

## Himanshi Munshaw-Luhar: A glutton for her work

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Over the past year Himanshi Munshaw-Luhar has eaten her way through India, sampling seafood on houseboats in Kerala, buying freshly-ground spices from bustling markets and dining at the country's only Michelin-starred restaurant.

The director of Caulfield's boutique tour operator Beacon Holidays has been doing all this in the name of work and next year will launch Masala Trails, an exclusive program that takes foodie travellers on a culinary tour of India.



"Food is a big part of our lives," the Mumbai-born, 30-year-old says. "In India every 50 kilometres the dialect and food changes."

Munshaw-Luhar will run the tours with her sister Rushina Munshaw Ghildiyal, a well-known gastronomy writer who works out of Mumbai.

"She's wanted to do it for a long time but when we got together we decided it was the perfect fit, I really enjoy the planning side of things, booking the hotels and we both enjoy the food side of things."

The sisters will run two tours, one in east and south India, and one in the north. As well as trawling through paddocks of fresh spices with naturalists and dining at well-known restaurants, travellers will be invited into local homes where housewives will cook village specialties. One of the highlights of the trip is a traditional Gujarati meal prepared by the Munshaw-Luhars' family cook of 35 years.

"The most popular Indian food internationally is butter chicken and chicken tikka masala but Indian food is predominantly vegetarian, there are a lot of different types of vegetarian foods with vegetables and pulses which vary across the country."

Leftovers are uncommon in India and food is usually prepared and eaten on the spot.

"There's no preparing it earlier and eating it later in the week," Munshaw-Luhar says. "In most houses you cook every meal fresh. From the time I was a kid every good memory has been around food, there is always someone feeding you."

Munshaw-Luhar came to Australia six years ago as a student. After completing her masters in management and accounting at RMIT she got married and decided to settle down and start her own travel business in Caulfield.

Munshaw-Luhar also runs Indian culinary tours closer to home in Dandenong and Melbourne's CBD. On weekends she often leads small groups of people through the city streets, introducing them to the delicate flavours of India at local cafes and grocery markets.

If you think local Indian restaurants only serve food off the menu, think again. "People on the tours eat an authentic meal that isn't on the menu regularly, we provide people with a snapshot of the different

regions – there won't be any chicken tikka."

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