

VADAPALANI

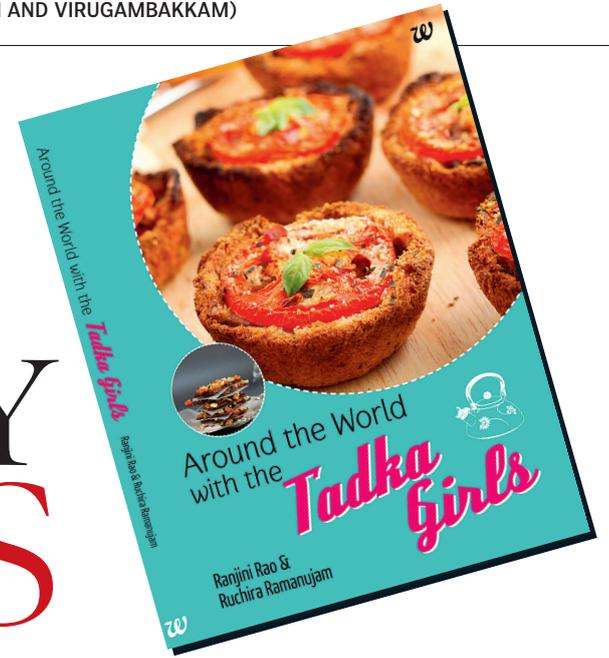
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ADVERTORIAL AND
PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

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CULINARY DIARIES



> Nidhi
Adlakha

Taking you on a culinary journey across the world, Ranjini Rao and Ruchira Ramanujam's food blog – Tadka Pasta – along with their cookbooks, gourmet baking, and cookery workshops is an inspiration for avid, budding chefs. Times Neighbourhood catches up with the duo who were in the city recently promoting their latest book 'Around the World with the Tadka Girls'

What started off as a neighbourhood friendship in the United States many years ago, blossomed into a great venture based on the pure love for food. Ranjini Rao and Ruchira Ramanujam met on the way to a community potluck in Chicago and their interest in food and writing resulted in their food blog 'Tadka Pasta'. Since then, their friendship has seen them through many kitchen disasters and sampling sojourns. "The idea for the blog came about three years ago, almost on a lark. Fairly inspired by Leah Eskin's food column in the Sunday Tribune, we hoped that Tadka Pasta would set the tone as a kitchen poetry blog, both in terms of the writing as well as the workings of our culinary experiments," says Ruchira, a self-taught cook who has been exposed to various cultures.



With a collection of about 200 unique recipes under their banner, they went on to publish an eBook, 'Mango Masala: 60 Indian Recipes from your Local Supermarket' last year, which became a Number 1 bestseller on Amazon within a week of its release. Their recent release, 'Around The World With The Tadka Girls' is a book filled with fresh, imaginative recipes, inspired by the authors' culinary quests and experiments in different cuisines, all blended with the inimitable Tadka style in their Indian kitchens. Ranjini, a writer, says, "The idea for our latest book, transpired over a phone call when we realised we had too many stories to tell and too many recipes in our collective repertoire."

The culinary evening held on December 14 in Chennai, in light of their latest

release, introduced their book to audiences in a unique way. "Chef Priya Roy, put out five dishes from the book for the audience to sample, which was the highlight of the evening. The chef added that it was a refreshing change for her to be a part of the exercise, with the role reversal in terms of being handed recipes to follow," says Ruchira.

The book brings together a delectable collection of breakfast and brunch options inspired by Mexican tastes and the traditional American bed and breakfast spread, soups and salads, melt-in-your-mouth breads, pasta and rice, and an entire section dedicated to their signature tadka dishes that they have brought together from their journeys to kitchens across the world, desserts and a bunch of recipes for children. Every recipe is accompanied by real-life stories, be they visits to a school potluck, or a drive down a wine trail in a Midwestern American town.

The most noticeable and common thread that binds Ranjini and Ruchira, who are now settled in Bengaluru, is how their love for cooking and food in general developed. They say, as children, watching their mothers whip up delicacies in the kitchen is when their individual journeys into the world of food began. Ranjini, says, "I was seldom allowed to tinker around in the kitchen as a child, but that didn't stop me from being a curious and keen observer and assisting my mother in the kitchen. It was when I was in my early teens, when she underwent a major surgery that I actually wore my apron and took on the mantle of the kitchen chief. Then came the wider exposure to multicultural cuisines, during my stints outside India, and being married to a Bengali has only accentuated my culinary and foodie experiences over the years." Ruchira adds, "I started out helping my mother bake, and I started to enjoy working in the kitchen and the appetizers and desserts would be delegated to me whenever we were entertaining. Once I got married I taught myself to cook a number of

Tamil dishes for my husband."

Doing what they enjoy matters the most to the Tadka girls and what has set them apart from the many home cooks is their storytelling technique - be it through words or pictures. Ruchira adds, "Our core idea has always been that food should appeal to all the senses." They add, "We prefer to use local and seasonal produce in our kitchens, and keep away from overly complicated dishes. Inspiration for our recipes comes from our travels and the cuisines that we've experienced."

Speaking of their journey from the online to the offline world, Ranjini says, "We've since transformed into much more than a food blog. Right from a chance to host a talk for the Culinary Historians of Chicago on Indian food, to participation in various bakers' showcases and

fairs across South India, and now a foray into baking and corporate cookery workshops, we're fortunate and grateful for the opportunities that have come our way." Ranjini and Ruchira are now working on their new book and are looking at continuing their focus on cooking workshops for individuals and corporates. Ruchira adds, "We also have a range of gourmet baking and spice mixes at hand, which we plan to package and promote more efficiently in the coming year."

Visit their blog: Tadka Pasta, or check out <https://www.facebook.com/Tadka>
Around the World with the Tadka Girls is available in India on Flipkart, Amazon, Sapna and eBay.

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