

RECIPES

Onion and carrot croquettes

Onion: 250 kg
Carrot: 250 kg
Flour: Big spoon
Butter: 40 gm
Milk (cold): 750 litres
Egg: Two
Bread crumbs (clear brown color)
Extra virgin olive oil: 30gm
Olive oil for frying
Salt & pepper



Fry the chopped onion with some oil until transparent in colour. Add chopped carrot and fry till golden brown, adding some salt and pepper. Once done, open the pan and start making the Bechamel sauce. In the middle of the pan add flour, extra virgin olive oil, butter and mix it all up a bit. Start adding the cold milk stirring constantly till the Bechamel sauce is ready. Spread the mix on a flat tray and keep covered in the fridge for at least three hours. Then, after this time has elapsed, take the mix out from the fridge and make the mix into round medium-sized balls. Dip in beaten egg, roll in bread crumbs and fry the croquettes in oil till golden brown. Remove and place on a paper napkin to soak up the extra oil. Place the croquettes on a plate and serve.

Watermelon gazpacho

Tomato: One kg
Watermelon: 750 gm
Onion: 50 gm
Green pepper: One or two
Cucumber: One
Garlic: 30 gm
Bread: one slice
Extra virgin olive oil: 50 gm
Salt: To taste



Cut the bread and dip in water. Peel all the vegetables, wash in water and place inside a mixer. After a few seconds, open the mixer and add garlic, squeezed bread, olive oil and salt. Close the mixer and churn till all ingredients are completely mashed. Add some cold water till you get the desired texture. Once done, filter the gazpacho through a sieve so the watermelon seeds are removed. Cool in the fridge. Finally, pour the gazpacho into a glass and serve cold.



Guillermo tasting one of his dishes

the older woman, will not touch the chicken because it is Tuesday, the day when she abstains from non-vegetarian food. Hidalgo and his students are making Spanish-style garlic chicken.

Renu, a third trainee, is in the narrow kitchen adjoining the terrace. There are hardly any pots, pans or gadgets here. Hidalgo pours oil in a well-used wok which is on a gas stove. The flame is high and there are no regulators. Renu puts in the chopped garlic and when the garlic is brown, she tosses in the chicken. As the chicken absorbs the oil, Hidalgo pours in some more oil. The women giggle. "He cannot estimate," Renu says. "He keeps pouring oil again and again." Hidalgo laughs with them. He probably does not realise the joke is on

'This is called Delhicious. We now serve for 30 to 40 people at parties in Gurgaon. Soon we will be in Delhi.'

him, but the camaraderie is infectious. By lunch time he has taught them to make two kinds of tuna salads, garlic chicken and chicken strips with honey and peanut in mustard sauce. Hidalgo then shows them how to present the dishes. He places the chicken strips on a white square disposable plate in a clump and on the other side he makes a small motif with mustard

sauce. Who would say this elegant dish has been turned out in a clean humble kitchen in a poor neighbourhood of Gurgaon?

The women now get to taste the food. "This is rather bland for me," says Priya of the delicate garlic chicken. The women are learning the recipes so that they can help Hidalgo cook for parties where they can cater for Mediterranean food at ₹800 to ₹1,000 per head. "This is called Delhicious. We now serve for 30 to 40 people at parties in Gurgaon. Soon we will be in Delhi and serve for Institutes Cervantes, the official Spanish cultural centre, and the Spanish Embassy, or anyone in Delhi who wants European food," says Hidalgo, who is a hotel management graduate from Barcelona.

About seven women come and learn cooking every morning. On weekends, they help Hidalgo cook for parties. They cook together and Hidalgo packs the food in boxes. A Nepali cook, who holds a second job with them, delivers the packed boxes and unpacks it at the customer's table. He then serves it on the white disposable dishes with the sauces.

Hidalgo loves his job at Naya Nagar because he feels he is making a real difference to people's lives. Priya has just arrived from Bihar and this training in Mediterranean cuisine has opened up an exciting new opportunity for her. Hidalgo's charter from his boss Ginesta is that he has to create a sustainable business which will continue even after he leaves. Challenging yes, but Hidalgo, who came to India as a backpacker a year ago, is not worried. "I do yoga, relax and enjoy living in this country. I love this country," he says.

Hidalgo pauses and then quotes Ramana Maharshi: "Whatever has to happen will happen." ■

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ANT offers crafts and coffee

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

STROLLING into The Ants Crafting Traditions, an ethnic boutique in a happening part of Bangalore, I discovered a bewildering collection of items that reflect the art, culture, craftsmanship and diversity of the northeast. At Ants, there's plenty to catch your fancy. But what's most prominent is the exquisite collection of contemporary apparel, home furnishing, jewellery, pottery and stationary, all handmade by tribes of the northeast. The range is available in alluring designs and prints, smooth textures, colours and durability.

The Ants is a store started under the aegis of the ANT – Action Northeast Trust – a non-profit based in Chirang district of Assam that believes in 'working with the strengths of the weakest.' This initiative of The ANT has merged traditions through Aagor cottons and Endy silk products for several years. The boutique-cum-cafe has been conceptualized by fashion and textile technology graduates, Smitha Murthy and her husband, Pradeep Krishnappa, who went to a tribal region to research a project and discovered their calling. "Our mission is to work for the sustainable and holistic development of rural and voiceless communities mainly in the northeast. We strongly feel that marginalized communities, especially northeast tribes must be mainstreamed, if they and their crafts are to survive," says Pradeep.

Smitha and Pradeep, who is also a designer, manage the store. Combining their business acumen, skills and experiences in fashion and textile technology, the husband-wife duo have transformed The Ants into Bangalore's most distinctive ethnic lifestyle store with a loyal clientele. One can see the rejuvenation of traditional art from the northeast, juxtaposed with contemporary aesthetics and design sensibilities. Right from home decor accessories to bright colours for your apparel. The Ants is a store that will provide you the right combination of ethnic and contemporary design. The merchandise is aesthetically displayed in simple block shelves fashioned out of rubber wood.

The store offers customized products and takes bulk orders too. Smitha and Pradeep scoured the northeastern region to collaborate on a personal level with NGOs, artisan groups, fair trade organizations as well as export manufacturers. The products are mostly handcrafted from natural materials and contract manufactured or culled from traditional artisans, craftsmen and manufacturers from the northeast by them.

LIVING

SUSHEELA NAIR



Weaving fabric

The ground floor of Ants is divided into three sections. The first is dedicated to apparel, the second to black pottery products and the last section stocks bamboo furniture. The collection of trendy and traditional stone jewellery and accessories are a big draw. Basketry comes from the matrilineal Khasi tribe of Meghalaya, while the Karbis and Dimasas contribute their weaves. There is jewellery from the Kinnjura tribe of Himachal Pradesh. The designer bracelets made with resin beads and semi-precious stones are a big hit.

You can also pick up ethnic kurtis, stoles, scarves and shawls made of Aagor cottons and Endy silks (or Emi silks). There are textiles (designed into skirts, kurtas, cushion covers and more) by Bodo weavers. These fabrics are handwoven by Bodo tribal women on their bamboo looms. The technique used here is extra warp and the motifs are traditional Bodo. Men's kurtas and shirts in Aagor cotton are also available. The store offers a free fitment facility by their in-house tailors.

The Ant's vast repertoire includes an exciting range of products carved out of black pottery by the Thangkul Naga tribes of the Ukhrol region of Manipur. These include earthen pots, tea sets, mugs, jugs, cooking utensils like the griddle, and kettles in quirky shapes which lend a rustic charm to any kitchen. Known as Longpi pottery, it is of royal descent as these products could only be used by the noble families of Manipur. They were mostly used to cook special meat dishes for marriages



An array of bamboo products

and other festivals. Also, there are mud pots serving sets and candle-holders.

The store features an amazing collection of cane and bamboo basketry by the tribes of Meghalaya besides stocking beautifully designed bamboo baskets in natural shades of green. Also on display are a wide range of hand-crafted furniture made from the bark of trees, exotic looking chairs and doors.

The furnishings and home décor products are made from loin loom woven by the women in Nagaland. These include cushion covers, table runners, napkins, cushions, bamboo coasters, floor mats and more. The section also stocks bamboo mats and coasters, bed mattresses, chair mattresses and floor mats. Besides, there are bark

SUSHEELA NAIR



Smitha and Pradeep, the enterprising duo in their store

SUSHEELA NAIR



Traditional tribal jewellery

boxes, pen stands, photo frames, wall hangings and diaries that are all handmade. Games like snakes and ladders have been exclusively handmade for children. There are toys for sale made by physically disabled children, so when you buy one, you know you are shopping for a cause. Other interesting items on display are kona reed mats and baskets, a unique craft of Manipur.

Don't miss the store's open cafeteria upstairs. It is worth a visit with its multi-cuisine café offering special recipes prepared everyday by the chef. While you sip refreshing herbal tea, you can browse through the café's collection of myriad books accessed through a tie-up with Blossom, Bangalore's leading bookstore. There is a collection of around 200 books of multiple genres.

The Ant also organizes documentary screenings, book releases and talks relating to responsible tourism, positive stories from the northeast and forgotten communities of India at the Ant store in Bangalore. As a socially responsible organization, Smitha and Pradeep adhere to fair trade practices and support artisans and craftsmen with design intervention and process improvement inputs to upgrade their native skills. The products of The Ants are also marketed through FabIndia, Mother Earth, and Sustainable Threads. ■

Address: The Ants Crafting Traditions, 2023/B, 1st Cross, 14th A Main, HALL 2nd Stage, Indiranagar, Bangalore - 560 038
Tel: 080-4171 5639 / 4152 1742
Store is open from 11 am to 8 pm and the Cafeteria from 9 am to 8.30 pm.