



ARTS & CULTURE

South Asian Eateries 'Go Local' to Recover from Pandemic Losses

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Hotels and restaurants across South Asia have had to reimagine eating out because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The worldwide health crisis forced many eateries to close. Those that survived are trying to use more local sources.

In India, restaurants were badly harmed by **lockdowns** and virus **outbreaks**. Millions of people in the industry lost their jobs.

In neighboring Sri Lanka, those in the restaurant industry continue to struggle.

Saman Nayanananda is a food and drink supervisor at a hotel in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo. He said that depending more on local food sources is critical.

Nayanananda survived a powerful tsunami in 2004 that killed 230,000. He lived through a long civil war that ended in 2009 and witnessed the results of the deadly 2019 terrorist attack that happened on the Easter holiday.

After every disaster, Sri Lanka's economy was able to recover.

But this time, the struggle to recover is greater. The country's economy is faced with debt and fuel and food shortages.

"A year after COVID, all hotels started food delivery," he said. "We were slowly recovering and then this economic crisis came."

"This crisis," he said, "it has broken the middle class."

Because of the struggles, Nayananda and others have centered on local foods to develop their offerings. **Dishes** were created that used locally grown sweet potatoes, cassava, yams and cowpeas.

Maneesh Baheti is founder and director of the South Asian Association for Gastronomy. He said the pandemic has raised **awareness** about health concerns and food sourcing. This has led the industry to adopt more environmentally friendly practices. That includes offering dishes made with locally grown produce.

“Eating fresh local produce according to season, returning to diets rich in nuts, legumes and green leafy vegetables, are trends that are here to stay,” Baheti said.

As the food services industry rebuilds itself, restaurant owners say some practices that became necessary during the pandemic can offer a way forward.

Many urban communities are experimenting with plant-based **diets** and growing vegetables and fruits in creative ways on their properties.

Back in Colombo, Nayananda began riding a bicycle to work and growing food at his home after it became difficult to feed his family.

In Sri Lanka and other countries in Asia, the recent wave of COVID-19 infections in China has caused worries over the risk of a return to shutdowns and other restrictions. But Nayananda said he is hopeful.

“What is important,” he said, “is to learn to live with what we have in our hands.”

I’m Ashley Thompson.

The Associated Press reported this story. Ashley Thompson adapted it for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

outbreak - n. a sudden start or increase of fighting or disease

dish - n. food that is prepared in a particular way

awareness - n. the state of knowing that something (such as a situation, condition, or problem) exists

diet - n. the food that a person or animal usually eats

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