

Proudly Representing:

Chef Mayank Istwal  
SPICES.STORIES.SECRETS.

Some call it their Bio.  
*We call it HIS STORY.*

Musaafer  
By The SPICE ROUTE CO.

Musaafer Corporate Executive Chef – Mayank Istwal



Chef Mayank is available for speaking engagements, talking head TV appearances, filmed (TV) or live event culinary competition judging, South Asian Leadership events, wedding menu planning and celebrity chef collaborations.  
Contd.,

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He is a graduate of The Institute of Hotel Management of Guwahati, India. Chef Mayank combines his expertise, passion and encyclopedic knowledge of spices, ingredients and textures serving a neoteric Indian dining experience in a stunning, expertly curated setting within Musaafer (meaning "The Traveller",) built within Houston's luxurious Galleria at Westheimer and Sage.

## **RECENT PRESS, FIRSTS, AND ACCOLADES**

In February 2024, Musaafer was named among the "Top 15 Most Romantic Restaurants in the World" alongside such luminaries as NYC's "Eleven Madison Park" by Blacklane, an international, award-winning VIP travel company, with a team of over 300 people with hubs in Singapore, Spain, the U.A.E., the U.K., and the U.S.

Additionally in February of 2023, he was honored with a nomination for "Best Chef" by the Houston Culture Map "Tastemaker Awards"

January 2024 saw the unveiling of an avant-garde dinner collaboration with Bayou City Hemp and 8th Wonder Brewery, featuring eight courses of THC-infused dishes alongside infused mocktails and cocktails.

In 2023, Musaafer and Chef Mayank made the coveted "Top 100 Restaurants in Houston - Culinary Stars" list curated by the highly respected food critic Alison Cook.

In 2021, "Time Magazine" listed Musaafer as "One of The Top 100 Places to Visit in the World"

And recently, Chef Mayank and Musaafer have been featured in "Conde Nast Traveller", "Houston Life" "FOX26 TV", "The Houston Chronicle", "CW39 TV", "Houston Business Journal", "Paper City Magazine", "FSR Magazine" and many more.

Chef Mayank was also the presenter of "Indian Heritage Through Cuisine, Culture and Spices" for The Foundation for India Studies (FIS) on the celebration of INDO -AMERICAN HERITAGE DAY

A brief note about FIS (FIS runs a project in University of Houston, TX with a vision to promote knowledge about India's contribution to the world in the field of language literature, arts, sciences, engineering, politics, economics and spirituality.)

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He was recently in the news for his innovative creation called “The V-Pill”, taking inspiration from Ayurvedic herbs and spices, more details of which are forthcoming.

### **LATEST NEWS**

Mayank’s quest for re-discovering long-forgotten ingredients, including nuts, fungi, spices, herbs and more, and bringing them back into the mainstream, is an on-going passion which keeps him going “back to the well” to resurrect the magic of culinary history.

### **FOOD PHILOSOPHY**

The intention of Musaafer’s gastronomic experience is to showcase our homeland of India in a manner that authentically honors the country’s culinary diversity. A meal experienced at Musaafer is an educational tour for our diners, where the Corporate Executive Chef Mayank Istwal vows to take you on the 100-day journey on which he himself embarked, throughout the 29 states of India. In his quest for global culinary knowledge.

Chef travelled to many tucked away places in India to gather recipes from home-cooks and legendary Chefs. India, one of the oldest civilizations, has many beautiful, ancient dishes, ingredients and techniques which are long lost to history, and no longer in the mainstream. These dishes have always had a significant existence in nature and are also beneficial to health.

During his journey, select ingredients and spice blends were sourced from families and plantations of India who have been using them for generations. The cutting edge skill, creativity and imagination of Chef Mayank comes into play when he translates his redefined vision for traditional Indian recipes into stunning, new-age plate presentations, whilst also ensuring that Indian Cuisine holds the same place on the global culinary stage as any other top cuisines.

Both the skillfully bespoke a-la-carte and tasting menus are woven with fascinating stories while engaging all the senses and showcasing a neoteric approach through inventive food presentations, and textural enrichment to the traditional dishes from the sub-continent.

At Musaafer we wish to celebrate the spirit of indulgence and abundance with an eclectic and inventive menu that is extensive, yet true to the original flavors and tastes of India.

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As a student, he won the National Council For Hotel Management and Catering Technology of New Delhi prestigious “Best Chef” award. His career began as a kitchen management trainee at the luxury boutique Devigarh Hotel in Udaipur, where he then became the Kitchen Executive. Mayank was chosen by famed Australian restaurateur and culinary entrepreneur, Chef Luke Mangan to run his fine dining restaurant “Salt Grill” aboard P&O cruise lines.

Following a few years aboard luxury, state-of-the-art cruise liners, Chef Mayank worked as a Junior Sous Chef at The LaLit, a luxury hotel in Udaipur where his talents earned him opportunities ~ such as being the exclusive chef to the cast of the BAFTA and Golden Globe award-winning movie '**The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel**', starring Dame Judi Dench, Maggie Smith, Bill Nighy and Dev Patel. Whilst they were filming on the property, Mayank formed special bonds with some of the stars, and even took them on tours of the kitchen gardens, and concocted special request dishes and even high teas for them during production. These people had some dietary restrictions, which Chef naturally took care of. Bill Nighy even stated that he has some of the best meals of his life from the kitchen of Chef Mayank.

He also worked as the Sous Chef at The Taj Fort Aguada, a beach resort and spa in Goa, which is world-renowned for having some of the best beaches, most diverse wildlife and top resorts in all of South Asia. Chef's Italian concept “Il Camino” within the resort won “**Best Italian Chef and Restaurant**”, even beating out the native Italians (expats) in the Goa restaurant landscape. Also, during his tenure in Goa he was the winner of the prestigious **Goan Chef Challenge**. His extensive experience in menu creation and kitchen management led him to become the Executive Sous Chef at the LaLit Ashok in Bangalore, where he was responsible for the operations of all the property's restaurants, plus its event spaces.

During his formative tenure in India, he invented ‘healthy spice blends’ combining his broad knowledge of Ayurveda and spices, which more deeply examines the nature of each spice, and how to prepare seasonal blends. He has created a palette of spice combinations which are guided by the cooling, warming, digestive, mouth freshening or baking nature of the spices. Chef Mayank believes his invention of these healthy spice blends will contribute the gift of better digestion, more enjoyable gastro-experiences, and a greater overall appreciation of spices to all mankind. Being a food historian, Chef Mayank is an impressive advocate of each ingredient and spice, from which he seeks age-old inspiration from within the historic Indian traditional storytelling like Katha, Pravachana and Kathakalakshepam.

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Following his successful career in India, Chef Mayank joined The Spice Route Company in the USA, to guide and shape all culinary aspects of their newest and most adventurous concept yet, and the group's first project in Houston, Texas – Musaafer. In order to create a carefully curated and truly authentic menu for the new restaurant, Chef Mayank embarked on a 100-day journey around the 29 states of India. He discovered hundreds of new recipes that he combined with contemporary elements to take Musaafer's diners on a luxurious and delicious culinary expedition, within its' meticulously decorated spaces. His quest for research is never ending, and so he also undertook a 2-month exploratory culinary visit to Mexico City to further discover the traditions in his new neighbouring country.

Being an avid traveller and food historian, Mayank has additionally sojourned to many countries including Australia, New Zealand, French Polynesia, Peru, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Turkey, Central Africa, UAE, West Africa and Mexico.

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