

# US American

Food & Drink

## Star-spangled dinner

From the thousands of rear-echelon military men whose allowances helped breathe life into Connaught Place in the early '40s (see "Dining at Per Diem Hill", p15) to the present day's mixed bag of publishers, Mormon missionaries and embassy spouses, Delhi's American community has never had a fixed identity. It has weapons contractors throwing five-star dinners for bureaucrats (every weekend, according to the *The Washington Post*) and medical volunteers eating dal moth on Nai Sarak after assisting in free consultations with the Ila Trust.

It also has Jenny Steeves and Dave Prager, authors of an upcoming book about being American in Delhi, based on their blog *Delhi Struggle* (a title they regretted after a few months). Seeking adventure and Indian food, the couple had their jobs transferred here. Their favourite place to eat is Karim's,

but as for "American food", they agreed that the phrase is a bit of a puzzle. Most American classics are modified immigrant dishes – pizza from Italy, hot dogs from German frankfurters. The hamburger is indigenous, but that means beef (the only legal beef burgers in Delhi are served by the American Community Support Association café, to citizens only. Prager confided the one burger he tried there was overcooked).

"New Yorkers are accustomed to having many different kinds of cuisine over the course of the week," Prager said. "But it's with a fair share of experience that we declare America's one unambiguous culinary superiority is breakfast. Nowhere in the world have we found a better way to start the day than with greasy eggs, butter-logged toast, burnt potatoes and bitter coffee of the greatest of all American institutions – the local diner." Other Dilliwalas might think instinctively of **The All-**

**American Diner** in the India Habitat Centre, but the closest Prager and Steeves came to the real meal was **Choko-la** in Basant Lok. "They have well-cooked eggs, fresh-baked bread and finely brewed espresso," Prager told us. "A few surly cooks short of the real thing, but close enough to satisfy our homesickness."

Prager and Steeves were also gripped by other furtive cravings. "I'm ashamed to admit it. There we were, surrounded by the best cuisine on the planet, yet we just can't get hot dogs or fajitas out of our traffic-addled brains," Prager said. On the worst days, they snuck into faux-American eateries, which did help remind them of home, as well as of "the mass-produced corporate pseudo-food that was part of the reason we left America in the first

place". On better days, they indulged in tex-mex, a craving mentioned by many Americans *Time Out* spoke to. Their favourite was **Sancho's**, which has recently moved from South Extension to CP, the cradle of American dining. In the move, it has pushed up both spices and prices. But despite some Punjabification, Sancho's can lay out a spread of chilli con carne nachos, buffalo tacos and a margarita that's just as mixed-up, messy and irresistible as American tex-mex itself. **RK The All-American Diner India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road (4122-0000). Daily 7am-11pm; breakfast buffet available until 11am. Meal for two Rs 900.**

**Choko-La** 36 Khan Market, middle lane (4175-7570); 61 Community Centre, Basant Lok, Vasant Vihar (4166-9191). Daily 8am-11pm. No alcohol served. Meal for two Rs 700. **Sancho's** M-48 Connaught Place, opposite Shankar Market (4308-4656). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily noon-midnight. Alcohol served only on Fridays and Saturdays.

## Delicatessen

For other Americans – again, New Yorkers in particular – comfort food means the light refreshments of the deli. "Even the word 'deli' is so American," said Noma Naina, an officer with the American Women's Association. "The simplest thing, which is the hardest to find here, is a good sandwich. Not Subway. But in the last couple years I've been able to buy any of the ingredients, like turkey or smoked salmon. You even get good bagels." She shops for her sandwich fixings at the **Modern Bazaar** in Basant Lok. It's an indulgence, but it's worth it.

Dave Prager is a skeptic. "Every New Yorker knows there are no decent bagels outside of NYC, so we didn't bother looking." Maybe they should have. There's a race on to reproduce the dense Jewish boiled-dough bread in Delhi. Gurgaon's

**American Ambrosia** bakery brags about the results – "created by a special double-boiled then baked process to get that authentic American taste". We'll vouch for **Bagel's Café**, also in Gurgaon, which gets their bagels made by a Canadian couple all the way across town in Sarita Vihar.

**American Ambrosia** ([www.americanambrosia.com](http://www.americanambrosia.com), 98184-33448). All bagel varieties available for Rs 350 per half-dozen and Rs 350 per dozen mini-bagels. Email [orders@americanambrosia.com](mailto:orders@americanambrosia.com).

**Bagel's Café** D-140 The Shopping Mall, Arjun Marg, DLF City Phase-I, Gurgaon (0124-4284742). Daily 9am-10pm. No alcohol served. Meal for two Rs 700.

**Modern Bazaar** 18-B, Basant Lok Market, Vasant Vihar (4166-9777, 98911-29999). Daily 10am-9pm. Home delivery available. Sliced turkey breast Rs 750 per 250g, smoked salmon Rs 565 per 250g.



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