

# Delhi-cious

## Indian food: From Catering to Cooking Classes



In an interview with Rossana A. Ammann, SINGApreneur Smriti Chhabra tells the story behind her **Delhi-cious** catering business and how she decided to swap the IT classroom for a kitchen full of novice cooks eager to learn about Indian food. The passion for teaching others is still there and Smriti now aspires to establish herself as a prominent figure in Indian cuisine in Switzerland.

Smriti has been abroad half her life. After getting married, she and her husband spent 12 years in London working as IT professionals. “Every time we ended up in an Indian restaurant I was never satisfied with the food and my husband always emphasized that we needed to open our own Indian take-out,” she explains. And that’s how everything started.

In London, they didn’t have much time to expand on the idea, but once they moved to Switzerland in 2011 with their two toddlers, she knew the time had come for her business project. “We want to show people what real Indian food tastes like and what Indian restaurants, the ambience and the actual Indian picture should deliver, ” emphasizes Smriti, who is currently offering catering services and cooking lessons in Zurich.

### Rossana: What does cooking mean to you?

**Smriti:** Cooking food basically means inner satisfaction. We get inner and spiritual strength from good food. If I am not happy or I feel disturbed I don’t like to cook. If food is not cooked when you’re in a good mood, then it is better not to eat it - it will not do any good to the body. Why do we eat? Basically to grow and nourish ourselves, to make ourselves happy. Can you imagine your day without having anything to eat? We cannot survive without food! We wouldn’t be able to give our best with empty tummies.

### **How did you come to Switzerland after 12 years in London?**

**Smriti:** My husband got a good offer in Switzerland and we moved again. In India, we have always been fascinated by this country because of (its appearance in) Bollywood movies. Switzerland was always that place and dream to live in. The idea was to stay for six months tops or even a year, but after coming here we loved this place and we never looked back!

Even though adapting to the country and at school was not easy for the kids, it was exactly during that period of free afternoons and parent-teacher meetings in the evenings when Smriti brought her Indian food for people to try for the first time. "When kids start a new school year, there is a tradition that they hold parent meetings very often and after every Info-Abend they normally do a small apéro and parents contribute. So I always did it with Indian dishes and everybody liked it," says Smriti.



### **Tell us more about how your business started.**

**Smriti:** During 2012 and after bringing food to the Info-Abende, some parents approached me and asked me to teach them how to cook Indian food, because they would love to learn. It was kind of a "cooking club" with a group of ladies. Then, the same friends gave me another idea: they thought that everybody should get a chance to learn with me and we decided to talk to the local community (Gemeinde) of Küsnacht, where I live, about offering cooking classes to whoever is interested!



**Where was the information published and how often did you teach in the community?**

**Smriti:** The Küsnacht community has an activities' catalog in which they offer courses. We talked to them and they agreed to add my cooking classes. After that, my first class was fully booked! It was 3-4 hours long with a 3-course menu. The participants loved the food, the information given and it was very motivating when I could see people smiling with satisfied tummies. I continued with 2 or 3 sessions every year with 6-7 classes in total. Then, every catalog included my classes. It went really well!

In 2018 Smriti Chhabra decided to turn her focus to giving private cooking classes in a school kitchen she booked and she has also catered some events for around 40 people. The same people that she met during her classes often approached her afterwards to book her catering services.

**Please tell us about your favorite dish.**

Being vegetarian, my favorite dish is **"Kadai Paneer"** because of its aroma and the crunchy taste of peppers. It's easy to cook, with a mix of coloured peppers with paneer (strained curdled milk) in onion and tomato gravy. It's flavourful, aromatic and a colourful treat for the eye. I am not exaggerating when I say that it's hard to tell the difference between a used and a clean plate when we have this dish for dinner at home!

Smriti also recently impressed members of the [Impact Hub Zurich](#) with a delicious lunch of butter chicken, lentil curry and light, aromatic basmati rice. Smriti is well known in the SINGA Factory for bringing spontaneous snacks of samosas, vegetable pakora and other meals to workshops, much to the delight of the coaches and her fellow SINGApreneurs.





**Where do you see your business going in the next 5 years?**

**Smriti:** I want to be known in every household (laughs). I want to spread the word about authentic, healthy and tasty Indian cooking and food in Switzerland! That is what I want to be able to do in the next years and I have the courage and the potential to do it.

**If we book your catering services, what can we expect?**

Ah, that's a hard one! Actually the list (of dishes) is endless. I try to customise catering. I would relish cooking for you including the ingredients you love to eat. Indian cooking is full of options and to name a few would not do it justice.

**"I cook to feed people and make them happy. It was never about the money. I want to show people how real Indian food tastes. How Indian restaurants should look, the ambience, the actual Indian picture."**

**Until now, what do you find to be the most useful guidance inside the SINGA Factory?**

**Smriti:** Everything, actually! It is the best thing that I joined them and I am very thankful. I have had a great opportunity to meet so many people and almost every day you get in contact with someone new. I would not be able to meet such a big network if I had not joined SINGA.

**From all the workshops you have participated in, is there one you could mention as special or really interesting?**

**Smriti:** There was one about revenue models with Felix Hofmann which I really liked! Because when you do business you have to look into all these things. I cook to feed people and make them happy, it was never about the money. However, when you think of starting a business yourself, then you have to look into the

pricing. Felix gave very insightful ideas on the topic. Another one I also liked was about legal information with Michael Mosimann.

### **What drives and motivates you every day?**

**Smriti:** My growing business, especially when I see the reviews I get from people after having my food. That motivates me a lot! Even from kids. One mother once sent me a video of her daughter saying to me: 'Oh, Smriti, your butter chicken is the best I have ever had' and it was amazing. Comments like that always keep me motivated.

### **What is your daily motto?**

**Smriti:** I basically try. Sometimes I am successful, sometimes not, but I consider 'maybe today is the last day I have' so let's make it matter. Let's finish whatever I can finish.



*This interview was held in English by Venezuelan journalist, storyteller and volunteer Rossana A. Ammann, who is passionate about multiculturalism, people's stories and organizational development. You can find her work and more about her via [LinkedIn](#)*

*Rossanan Ammann, 2018, October 8th*