

Mangalore Eats

FLAVOURFUL GHEE ROAST AND BANANA FRY ARE JUST SOME OF THE CITY'S SPECIALITIES

Text and Photographs by **AYSHA TANYA**



In the evening, Car Street is full of vendors catering to hungry pilgrims and office-goers who enjoy snacks like bendekaipodi or okra pakoras, vadas (top left), and green banana fritters (bottom left); Frothy filter coffee makes for a perfect ending to a South Indian meal (right).



As a child, I spent many summer vacations with my cousins in the seaside city of Mangalore. Among the most exciting parts of my visits would be the opportunity to eat delicious Mangalorean food: ghee roast redolent with the aroma of red chilli, spicy beef curry, and garlic-infused cashew curry. The city has some good restaurants that serve up scrumptious Mangalorean fare. My favourite is Gajalee, an old colonial-style bungalow converted with high ceilings,

stark walls, and terracotta floors. However, it is on the more expensive side. On a recent trip, I decided to see what the city had in store for a foodie on a tighter budget. With my cousin Niloufer, a Mangalore resident, as guide, I went looking for places that did not have anything on the menu that cost more than ₹200. I was in for a treat.

NEW TAJ MAHAL CAFÉ

The promise of steaming tumblers of filter coffee makes it easier to wake up early to

get to this breakfast place. At 7.30 a.m., the place is bustling—waiters do their synchronised dance of placing plates of piping hot food in front of customers, and clearing up empty dishes. The air is laden with the smell of spicy sambhar. This is not a place where people come to socialise. Breakfast is serious business. The only sounds are those of plates of hot idlis being slapped down on the table, and chairs scraping floors as patrons finish and leave, to make way for the next hungry customer.

The buns here are a revelation. **Mangalore buns** are like jazzed up *bhaturas*, with a copious amount of banana incorporated into the batter, making it sweeter and much softer than a regular bhatura. As you bite into it, and begin to appreciate this heady combination of flour and banana, it melts away, leaving only a lingering sweetness. After the buns, the **masala dosas** can be slightly disappointing. They simply aren't as crisp as they should be. The **filter coffee**, however, is frothy and intoxicatingly fragrant.

Pattumudi Soudha, Ballalbagh; 0824-4269335; open 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily. Masala dosa ₹30; Mangalore buns ₹15; filter coffee ₹14.

GIRI MANJAS

This low-key establishment is easy to miss unless you're looking for it. From the outside, all that's visible is a wall plastered with Coca-Cola ads. Between the faces of two models sipping cool drinks is a hole that is the entrance. The busy restaurant is located in an old house and the experience is intimate, with the owner talking to every customer. The seating consists of two long tables on opposite ends of the room facing each other, with everyone sitting elbow-to-elbow on plastic stools. The vibe is convivial.

There is no menu. The options are simple: whatever fish was caught that day done either *sukka* or as a masala fry. In addition, there are the "meals": a serving of rice, with an unlimited supply of Mangalore fish curry, a vegetable curry, and rasam. The rasam is one of the best in the city. It has that most comforting of food smells—the trifecta of roasted garlic, browned onions, and earthy tones of curry leaf. The **prawns sukka**, cooked with

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In Mangalore, the sambhar accompanying dosas is mellow and slightly sweet compared to its TAMILIAN counterpart.

shredded and roasted coconut, smells and tastes delicious. The **fish masala** is the star of the show. When I visited, I was served a slice of the freshest *anjali* (seer fish) cooked in a masala of ground red chilli and garnished with lime and coriander. The flavours were bold and intense and made for the perfect accompaniment to a lunch of rice and curry.

Near Kalikamba Temple, Gopalkrishna Temple Road; 99000 00080; open 11.30 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily. Meals ₹30; anjali masala ₹100; prawn sukka ₹70.

VEER VENKATESHWARA

Hungry crowds descend on Car Street in the evening, eager for their snack. People jostle in front of Veer Venkateshwara, trying to get the attention of the elderly man taking orders. He moves about slowly, unfazed by the rush. Glass cases in front of him hold tempting snacks of various shapes and sizes. At the back of the shop, two sweat-drenched men marinate sliced green bananas and drop them into a huge vat of bubbling oil. A few minutes later, the man gently lowers a ladle to bring out the now golden, semolina-studded slices of banana.

Despite the crowd clamouring for his attention, the elderly man proceeds at his own pace. The piping hot food arrives wrapped in grease-stained newsprint. First there is *bendekaipodi*, crisp and salty bits of okra, held together with doughy batter. It's dripping in oil, but delicious. The crisp

exterior of the *parendepodi* (green banana fry) easily gives way as you take a bite, yielding the tender banana nestled inside. Every bite is a riot of texture—the crunchy batter with the grainy semolina offset by the succulent banana. It is a local speciality prepared simply and tastefully.

Near Sri Venkatramana Temple, Car Street; 97411 10000; open 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. closed Sundays. Parendepodi ₹12 per plate; bendekaipodi ₹10 per plate.

PALLAVI

Pallavi is a small restaurant in the town of Padubidri (a 30-km drive from Mangalore). It allegedly serves the best **ghee roast**, a dish that consists of either chicken or prawns marinated in a fiery, chilli marinade and true to its name, fried in ghee. It is not the sort of place where one goes to enjoy the ambience and have a long chat with friends. Like New Taj Mahal Café, it has a sense of urgency. Ghee roast is Mangalore's most delicious culinary invention. The wonderful thing about the dish is its distinct and delicious smoked chilli flavour, taken to a whole new level by roasting the meat in ghee.

Do try the **butter garlic squid**, which is served piping hot, on a bed of thick buttery gravy. The squid rings are batter fried before being tossed in butter, garlic, and pepper. Each piece is a bite of heaven.

Main Road, Padubidri; 0820-2555484; open 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. Chicken ghee roast ₹180; butter garlic squid ₹130. ■