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# A quest for great biryani

Five explorers criss-cross the country in search of the best version of this iconic dish

•• RANJANI RAJENDRA

It's been a long day for the group of five; they're onto their fourth biryani joint, sampling plates of aromatic rice and meat. They started with a pit stop at the iconic Star Biryani in Ambur, before moving on to Charminar in Royapettah, followed by a portion of FillBelly's wood-fired biryani, before finally settling down for a late lunch at Kalyana Bhavan in Egmore for some authentic Tamil wedding-style biryani, with chicken 65 and *ennai kathirikai*. Their trip isn't called The Great Indian Food Trip for nothing.

Kickstarted by Mumbai-based travel startup ScoutMyTrip, The Great Indian Food Trip is an attempt to bring together food and travel bloggers, along with food enthusiasts, under one umbrella, to sample a range of authentic Indian dishes. And Biryani Trail is their first. "But we're focussing on South Indian biryani this time. There are so many variations and they are worth exploring," says Deepak Ananth, CEO and co-founder of ScoutMyTrip.

With five core members from Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad, the Biryani Trail kicked off in Hyderabad last week. "We tried biryani at eight places there – Shadab, Shah Ghouse, Ulavacharu, Cafe Bahar, Bawarchi, Astoria among others. Of these, we thought Shadab had the best biryani. Our next stop was in Bengaluru, where we discovered the biryani that has so far 'blown our minds'. This was the bhatkali



**Flavour and fervour** The ScoutMyTrip team after a good meal

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

biryani at Alibaba Café. This is a typical Kannadiga-style biryani, where the rice and meat are cooked separately before being mixed. It was extremely tasty with a robust onion-y flavour. It surprised us. We, of course, tried the donna biryani at Shivaji Nagar as well," says Ananth.

In Chennai, they also tried Yaa Mohideen and Aasife, but they liked the biryani served at Kalyana Bhavan the best. "It

was a unanimous choice. Simple, but robust flavours," says Ananth, adding, "The idea behind exploring the various styles found in the South is to highlight the sheer variety and the fact that not every biryani is cooked on *dum*. The basic ingredients might be the same, but the way the dish is cooked makes all the difference."

The 13-day trip also had the group head to Coimbatore (for Chettinad and Dindigul birya-

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

It is said that biryani is derived from the Persian word 'beryan', which means fried or roasted before cooking, and 'birinj', which means rice.



nis) and Calicut for some kaima rice biryani. Piled in two cars, the members – Himanshu Sehgal, Shrikanth Bhamidi (also the lone vegetarian in the group), Nikita Biswas, Saumya Rai and Deepak Ananth – share a great camaraderie. "There's no such thing as too much biryani," laughs Rai adding, "And anyway, we're trying so many different types, it doesn't get repetitive. It's interesting to note the difference in flavours and styles."

The group has been regularly updating their social media profiles and website blog about the trail, and has added a slew of bloggers and foodies in each city for their biryani walk; people can also track the group's progress on their website. "We carry the best biryani with us to the next city, to give foodies there an idea of what it's like. Give them a taste of authenticity as well," says Ananth, adding, "We plan to do these food trails at least once a month, and the dishes could vary – from momos and chai to butter chicken. And each of them will see us heading to various parts of the country to try and sample some of the most authentic variants."