

MERCEDES AND BMWs ARE INCHING THEIR WAY in the darkness along a shabby lane behind one of the world's most luxurious hotels. But their occupants are not bound for Mumbai's Taj Mahal Palace. Along with a stream of office workers, taxi drivers and backpackers, they're heading for the legendary Bademiya kebab stand, known all over the city for its succulent flame-grilled mutton and chicken wrapped in roomali roti – wafer-thin sheets of bread. For those in the know there is another treat here: a paper plateful of keema – minced mutton and liver spiked with cloves and cinnamon.

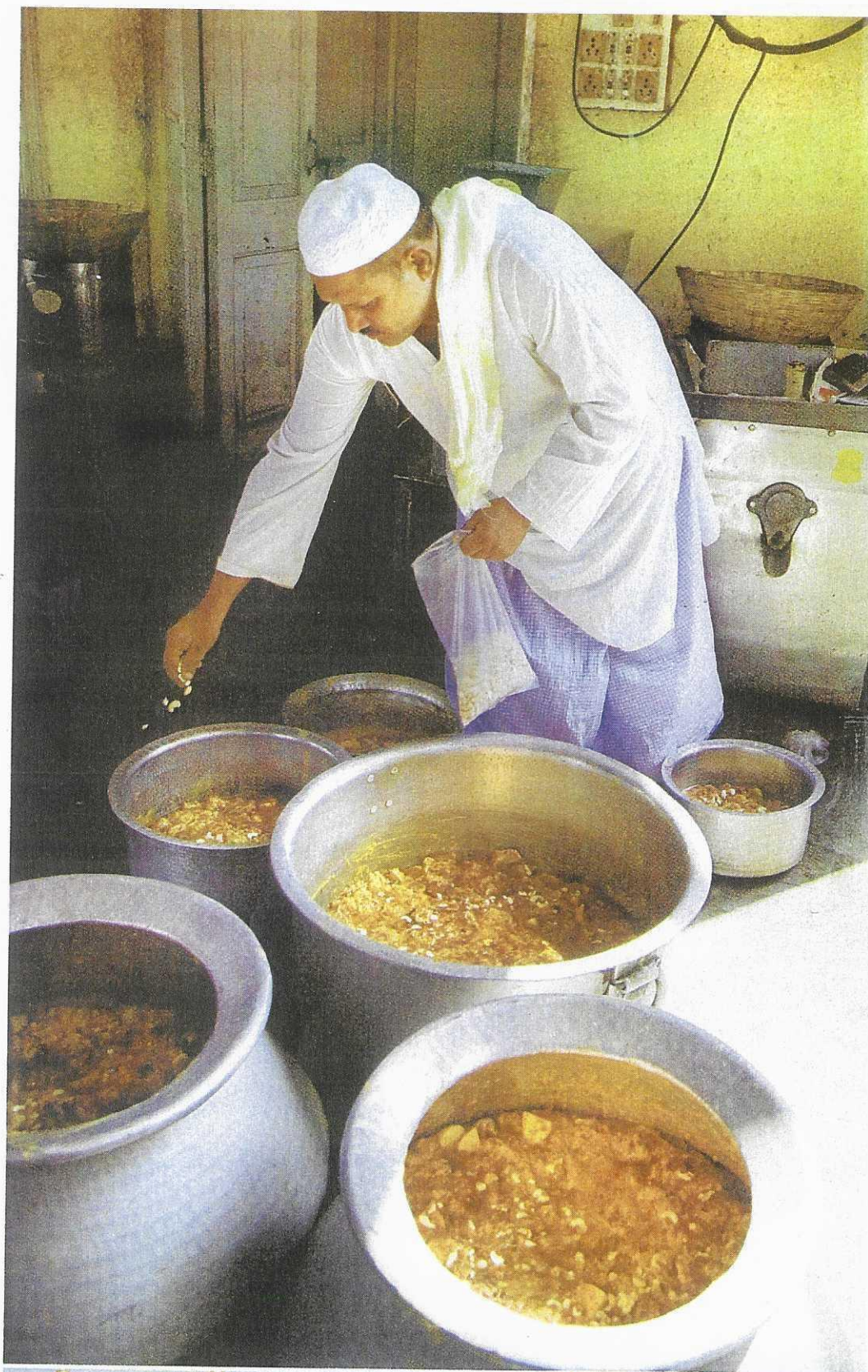
Down another alley, 5,000 miles away in London's Knightsbridge, well-heeled diners are enjoying the same dish. The prices at Michelin-starred Amaya are many times higher than in that Mumbai backstreet, but the recipe is virtually identical. You have Camellia Panjabi's word for that. The woman who made Indian food fashionable in London – first with the Bombay Brasserie, then Chutney Mary, Veeraswamy (the UK's oldest Indian restaurant) and the Masala Zone chain – is always on the look-out for exciting new recipes for her restaurants. And after some silky persuasion, Bademiya's owner yielded the secrets of his incomparable keema.

Following in her wake on a whirlwind tour of downtown Mumbai's foodie hotspots, I'm not surprised he gave in. Camellia is an unstoppable force. In her 30-plus years as marketing director with India's prestigious Taj Hotels group, she criss-crossed the subcontinent, seeking talented chefs and authentic recipes from maharajahs to humble housewives so that she could introduce real regional cooking into the hotels' restaurants.

Many of those recipes found their way into her *50 Great Curries of India*, the world's bestselling curry book. Some also appear on the menu at Amaya and the other restaurants she runs with her brother-in-law, Ranjit, and sister, Namita. And, whenever she's in her home town of Bombay (she never calls it by its new name), her quest for new ideas – and chefs – to bring back to England continues.

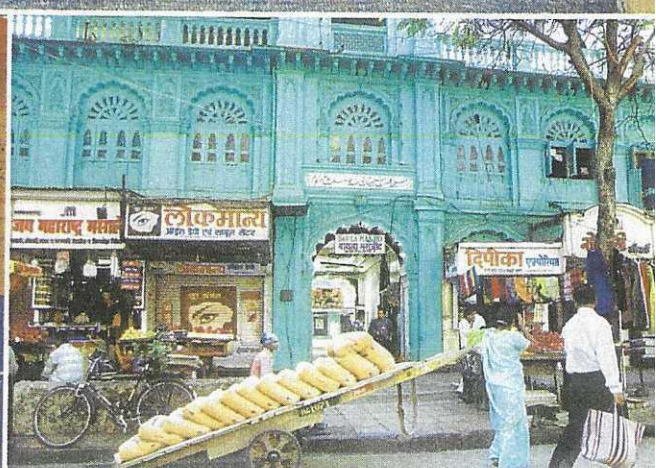
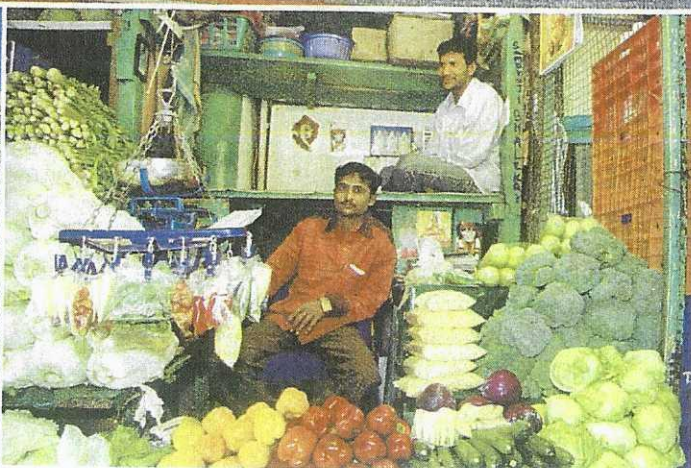
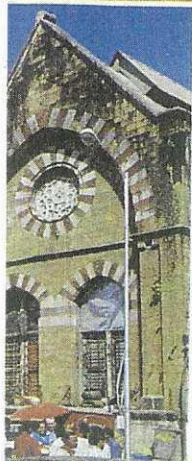
Loyal customers, however, may be surprised to hear that she rarely seeks inspiration in the city's five-star restaurants, good though they are. Instead, she heads straight for its teeming, colourful streets.

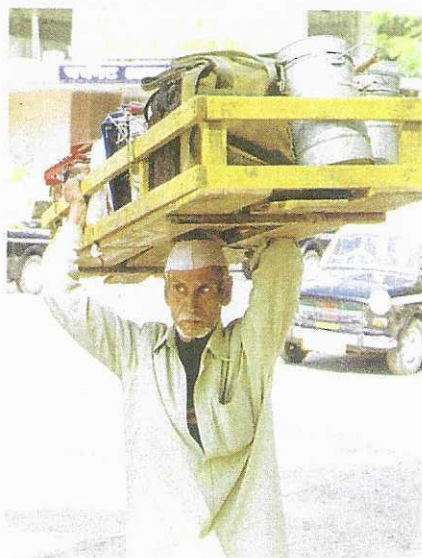
'Street food is what Bombay is all about,' says Camellia, as we join the hubbub in a lane of food stalls in the shadow of Victoria Terminus, the Raj's madly over-the-top recreation of London's St Pancras station. ▷





Food for sharing: taking salt to whet the appetite at a Bori feast and, left, adding cashews to marinating biryani meat at Jaffer Bhai's kitchens. Below from left, looking out over the harbour; Crawford Market, outside and in; food delivery Mumbai-style





OUT TO LUNCH

Asked which is the best place to eat in the city, most Mumbaikars will say: at home. Every morning an army of 1,000 men springs into action to ensure they get their favourite food at work, too.

These are the legendary *dabbawallahs*, a common sight in their white caps and pyjama trousers, carrying 150,000 piping hot meals from suburban kitchen to downtown desk with astonishing efficiency.

Once sons and husbands leave for work on packed commuter trains, their womenfolk prepare a lunch including rice, dhal, curry, yogurt and chappatis stacked in aluminium trays inside an insulated tiffin box. This is then collected by a runner who delivers it to the nearest station, where another *dabbawallah* takes it into the city.

On arrival at the central stations, boxes – identified by colour coding, as most *dabbawallahs* are illiterate – are sorted on the pavements. They then start their journey across Mumbai on heads, handlebars and handcarts, with arrival at the workplace by 12.30pm guaranteed. Then the process is reversed to return the boxes home. The service costs just £2 a month and a recent study found only one lunch in six million goes astray.

For a few rupees we try the latest craze – paper cups of steamed corn kernels tossed in butter, lemon juice and spices (delicious). ‘This is where the excitement is and where the trends that eventually end up in restaurants start,’ says Camellia. ‘Everyone, high and low, wants to know where the hot new stand is. It’s the survival of the tastiest – if your food isn’t good enough the customers move on.’

At the next stall a crowd waits for mounds of chopped vegetables sizzling in butter on a griddle to be turned into their favourite street snack, *pav bhaji*. The veg are mashed with spices and yet more butter and then served up in butter-soaked rolls. Looks like a heart attack in a bun to me.

‘You shouldn’t analyse street food,’ says Camellia. ‘Just enjoy the explosion of flavours, what chefs call “the yummy”.’ For her, it doesn’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that zing – hot, sour, sweet, salty and spicy combined.

Her latest discovery certainly has it all going on. A strange hybrid called Szechuan pizza is doing a roaring trade at the Haji Ali Juice Stand overlooking the famous mosque on the seafront. ‘It’s a crazy idea but I can’t stop eating it,’ she laughs as we tuck into an Indian flatbread spread with chilli sauce then topped with onion, garlic, coriander, cheese and more chilli sauce.

In a way, Camellia is partly responsible for this bonkers snack. She popularised Chinese food when she opened the Golden Dragon in the Taj Mahal Palace 35 years ago. Its Indian take on Chinese food – heavy with spicy red chilli and garlic gravy – made it the nation’s hottest restaurant in its early years and it’s still going strong. ‘When Bombayites eat out, they love Chinese,’ says Camellia, ‘but they’re really eating “Chindian”. Their favourite dish, chicken Manchurian, is unknown in China.’

Whether the Chindian pizza will make it on to the Masala Zone menu back in London remains to be seen. Plenty of Bombay’s street food already has, including my favourite, *pani-puri*: wheat puffs stuffed with diced potato, chickpeas, coriander chutney, yogurt and drizzled with tamarind water. As the contents drip down my chin, I learn that they’re best eaten in one mind-blowing mouthful.

Having ‘curry royalty’, as *The Times* called her, as your guide has many advantages, one being that she knows which stalls are unlikely to serve a dose of dodgy tummy on the side. If you don’t want to risk it, head for the Sea Lounge at Taj Mahal Palace where years ago Camellia persuaded her horrified bosses to let her put various *puris* on the menu. They were an instant hit and

afternoon tea with street snacks is still packing them in.

Tens of thousands of restaurants and stalls cater for the diverse tastes and creeds of the 18 million people crammed into this narrow strip of land by the Arabian Sea. Chaotic and captivating, it’s the subcontinent’s most cosmopolitan city and home to both its most expensive real estate and biggest slums. Mumbai, the saying goes, isn’t really part of India but every part of India is in Mumbai. As in New York, everyone is from somewhere else and the melting pot of cultures is reflected in the food.

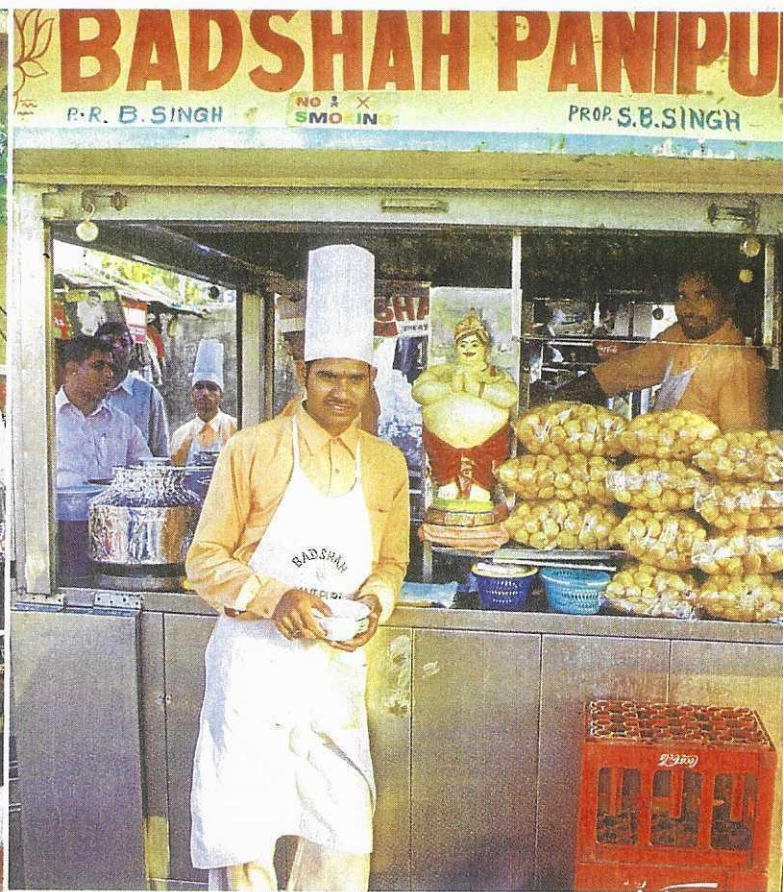
The Boris, a prosperous Muslim trading community, were among the early arrivals. New year and birthdays are marked with feasts and Camellia’s friend, Rashida Anees, throws a dinner party at her home to show us how the Boris celebrate. The meal begins on the floor with guests gathered around a *thal*, a vast silver plate filled with steaming dishes and a bowl of salt. Each takes a pinch of salt to whet the appetite and the feasting begins. The lamb biryani and *khichda*, a kind of wheat, meat and lentil porridge that tastes better than it looks, are particularly scrumptious but, to my surprise, have no bite at all. ‘We don’t cook with chillies,’ explains Rashida, ‘so we use a lot of pickles and chutneys to give it a kick.’

Camellia sometimes has a Bori biryani on her menus in London but there’s another she’d dearly like to feature, if only she could get the recipe. Alas, Jaffer Bhai Mansuri, the self-styled biryani king of Mumbai, isn’t letting anyone in on his secrets. Having inherited them from his father, the recipes are taught from cook to cook and never written down.

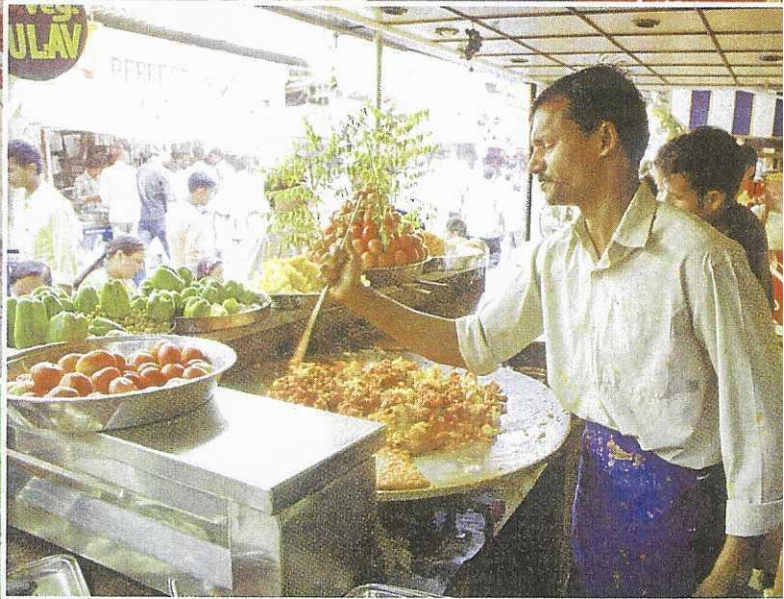
‘Nobody can make what we make,’ he ▸

WHERE TO EAT

Bademiya, Tulloch Road (22 2841 649)
Golden Dragon and Sea Lounge, Taj Mahal Palace and Tower, Apollo Bunder (22 6665 3366) **Haji Ali Juice Centre**, 11A, Tardeo Road (22 2492 1632) **Jaffer Bhai’s Delhi Darbar**, 197 Pathe Babu Rao Marg (and branches) (22 2387 5656) **Khyber**, 145 Mahatma Gandhi Road, Kalaghoda (22 2267 3227) **Konkan Café**, Taj President, 90 Cuffe Parade (22 6665 0808) **Mahesh Lunch Home**, 8D Cowasji Patel St, Fort (22 2287 0938) **Trishna Sai**, Baba Marg, Kala Ghoda, Fort, Colaba (22 2270 3213) For details of **Veeraswamy**, **Chutney Mary**, **Amaya** and **Masala Zone** in London, go to www.realindianfood.com.



Curry queen:
Camellia Panjabi
with her favourite
Kashmiri red chillies



Street life: from fruit
shakes and platters to
puris, pav bhajis, above,
and Bademiya's famous
kebabs, you can snack
your way around town

says, as he teases us with a glimpse behind the scenes at Biryani HQ. In a courtyard at the rear of his offices sweating cooks prepare industrial quantities of fragrant biryani, their famous lamb curry, *dabba gosht*, and other delicacies in huge pots over rows of open fires. These are sealed and delivered to weddings and dinner parties, but more modest portions can be had at Jaffer Bhai's citywide Delhi Darbar restaurants.

The dishes at our next stop, the Konkan Café, hold no mysteries for Camellia. Before setting up this acclaimed seafood restaurant in the Taj President Hotel, she sent chef Ananda Solomon off to trawl the lush Konkan coast between Bombay and Mangalore for the best local recipes. 'They're based on fish, coconut and rice,' says Ananda, 'and it's a really healthy way to eat.' All I know is it's sensational – you haven't eaten a great prawn curry until you've tried Ananda's Goan king prawns in a red masala served with lemon rice.

Seafood lovers should also head for Mahesh Lunch Home (try the tandoori tiger prawns) and nearby Trishna, where the meaty crab claws in warm garlicky butter are not to be missed.

Fish is king in this coastal megalopolis and we swing by the popular Grant Road fish market to inspect the local catch. Women in jewel-coloured saris sit on their tiled stalls expertly filleting whatever

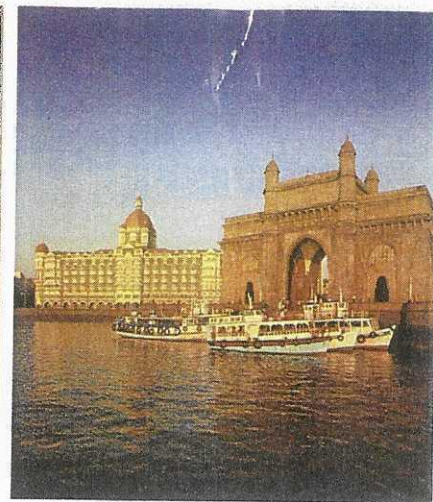
they've brought from the docks to sell: glistening mounds of sardines on one stall, pomfret, a flounder-like fish, on the next.

Every other kind of fresh produce is available at Crawford Market, housed in a cavernous Victorian building adorned with friezes designed by Rudyard Kipling's father. As Keith Floyd remarked after visiting it: 'If you can eat it or stroke it, you can probably find it here.'

Bypassing the horrors of the poultry and pets section, we admire the immaculate displays of fruit and veg in the main hall. I'm tempted by the baskets of chillies but Camellia knows the best peppers are across town at the Khamkar pickle and spice store. Kashmiri chilli, treasured for its deep red colour, and three other varieties are sent from here to England every three weeks for use in her restaurants.

Our last meal is lunch at the most famous tandoori restaurant in town. Khyber has been thrilling meat lovers for 50 years with its robust Northwest Frontier-style cooking and, as we worked our way through melt-in-the-mouth kebabs, creamy curries and the house speciality, *raan* – slow-cooked, marinated leg of lamb finished on the grill in a masala of aromatic spices – we joined the massed ranks of its admirers.

Amol Patil, Khyber's head chef, declares his *raan* to be the finest in Mumbai. 'You may be right,' says Camellia. 'But have you tried our version at Veeraswamy?' □



HOW TO GO

Mumbai is the gateway to south India and makes a great stopover en route to the beaches of Goa and Kerala. Or you can do it as a short break – for a real taste of the exotic just eight hours away, it's hard to beat.

India holiday specialists **Cox and Kings** (020 7873 5000; www.coxandkings.co.uk) offer a five-night B&B stay at the historic **Taj Mahal Palace** (above), overlooking the historic Gateway of India and the Arabian Sea, including flights and private transfers, from £945 per person, based on two sharing. They can also arrange a city sightseeing tour, a boat trip to **Elephanta Island** and its 1,500-year-old Hindu cave sculptures or a visit to **Bollywood**. That leaves plenty of time to scoop up bargains in the many enticing shops and, of course, to enjoy some of the best Indian food you will ever taste.

Malabar prawn curry

Serves 4-6

This is a hot curry for those who like a good kick. For a mild flavour, leave out the dried chillies and chilli powder. Serve with fragrant pilau or basmati rice. Garnish the dish with coriander or a few extra curry leaves fried in hot oil if you like.

Prep time 25 minutes

Cook time 20 minutes

Do ahead The curry can be prepared several hours ahead up to the point of adding the prawns. Can be frozen

3 tablespoons sunflower oil

¼ teaspoon mustard seeds

16 curry leaves

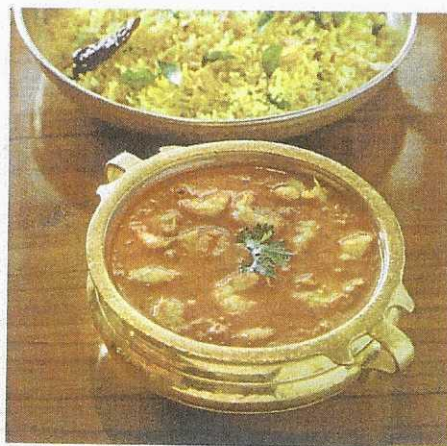
1 medium onion, peeled and sliced

1 heaped teaspoon grated root ginger

3 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced

4 green chillies, cut in half lengthways and deseeded

1 whole dried red chilli, crumbled, or a pinch crushed dried chillies



½ teaspoon red chilli powder

½ teaspoon turmeric

½ teaspoon ground coriander

½ teaspoon ground cumin

1 teaspoon paprika

2 ripe tomatoes, chopped

1 tablespoon tamarind paste

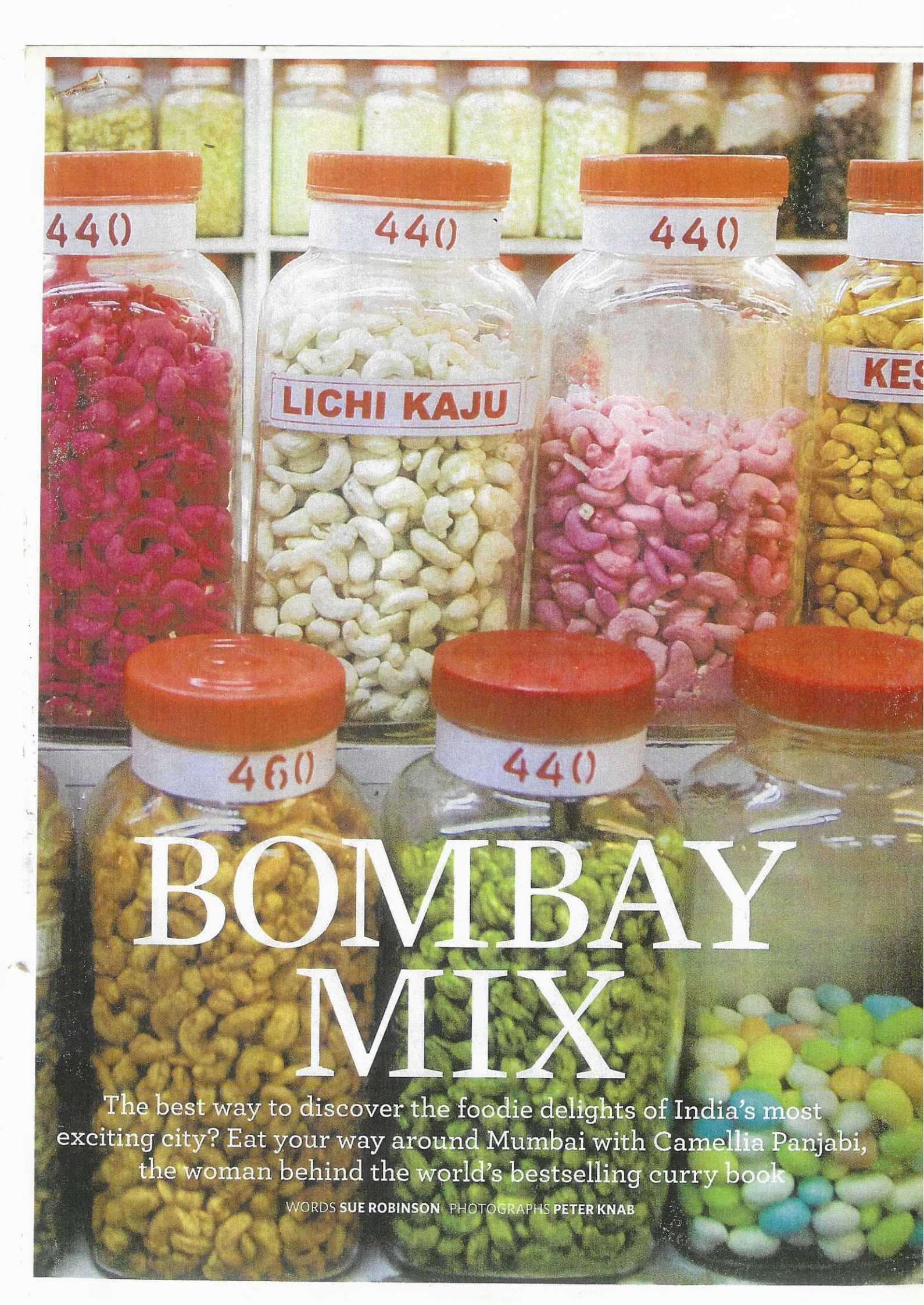
½ x 400g tin coconut milk

400g raw peeled large prawns

In a shallow pan, heat the oil until it is medium hot and add the mustard seeds. When they start to pop, add the curry leaves and, after a few seconds, add the onion and sauté, stirring for 7-8 minutes. Add the ginger, garlic and green chilli. After 2 minutes, add the dried red chilli or crushed dried chillies, the red chilli powder, turmeric, ground coriander, cumin and paprika. Add 2 tablespoons of water and cook the spices for 2 minutes, stirring so they do not stick. Stir in the tomatoes, 100ml of water and the tamarind paste. Turn the heat down and simmer, partially covered, for 5 minutes. Stir in the coconut milk and ½ teaspoon of salt and simmer for 5 minutes more. Strain into a pan and discard the chillies etc. Season to taste. Add the prawns and cook gently for 2-3 minutes until they are pink and cooked through.

Per serving (if serving 6) 720cals; 36.2g fat, of which 8.4g saturated fat; 15.6g carbohydrate; 83.7g protein; no added sugar; 0.9g salt; 5.4g fibre

Recipe adapted from Camellia Panjabi's 50 Great Curries of India (Kyle Cathie, £15.99)



BOMBAY MIX

The best way to discover the foodie delights of India's most exciting city? Eat your way around Mumbai with Camellia Panjabi, the woman behind the world's bestselling curry book

WORDS SUE ROBINSON PHOTOGRAPHS PETER KNAB