

Variety is the Spice of Life



Food for Thought 29th March 2025

“Variety is the spice of life.”

— William Cowper

new and exciting
experiences make
life more interesting

Proverbial saying, late 18th century; originally as a quotation from the English poet William Cowper (1731–1800) in *The Task* (1785): ‘Variety's the very spice of life, That gives it all its flavour.’ An earlier version is found in the *The Rover* (1681) by the dramatist Aphra Behn (1640–89), ‘Variety is the soul of pleasure.’ The Greek dramatist Euripides (c.485–c.406bc) in his *Orestes* has, ‘a change is always nice.’

- What are spices ?
- What is the variety ?
- Silk roads and Spice routes
- How did spices come to our table ?
- How do they enrich our cuisine ?
- How have things changed over time with transport routes and migratory patterns ?
- Are spices exquisite delicacies or have they become simple staples in our dishes ?
- Do we need them to improve our health with our new knowledge of Ayurveda ?
- Do we prefer fusion over purity ?
- Is variety truly the spices of life or should we be satisfied with less and support our locals or continue to dream of greater diversities ?

What are spices ?

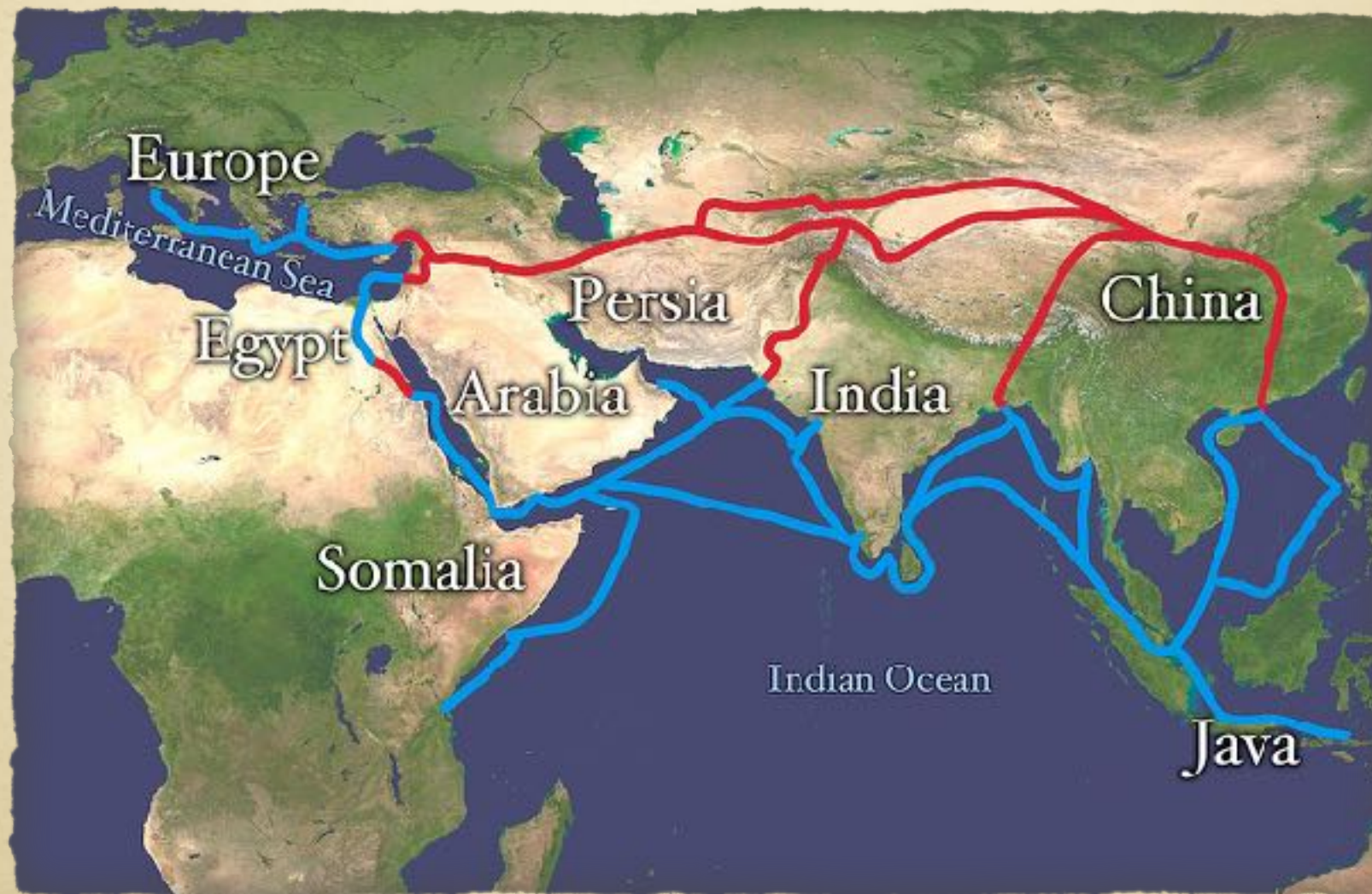
A spice is any seed, fruit, root, bark, or other plant substance in a form primarily used for flavoring or coloring food.

What is variety ?

the quality or state of being
different or diverse; the absence of
uniformity or monotony OR

a number or range of things of the
same general class that are distinct
in character or quality.

Silk roads and Spice routes



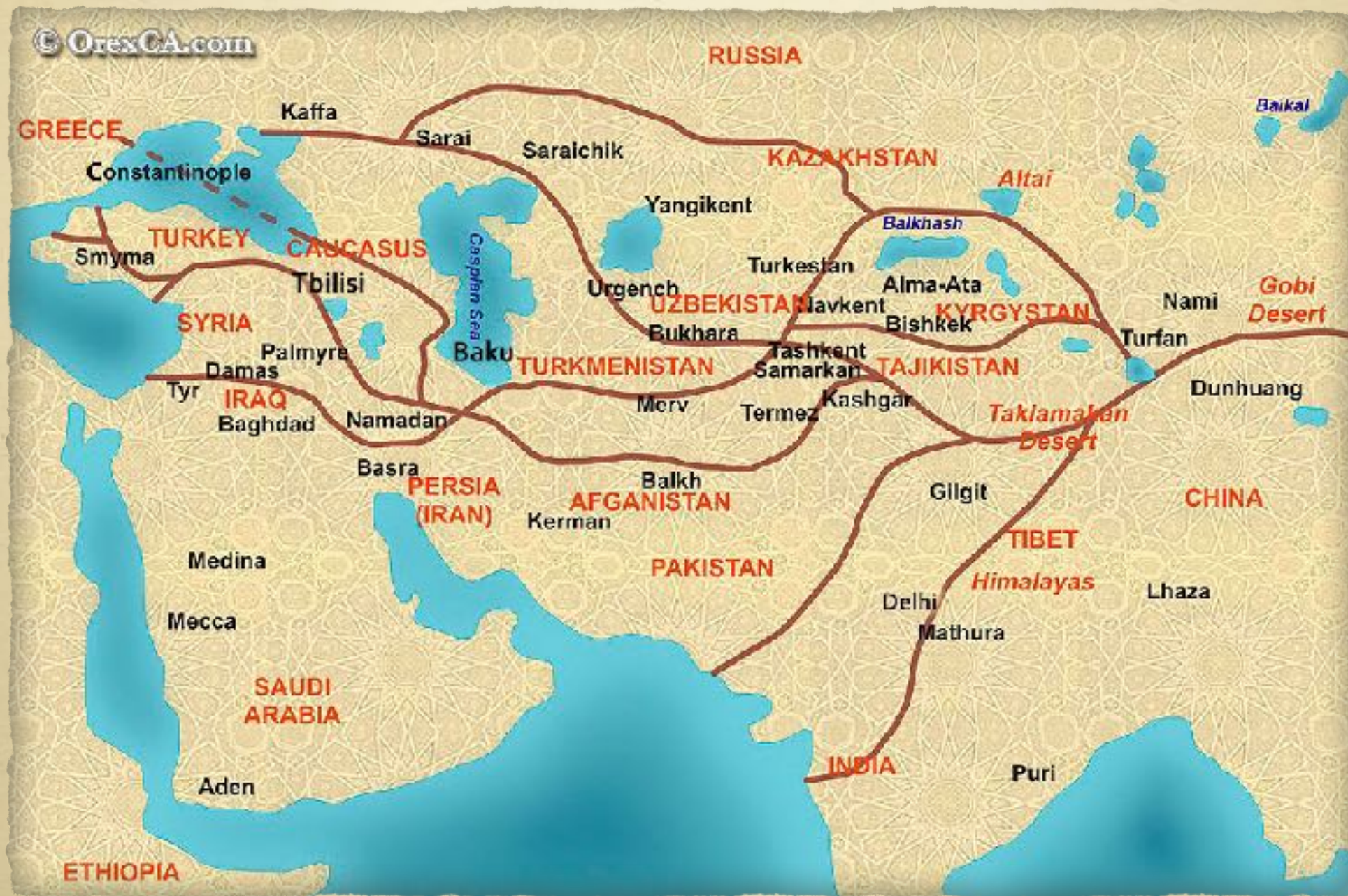
Silk roads and Spice routes

Silk Road extending from Europe through Asia.
Overland routes are red, and the maritime routes are blue.

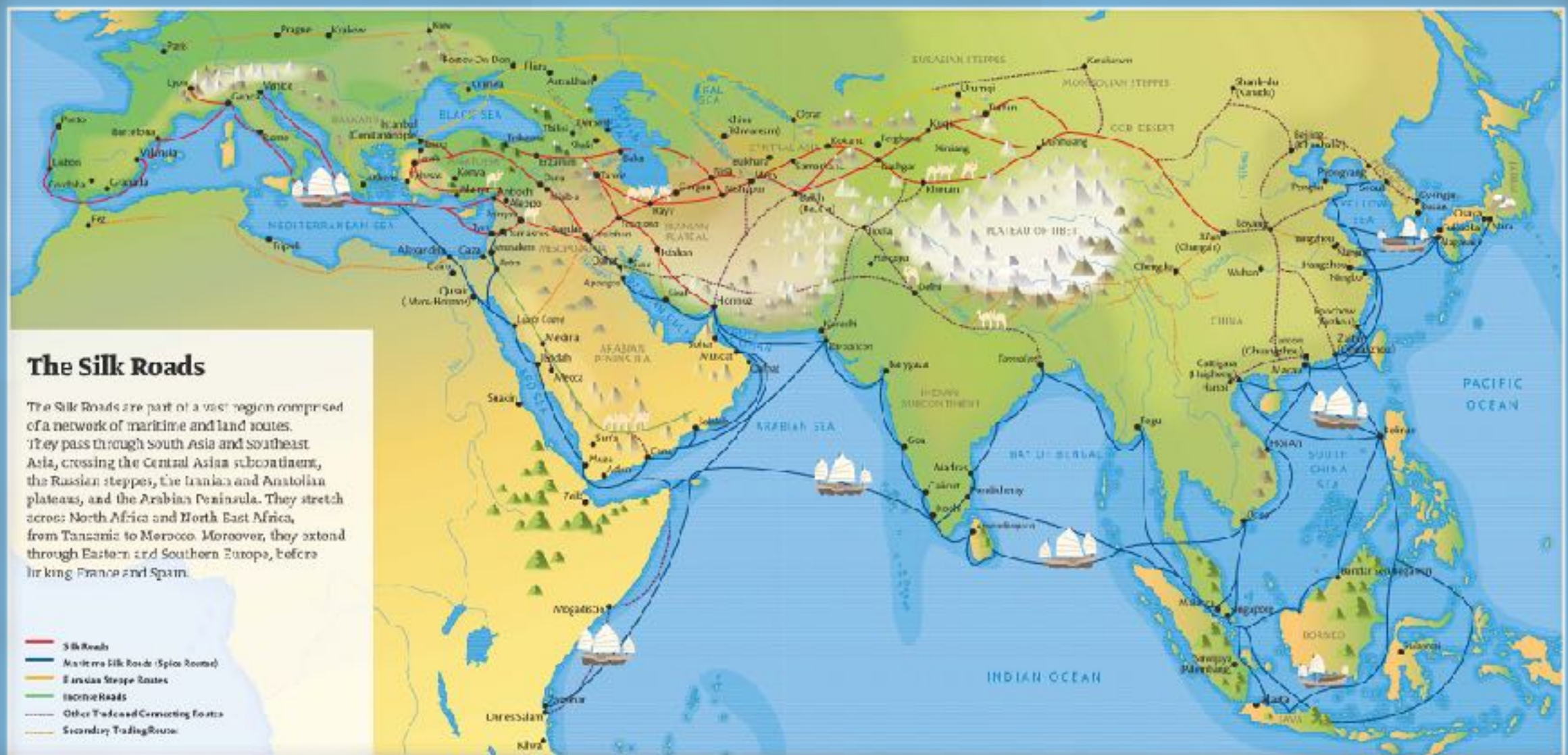
Location: China Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan
Includes: 33 locations in 3 countries

On June 22, 2014, UNESCO designated a 5,000 km (3,100 mi) stretch of the Silk Road network from Central China to the Zhetysu region of Central Asia as a World Heritage site. The corridor spans China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and includes 33 new sites and several previously designated heritage sites.[1]

Silk road



Silk road



Silk road



Silk road (1/2)

The Silk Road was a network of ancient trade routes, formally established during the Han Dynasty of China in 130 BCE, which linked the regions of the ancient world in commerce between 130 BCE-1453 CE. The Silk Road was not a single route from east to west and so historians favor the name 'Silk Routes', though 'Silk Road' is commonly used.

The European explorer Marco Polo (1.1254-1324 CE) traveled on these routes and described them in depth in his famous work but he is not credited with naming them. Both terms for this network of roads - Silk Road and Silk Routes - were coined by the German geographer and traveler, Ferdinand von Richthofen, in 1877 CE, who designated them 'Seidenstrasse' (silk road) or 'Seidenstrassen' (silk routes). Polo, and later von Richthofen, make mention of the goods which were transported back and forth on the Silk Road.

Silk road (2/2)

The network was used regularly from 130 BCE, when the Han Dynasty (202 BCE - 220 CE) officially opened trade with the west, to 1453 CE, when the Ottoman Empire boycotted trade with the west and closed the routes. By this time, Europeans had become used to the goods from the east and, when the Silk Road closed, merchants needed to find new trade routes to meet the demand for these goods.

The closure of the Silk Road initiated the Age of Discovery (also known as the Age of Exploration, 1453-1660 CE) which would be defined by European explorers taking to the sea and charting new water routes to replace over-land trade. The Age of Discovery would impact cultures around the world as European ships claimed some lands in the name of their god and country and influenced others by introducing western culture and religion and, at the same time, these other nations influenced European cultural traditions. The Silk Road - from its opening to its closure - had so great an impact on the development of world civilisation that it is difficult to imagine the modern world without it.

Good from West to East

- Horses
- Saddles and Riding Tack
- The grapevine and grapes
- Dogs and other animals both exotic and domestic
- Animal furs and skins
- Honey
- Fruits
- Glassware
- Woolen blankets, rugs, carpets
- Textiles (such as curtains)
- Gold and Silver
- Camels
- Slaves
- Weapons and armour

Good from East to West

- Silk
- Tea
- Dyes
- Precious Stones
- China (plates, bowls, cups, vases)
- Porcelain
- Spices (such as cinnamon and ginger)
- Bronze and gold artifacts
- Medicine
- Perfumes
- Ivory
- Rice
- Paper
- Gunpowder

Spices



Etymology

The word spice originated in Middle English,[5] from the Old French words espece, espis(c)e, and espis(c)e. [6] According to the Middle English Dictionary, the Old French words came from Anglo-French spece;[6] according to Merriam Webster, the Old-French words came from Anglo-French espece, and espis.[5] Both publications agree that the Anglo-French words are derived from Latin species.[5][6] Middle English spice had its first known use as a noun in the 13th century.

[5]

Spices (1/2)

Spices are distinguished from herbs, which are the leaves, flowers, or stems of plants used for flavouring or as a garnish. Spices and seasoning do not mean the same thing, but spices fall under the seasoning category with herbs. Spices are sometimes used in medicine, religious rituals, cosmetics, or perfume production. They are usually classified into spices, spice seeds, and herbal categories.[1] For example, vanilla is commonly used as an ingredient in fragrance manufacturing.[2] Plant-based sweeteners such as sugar are not considered spices.

Spices can be used in various forms, including fresh, whole, dried, grated, chopped, crushed, ground, or extracted into a tincture. These processes may occur before the spice is sold, during meal preparation in the kitchen, or even at the table when serving a dish, such as grinding peppercorns as a condiment. Certain spices, like turmeric, are rarely available fresh or whole and are typically purchased in ground form. Small seeds, such as fennel and mustard, can be used either in their whole form or as a powder, depending on the culinary need.

Spices (2/2)

A whole dried spice has the longest shelf life, so it can be purchased and stored in larger amounts, making it cheaper on a per-serving basis. A fresh spice, such as ginger, is usually more flavorful than its dried form, but fresh spices are more expensive and have a much shorter shelf life.

There is not enough clinical evidence to indicate that consuming spices affects human health.[3]

India contributes to 75% of global spice production.[4] This is reflected culturally through its cuisine. Historically, the spice trade developed throughout the Indian subcontinent as well as in East Asia and the Middle East. Europe's demand for spices was among the economic and cultural factors that encouraged exploration in the early modern period.

Spices



Spices at a central market in Agadir, Morocco

Spices



Spices of Saúde flea market, [São Paulo](#), Brazil

Spices



A group of Indian herbs and spices in bowls

Ayurveda (1/2)

Ayurveda (a Sanskrit word that means "science of life" or "knowledge of life") is one of the world's oldest whole-body healing systems. It was developed more than 5,000 years ago in India.

Ayurveda is based on the belief that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between the mind, body, spirit, and environment. The main goal of ayurvedic medicine is to promote good health and prevent, not fight, disease. But treatments may be geared toward specific health problems.

Ayurveda indicates to eat fresh, homemade food instead of processed products and to enjoy your food and eat when you are calm, instead of stressed or angry, for good digestion.

Eat your biggest meal at lunch when your digestion is best. This may also help you sleep at night if you aren't trying to digest a heavy dinner.

Focus on foods that balance all of the doshas, including fruits, vegetables, rice, nuts, and honey as a sweetener.

Ayurveda (2/2)

Herbs

You can incorporate many herbs used in ayurveda when cooking food. Before taking herbal supplements, check with your doctor to make sure they are safe and won't interact with any medications you are taking. Some of the most commonly used, and easy-to-access, herbs in ayurveda include:

- Ashwagandha, which reduces stress and helps with sleep
- Turmeric, an anti-inflammatory
- Ginger, a root that can reduce nausea
- Cumin, a spice that helps with digestion
- Black pepper, which can be a decongestant

Ashwaganda



Relieves Stress and Anxiety - Lowers Blood Sugar and Fat - Increases Muscle and Strength - Improves Sexual Function in Women - Boosts Fertility and Testosterone Levels in Men - Sharpens Focus and Memory

Ashwaganda

Withania Somnifera

Ashwagandha is an evergreen shrub that grows in Asia and Africa. It is commonly used for stress. There is little evidence for its use as an "adaptogen."

Ashwagandha contains chemicals that might help calm the brain, reduce swelling, lower blood pressure, and alter the immune system.

Since ashwagandha is traditionally used as an adaptogen, it is used for many conditions related to stress. Adaptogens are believed to help the body resist physical and mental stress. Some of the conditions it is used for include insomnia, aging, anxiety and many others, but there is no good scientific evidence to support most of these uses. There is also no good evidence to support using ashwagandha for COVID-19.

Don't confuse ashwagandha with *Physalis alkekengi*. Both are known as winter cherry.

Bay Leaves



Antioxidants - good source of minerals -
antibacterial properties - decrease blood sugar
levels for type 2 diabetes

Bay Leaves

The bay leaf is an aromatic leaf commonly used in cooking. It can be used whole or in a dried or ground form. Bay leaf is typically used to season long-cooking dishes like soups, stews, and braises, but it can also enhance the flavor of quicker-cooking dishes like risotto, pasta sauce, or even a simple pot of rice. The key is to have at least a little liquid for the bay to infuse and heat to get the process going.

Black Pepper



Good digestion - Prevents constipation - skin problems - Weight loss - Respiratory diseases

Black Pepper

Black pepper has been used as a folk medicine in a variety of cultures. The chemical, piperine is an active component in both black and white pepper.

Also called the king of spices, pepper is one of the oldest and most popular spices in the world. Discovered 4000 years ago, it is indigenous to the Malabar Coast in India. It was the search for pepper that drew early Western sailors eastwards. It became so important that it was used as desirable currency-dowries, taxes and rents were paid in pepper corns and the word pepper corn rent was coined. The name pepper comes from the Sanskrit word pippali meaning berry.

Cinnamon



Regulating glucose levels (diabetes) - Source of
manganese, iron, fibre, calcium

Cinnamon

Cinnamon comes from the bark of the *Cinnamomum* tree and has a long history in both the medicinal and culinary world. Cinnamon is used mainly as an aromatic condiment and flavouring additive in a wide variety of cuisines, sweet and savoury dishes, breakfast cereals, snack foods, tea, and traditional foods. The sweet and spicy aroma of cinnamon makes food delicious and mouth-watering. Cinnamon sticks add natural flavour to recipes and have many health benefits. They can enhance the flavour of your soups and chicken curries. They are good in regulating glucose levels and helps in diabetes management. It is a great source of manganese, iron, fibre, and calcium.

Coriander



Rich in immune-boosting antioxidants - rich in
minerals - cholesterol reduction

Coriander

Coriander is often used in Spanish, Mexican, Latin and Indian cuisine. It's a common ingredient in spice rubs, marinades, chilis, sauces, soups and curries and works well with onions, bell peppers, tomatoes and potatoes.

Coriander seed helps in reducing bad cholesterol and promotes good cholesterol in the body. These are rich in copper, zinc, iron and other essential minerals that increases RBC and improves heart health. Coriander seeds also help in increasing metabolism.

We also like tossing the seeds with roasted vegetables or adding to soups . To really unleash their earthy flavour, toast seeds over medium heat until fragrant before using.

Cumin



Increases antioxidant intake - Promotes
digestion - Provides iron

Cumin

Cumin's flavour has been described as earthy, nutty, spicy, and warm. Typically used in savoury dishes. It is a flowering plant in the family Apiaceae, native to the Irano-Turanian Region.

Fenugreek



Decrease blood sugar levels, increase insulin

Fenugreek

Trigonella foenum-graecum

Fenugreek is a clover-like herb native to the Mediterranean region, southern Europe, and western Asia. Its seeds, which smell and taste like maple syrup, have been used as a spice and a traditional medicine. Because of its maple-like flavour, fenugreek has been used as a flavouring agent in foods, beverages,

Fenugreek seems to slow sugar absorption in the stomach and stimulate insulin. Both of these effects lower blood sugar in people with diabetes. Fenugreek might also improve levels of testosterone and estrogen, helping to improve interest in sex.

Ginger



Weight loss - improve digestion - helps burn stored fat - Lowers blood sugar - Lowers cholesterol - Indigestion - Menstrual pain - Nausea and morning sickness - Inflammation.

Ginger

ZINGIBER OFFICINALE

Dry ginger facilitates weight loss by improving digestion, which helps in burning stored fat and processing glucose in the blood. It also speeds up metabolism and controls fat absorption, thanks to its thermogenic properties. Another benefit of dry ginger is its ability to curb hunger and overeating.

Turmeric



Coughs - Diabetes - dermatological conditions - respiratory problems
- cardiovascular and hepatobiliary diseases - Arthritis - irritable bowel
disease (IBS) - Peptic ulcers - Psoriasis - Atherosclerosis.

Turmeric

CURCUMA LONGA

Curcuma longa L. (turmeric) of ginger family (Zingiberaceae) belongs to the group of oldest cultivated spice plants in the south-east Asian countries. For many years rhizome of this plant has been used also as a safe and active drug for the treatment of various chronic diseases, especially of diabetes mellitus.

Curcuma longa L., is commonly used as a spice in curries, food additive and also, as a dietary pigment. It has also been used to treat various illnesses in the Indian subcontinent from the ancient times.

The turmeric plant is used as a traditional medicine and remedy for various diseases including

Coughs.

Diabetes.

dermatological conditions.

respiratory problems.

cardiovascular and hepatobiliary diseases.

Arthritis.

irritable bowel disease (IBS).

Peptic ulcers.

Psonriasis.

Atherosclerosis.

Migratory Patterns

Published on January 19, 2017

In our global society, the movement of humans from one country to another has had extraordinary impact, changing our perceptions through the the exchange of ideas and introduction of new cultures. This can be seen in the adoption of traditional architectural techniques in contemporary architecture, as well as in the dissemination of contrasting architectural philosophies such as the International Style and Critical Regionalism.

World Migration Patterns



Diets and Remedies

- Ayurveda
- Paleo
- Atkins
- Interval fasting
- Dopamine Rush

Dishes

- Favourites Spicy recipes to turn up the heat.
- Fiery cottage pie made with rose harissa and topped with chilli and herb mashed potato
- Chicken arrabiata
- Vietnamese-style tofu burger
- Spicy sausage pasta
- Spicy chilli con carne with guacamole
- Spicy gochujang cauliflower 'wings'
- Spicy vodka pasta
- Jamaican chicken curry
- Crispy baked chicken wings with Korean barbequ

Dishes

- Spicy gochujang udon noodles
- Curried red lentil soup
- Huevos rancheros
- Penne al'arrabiata
- Prawn spaghetti with tomato, basil and chilli
- Chilli paneer
- Spicy Sichuan (dan dan) noodles
- Fish finger bharta
- Spicy mushroom lasagne
- Pasta with cavolo nero and 'nduja
- Vegan spicy sausage casserole

Dishes

- Chicken with spicy rice
- Tom yum gai
- Jollof rice
- Tso's chicken by Ching-He Huang
- Chilli chicken
- Gochujang red beans and kimchi rice bowl
- Tandoori hot naan pizza
- Spicy sausage pasta
- Chilli-fried tofu with egg-fried rice
- Spicy salmon rice bowls
- Thai pork larb

Dishes

- Spicy tofu fajitas
- Beef cashew vindaloo
- Piri-piri sauce
- Spicy pork and rice
- Prawn jambalaya
- Portobello mushrooms in adobo
- Creamy 'nduja pasta
- Jerk beef burgers
- Spicy beef lettuce cups
- Spicy tofu fajitas by Dr Rupy Aujla

Meals and Future

The shift from fixed to flexible eating habits reflects a radical change within our society. In a world where flexibility and mobility are becoming of higher importance, our eating behaviour is also being adapted in line with these new demands.

The food culture is increasingly shaped by individuality and spontaneity, which can lead to a more diversified and healthier diet. At the same time, this development means the food service sector, trade and company restaurants face new demands and they have to adapt accordingly to satisfy the consumers' changed needs.

It is going to be exciting to see how these trends further develop and what new food cultures arise in the future.

Food Culture

Traditional vs. modern food culture

Traditional food culture is distinguished by defined mealtimes that are planned in advance, which to a large extent dictated when, what, how much and with whom we eat.

Since these fixed structures are no longer in place, modern food culture is on the other hand characterised by individual, flexibly appropriate dining opportunities and thus offers scope for healthy and high-quality ready-to-eat products, meal kits and take-aways.

Diversification

Dr. Ara Norenzayan

Professor and Distinguished University Scholar at the Department of Psychology

Dr. Norenzayan lives and works on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam). He is a prolific researcher and teacher in the fields of cultural evolution, social psychology, and the origins of religion. His work examines how cultural diversity shapes the human mind, and he is particularly interested in topics such as cultural and religious diversity, cooperation and conflict, the psychology of metaphysical and supernatural beliefs, human-nature interactions, sacred values, and more.

How has food and culinary arts played a role in shaping cultures?

Food Culture 1/4

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How has food and culinary arts played a role in shaping cultures?

Food Culture 2/4

Since ancient times, food has been a cornerstone of cultures worldwide. It is essential for our survival, which is why preoccupation with food is a human universal that connects us all. To feed our calorie-hungry big brains, our hominid ancestors invented fire and cooking, which outsourced digestion to culture. When you barbeque meat or eggplant, you make them tasty and partially digested before the food enters your mouth. This has been so important for our survival as a species that evolution has modified our bodies to have smaller teeth, weaker chewing muscles, and shorter gastrointestinal tracts than our primate relatives.

“There is more to eating than survival. Eating and drinking are a medium through which we gather, socialize, and create bonds. We celebrate, commemorate, tend to one another, and enact our rituals through food.”

Food Culture 3/4

In places such as Vancouver, where the food scene is so diverse, how has the globalization of food affected cultural identities and traditions?

I grew up in Beirut, Lebanon, where an amazingly rich culinary tradition that has been perfected for thousands of years taught me the love of good food. Yet, these were times when globalization had not reached the kitchen table, and I had limited exposure to the various cuisines we take for granted here in Vancouver. I had never had guacamole until I moved to North America!

I have Armenian heritage, which means that I have an arsenal of recipes passed down to me from my mother. I got my love of cooking from her. My two children have had the privilege of enjoying food from everywhere in the world.

Food Culture 4/4

How does the language used to describe food reflect cultural attitudes and values ?

A culture's food vocabulary is a window into its values and priorities. A typical Italian child can name twenty-two different kinds of pasta, whereas a child in Canada might know three to four different kinds. But it's not just the vocabulary that matters; it is also the attitudes that are transmitted through language about food.

The cultural psychologist Paul Rozin has found that when French and American research participants are asked what comes to mind when thinking of fried eggs, the French say "breakfast," Americans say "cholesterol." The French think of the culinary experience; Americans think of what is entering the bloodstream. Interestingly, this vigilance doesn't translate into better health. Life expectancy is, in fact, higher in France than in the United States.

Sayings

- Sugar and spice and all things nice

Desire creates sorrow

– Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 2, Verse 62
Bhāgavatam 9.19.13

Create and celebrate fusion ?

– Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 2, Verse 62
Bhāgavatam 9.19.13

Fusion or Purity ?

— William Cowper

Is it in our hands ?

— were

Acquired Tastes...1/2

By this period, they write, “food in much of the United States and Europe bore the collective imprint of global trade, colonization, mass distribution, racist science, celebrity culture, and factory processing.” Remarkably, a century earlier, it did not. So how did we arrive at the food system we all recognize today ? How did our common misconceptions about food history arise ? And why does the narrative about how we got here matter ?

...pandemic exposed fissures in our food supply chain, and argue that we’ve only begun to scratch the surface of a food system whose depths demand greater scrutiny...stories of bread, beer, sugar, canned food, fake meat, and more — tracing nutritional reform through its thorny history and introducing critical considerations to forge a future that is healthier for the land, our bodies, and our cultural relationships.

Acquired Tastes...2/2

tackle individual consumption habits as the main problem. In “Acquired Tastes,” we sought to illuminate that the big issues are political and thus need policy solutions.

...focus on individual responses leads readers to miss the structural forces that overwhelm such individualist approaches. Government subsidies, for example, along with corporate forces, agrochemical firms, global trade deals, and negotiations at large political scales about labor, wages, and land use pull our decisions as consumers back into the prevailing ways food and agriculture exist in the world. Personal shopping choices don't change the structures, the pieces of which powerful people have been building into the world for over a century...

...food is political in history too, not just now. It's hard enough to make the point to a lot of foodies today that food is political always, everywhere, and is never *just* about food...

Acquired Tastes

– Stories of the origins of modern food

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Thank you :)

Extra Slides

New Silk road



New Silk road (1/2)

For access to our content, please go to <https://www.euromoney.com/reprints>

New Silk road (2/2)

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