

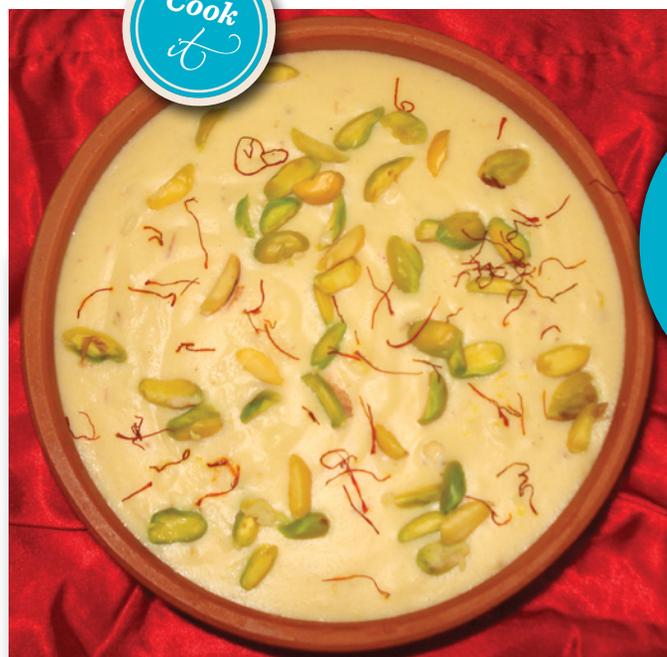
the gritty interior of Tunday Kababi. This 110-year-old Lucknow institution is famous for its *galawati kebab* of finely minced meat, marinated in green papaya and a secret spice mix, and slow-cooked to a melt-in-the-mouth consistency. Legend holds that this delicacy was originally created by an enterprising chef to satisfy the gourmet tastes but toothless mouth of an aging Nawab of Kakori. Our sampling is a patty of ultra-soft minced water buffalo, with complex, subtle seasoning that hints of rose petal powder. It's sided with crepe-thin paratha bread cooked Lakhnawi style: on a round-bottomed pan inverted over a charcoal fire.

A similar gauntlet of diligent cooks and breadmakers fills the entrance at our next stop, and Raheem's Restaurant bustles with families and early diners as we take a seat in its freshly painted interior. Here we are treated to Raheem's claim to fame: braised mutton *nihari* served with *kulcha* bread. In Nawab times, *nihari* was a traditional breakfast dish, simmered through the night in sealed cooking vessels, to be eaten after morning prayers. Now it's a popular "anytime" stew, its smooth bone marrow-infused gravy perfect for sopping up with *kulcha*.

Fans of North Indian breads will know *kulcha* as cousin to naan, substituting baking soda for yeast as the leavening agent. But Lakhnawis give *kulcha*, too, its own spin by fusing the traditional fine flour dough with an equal amount of puff pastry dough. Flattened together and coated with a milk wash for colour before baking in a tandoor oven, the resulting bread has a delightful flaky texture.

It's now 9 pm and the lanes of Chowk have hit prime-time. While two weeks in urban India have honed my traffic-dodging skills to a fine edge, my confidence is sorely tested as we make our way to our final tasting stop. The motorbikes are omnipresent, threading slowly between pedestrians, their honks polite, but their position at the top of the street hierarchy unquestioned. Keeping contact with Cyrus becomes well-nigh impossible, and the bright yellow sign of Rehmat Ali Sweets Corner is a welcome beacon of respite. Buffered from the throng by the customers that cluster at the shop's takeout window, we savour refuge and confections alike: *habshi halwa*, a sweet milk reduction thick with chopped nuts and dried fruit; and smooth, creamy *phirni* (ground rice pudding) served in a chipped clay cup.

I lick clean my tiny wooden spoon and the treats work their blood-sugar magic — with an energy that just might be a match for the brio that flows through this ancient and historic quarter. 



Cook

INDIA

SERVES 4

Phirni

FOR THIS THICK and creamy rice-based dessert, use milk with at least 2% butterfat in order for the pudding to set properly.

Basmati Rice
5 Tbs

Homogenized (full-fat) Milk
1 L

Saffron
a pinch

Sugar $\frac{3}{4}$ cup

Ground Cardamom
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp

Slivered Almonds, Chopped Pistachios or Dried Fruit (raisins, apricots) for garnish

- 1 SOAK** the rice in water for 30 minutes. Drain, and grind the rice to a coarse paste with a little of the milk (up to a $\frac{1}{4}$ cup) in blender.
- 2 BRING** the remaining milk to a boil in a heavy-bottomed pan over medium heat. Stir in the rice paste.
- 3 SIMMER**, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens and coats the back of a wooden spoon. Stir in saffron.
- 4 ADD** the sugar and ground cardamom. Cook until the sugar is completely dissolved and mixture thickens again (2–5 minutes).
- 5 POUR** into serving bowls and garnish with nuts or fruit and asprinkling of saffron threads. Chill for at least 1 hour before serving.

Do

The **LUCKNOW CULINARY WALK** has been operated by Tornos tours since 2000. The tour includes a handy gift bag containing cutlery, napkins, and bottled water as well as background notes on Awadhi cuisine. Tornos also offers a wide variety of other heritage tours and food experiences in and around Lucknow. www.tornosindia.com

CATHERINE VAN BRUNSCHOT is a Calgary-based food and travel writer. Read more of her work at www.catherinevanbrunschot.com

Click