

## A STOVE AMONG THE VINEYARDS

**VALLELUNGA, SICILY** The grounds of Regaleali Vineyards, between Agrigento and Palermo, seem to go on forever. When I finally reached the house, Anna Tasca Lanza rushed out to greet me and pulled me into the remodeled barn where she hosts her culinary courses. (Regaleali has been in the Tasca family for 178 years.) There were only a handful of students in my class, so we were able to enjoy one-on-one attention while turning out a staggering array of dishes—everything from roasted hen and fresh stuffed sardines to grilled marinated artichokes and mushrooms, *arancini* (fried rice balls), *fritto misto*, *cassata*, and strawberry *sorbetto*. But the best part of the week was simply cooking with Anna and sharing her food—it was like being in the kitchen with my own Sicilian grandma. (011-39-0934-81-46-54; [absoluteitalia.com](http://absoluteitalia.com); \$2,277 for three days, including accommodations and meals) —Gina Marie Miraglia Eriquez



Think of Anna Tasca Lanza as your Sicilian grandmother, one who may whisk you off to an artisanal ricotta factory.

**WHAT I LEARNED** When making *arancini*, use a starchy rice, such as Arborio, to keep the balls intact when frying. **BIGGEST SURPRISE** How fresh the ingredients were compared to the same things you'd find back home. (I'll never forget those beautiful sardines.) **BEFORE YOU GO** Parts of Regaleali Vineyards are more akin to a working farm. Pack casual clothing and be prepared for "country."

## TUK-TUK TO TRANSCENDENTAL

**COCHIN, INDIA** "I would love to have you in my home and share my knowledge of cooking" was Nimmy Paul's response to my emailed query. "Yes, there is a train from Tellicherry," continued one of Kerala's foremost culinary authorities. "The journey would be six hours. Look forward to hearing from you. Love, Nimmy." I flattened the paper, soft by now from many foldings and the ever-present humidity, and practiced saying her tongue-twisting address. I was standing in the bustle of M.G. (Mahatma Gandhi) Road, in the town fabled for centuries as a trading hub, under a hot, bright sky. I gave alms to the wizened beggar on the corner, sidestepped a goat, and hopped into a tuk-tuk. A sign taped to the (broken) meter read "Bless Us!" The driver revved the engine (Can't be any larger than a mango, I thought), bossily tooted the horn, and butted his way into the good-natured chaos of trucks, motorbikes, bicycles, boxy Ambassador taxis, more tuk-tuks, and the occasional donkey. Ten minutes later, the generous welcome implicit in the note I still clutched was borne out by the sight of Nimmy, slim and straight in a dark green kurta, and her husband, V. J. Paul, waiting for me outside their tranquil little house. Soon I was ensconced in their kitchen, as neat and efficient as a ship's galley, while Nimmy outlined the lesson. Most of the dishes she was going to demonstrate lay within the Syrian

Christian tradition, she explained, adding swiftly that Syrian Christian Indians are so-called after the ancient rites they follow, not because they are from Syria. First Nimmy readied the makings for our dinner: *meen molee*—fish (here, the firm yet delicate pearl spot) in coconut milk; *kozhi varathathu*, or chicken "roast" (for a recipe, see page 79); and *vendekka olathyathu* (okra stir-fry). Then, as a starter, she presented me with the clean, pure flavors of Kerala on a plate—small prawns sautéed with citrusy curry leaves, a piece of sweet-sour *kokum* (the dried fruit of the gamboge tree), a smashed garlic clove, and a fragrant drizzle of something. "Coconut oil?" I ventured, and Nimmy smiled in acknowledgment before delighting me with a meal that moved from delicate to intriguing layers of spice. This is food I will make at home, I realized, after polishing off a cup of fish soup, rich with cumin and velvety tomatoes. *All the time*, I concluded, after the chicken. (011-91-484-231-4293; [nimmypaul.com](http://nimmypaul.com); about \$30 per class, including lunch or dinner) —Jane Daniels Lear

**WHAT I LEARNED** Adding a smidgen of ghee to the cooking oil imparts a roundness of flavor to *meen molee*. **BIGGEST SURPRISE** The gorgeous earthenware pots called *currychutties*. **BEFORE YOU GO** Visit Cochin's spice and vegetable markets so you have a frame of reference. **WHERE TO STAY** Grand Hotel (011-91-484-238-2061; from \$40) is comfy and convenient. Great postcards in the gift shop, too.

### AROMATIC BRAISED CHICKEN WITH FRIED ONIONS

Adapted from Nimmy Paul, Kerala, India

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 2½ HR (INCLUDES MARINATING)

*All sorts of English terms have made it into the Indian culinary lexicon. This is what's called a chicken "roast."*

- 2½ lb chicken thighs with bone, skin discarded
- 4 medium shallots, quartered
- 5 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced peeled ginger
- 2 sprigs fresh curry leaves (see Shopping List, page 206), leaves removed from stems
- 1 teaspoon cayenne
- ¼ teaspoon black peppercorns
- 10 whole cloves
- 1 (1-inch) piece cinnamon stick
- 1 teaspoon distilled white vinegar
- ½ cup water

About 2 cups vegetable oil

- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
- 3 teaspoons all-purpose flour, divided

►Toss all ingredients except water, oil, onion, and flour with 1 teaspoon salt in a wide heavy medium pot. Marinate chicken, covered and chilled, 1 hour. ►Add water and bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, until chicken is tender, 40 minutes to 1 hour. ►Meanwhile, heat 1½ inches oil in a small heavy saucepan over medium heat until hot but not smoking. ►Toss onion with 1 teaspoon flour, then fry in 2 batches, stirring frequently (do not let burn), until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes per batch. Transfer with a slotted spoon to paper towels. Reserve 3 tablespoons oil. ►Remove chicken from cooking liquid, reserving liquid, and gently pat dry. ►Heat reserved oil in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium-high heat until it shimmers, then brown chicken all over, about 6 minutes total. Transfer to a platter. ►Add remaining 2 teaspoons flour to fat in skillet and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add chicken-cooking liquid (with aromatics and spices) and simmer, stirring, until slightly thickened, about 2 minutes. Season with salt and pour over chicken. Top with fried onions.

FROM LEFT: JOHANNA WEBER; COURTESY OF ANNA TASCA LANZA OPPOSITE: ROMULO YANES FOOD STYLING: RUTH COUSINEAU PROP STYLING: HALEY THURSHWELL

