



EAT OUT

YOUR GUIDE TO THE BEST DINING OPTIONS

NATIONAL DAY 2012 CELEBRATION

Taste of things to come

• Youngsters strive to take Emirati fare mainstream

By YUSRA FARZAN, STAFF REPORTER

Craving Thai, Japanese or Lebanese fare — there are countless places to choose from. But for an expatriate or tourist yearning to try Emirati dishes one has to seek out a traditional kitchen and order their machboos and biryani in bulk. But a new army of young Emiratis is out to make their food more accessible and put their national cuisine on the map, despite a lack of support from society for the role of a chef.

"I faced lots of problems when I started Klayya, especially from the local community," said Asma Al Falasi, who runs the delightful Klayya Bakery and Sweets.

"There are many who are very appreciative of the work that, I do including my family. But some people come in and look at me in pity. Some people have told me it is hard for me to get married now."

Ali Edbowa, chef at Mezlai, an Emirati restaurant at Emirates Palace, points to a stigma that limits Emiratis from venturing into the culinary world. "During a trip abroad, I asked my mother to give me some recipes and the first time I cooked I was good at it and later I left a job in the army to become a chef. My mother and father were very happy, but some of my friends stopped talking to me for a year — but now they are happy too. I am very, very happy in the kitchen. You need that passion. In our culture, people see it better for a man to work in the army or police. They think cooking is for women."



Clockwise: Regag, khameer, chebab, muhala and falazi.



Aseedah.



Ryooq Al Jumma.



Saeed Al Falasi, Asma's brother and co-founder of Klayya Bakery and Sweets.

Barzh.ae

For those in the dark about Emirati cuisine, barzh.ae is a good place to start. Run by Fatima Al Houry, Abdul Aziz Al Jazeri, Mohammad Al Hawr and Noora Al Qasim, this website aims to take Emirati cuisine mainstream.

The four worked at a government office together. "We wanted to do some sort of business together and since we are all foodies and proud of Emirati culture this was the perfect initiative. We want to put Emirati food on the map, just as there's Indian and Japanese cuisine. Ours is unheard of," Fatima tells us. Visitors can find a list of the ambassadors of the cuisine, the ladies who run popular kitchens around the country, along with drool-worthy pictures and a short description of dishes. Launched in October, the quartet hopes to include all restaurants serving their beloved home cuisine over the next months. They also want to open a café next year.

Klayya Bakery and Sweets

As I sat and waited for my host, taking in the old school Arab prints juxtaposed with eclectic modern furniture, the waitress brought me a joyful cup of haleeb kastar, custard milk topped with red seeds.

"Whenever I travelled abroad, I always try to hunt down places that serve the authentic food and drink of the country," said Asma Al Falasi, the lady behind Klayya.

"And shame on us, whenever people come here we do not have that. I decided against opening a restaurant because I wanted to create a relaxed atmosphere, like an afternoon spent at a small local house."

Her specialities are Emirati breakfasts infused with local flavour — think dates and eggs, served with bread and karak.

Karak, the tea that people queue up to drink at the small cafeterias around town, comes in three varieties: original, Klayya — with a little cookie — and Shindagha, a spicy version.

Six different local breads are on offer too, from the sesame seed-dotted khameer to the slightly sweet muhala. I succumbed to a regag with egg and cheese. Served like a crepe, it is crispier than the French pancake. Asma, an avid reader, also has a shelf of popular local books including Qais Sedki's Arabic manga comics.

■ **Klayya Bakery and Sweets: Al Barsha Mall, Tel: 04-3255335**



Chocolates stuffed with aseeda.

Gourmandise Sweets and Cakes

In a little corner of Al Wasl Road, batheeth, traditionally a date crumble, is made with Oreos, marshmallows and peanut butter and is served with a toffee sauce and a closer-to-home sesame dip. Little chocolates are stuffed with custard-like aseeda, while khabeesa, a date and flour mix with rose water and cardamom, is served in shot glasses.

Mother-daughter duo Sahar and Mona Abu Aisha and their partner Abdullah Ahmad Al Marouri have started a culinary revolution, blending traditional and Western flavours and revamping how sweets have usually been served in large trays with a sleeker "sweets in a cup" concept.

While they have received acclaim for their innovation, the ride hasn't been an easy one. "We sell our batheeth boxes for Dh135. Once a lady came in and gave me Dh250 for them. When I gave her her change, she was shocked as she had been buying them for Dh250. Later we found a lady who had been buying our product in bulk, freezing it and selling them for a higher price," Mona said. "This compromised the high quality."

■ **Gourmandise Sweets and Cakes Al Wasl Road, Tel: 04-3455455**

Wild Peeta

"Our country is young and we do not have the infrastructure to ensure local produce and with the economy driven by imports, international brands have monopolised the food industry. This has made it difficult for the minority local population to make inroads, hence most choose to work in government departments," says Mohammad Parham Al Awadi, sitting alongside his brother Peyman echoing his views.

The brothers run Wild Peeta, the gourmet shawarma haunt. "When Emiratis, both young and old, come and see us working in the restaurant, they are filled with pride. Many people have told us that this is the only place you can see Emiratis and expats interacting."

An ode to their favourite local stew, the khaleeji saloona shawarma is their bestseller. The stew's ingredients are mixed with baharaat, a spice mix, to create a sauce which is the base of the shawarma.

"We asked our family and friends where we could find baharaat and they directed us to the old spice souq in Deira to a third-generation spice trader who grinds spices for Emirati families and uses only the best products."

■ **Wild Peeta, Dubai World Trade Centre Plaza, 055-8957672**



Left: Payman and Mohammad Parham Al Awadi.



Khaleeji saloona shawarma, Wild Peeta's bestseller.

Al Fanar Restaurant

On the Monday afternoon we visited Al Fanar at Festival City, many Emiratis were digging into the saloona laham badaweyah, a mutton stew eaten with rice, and the aysh mohamar ma samak magli, fried fish served with sweetened date rice.

"It was mainly Emiratis that came to our restaurant, but now we are seeing many expatriates coming in, especially in the evening. And once they try our food they always come back," the restaurant's owner Hashim Al Marzouqi told *tabloid!*

"We are proud that we are the first authentic Emirati restaurant — the others have hummus and moutabel on the first page of their menus and even though we enjoy it, this is not our cuisine." Al Fanar has expanded to Abu Dhabi, with a branch opening at the Ritz Carlton compound in March next year.

■ **Al Fanar Restaurant: Dubai Festival City, Tel: 04-2329966**



Hoobol (fish eggs like caviar, deep fried.)



Saloona laham dadaweyan.



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APPETISERS: UAE DINING NEWS

UAE'S TOP BAKERS AT BAKEFESTDXB

Slabs of delectable brownies, creamy cheesecakes, moist cupcakes, whimsical cakes and chewy cookies — that's what the founder of BakeFestDXB, Nicholas Rego has promised us at this year's edition on November 30 at Wild Peeta.

"BakeFestDXB started accidentally. A few of us were bantering on Twitter about how we should organise such an event and then the Wild Peeta guys were like let's make this happen," Rego said. "After spreading the word through social media channels, 12 bakers crowded at Wild Peeta's previous Healthcare City branch. We were literally in a corridor."

"The first edition was a success and Mohammad [Parham Al Awadi] of Wild Peeta was all for keeping this community baking initiative going. Through BakeFestDXB we encourage bakers who have no funding or resources to come and exhibit their wares. We don't charge them for table space. They can charge for their goodies and they get to keep the profits. Since the event is held annually, we build up enthusiasm for it and then bakers send in their details. This year we had 29 really talented bakers sign up but we can only pick 15 because of space constraints."

"For me the biggest success story of BakeFestDXB is Layal Takieddine who runs Loul's Sweet Treats which is a fledging success." BakeFestDxb takes place at Wild Peeta (Dubai World Trade Centre) from 1pm. Entry is free.

NEW OPENINGS

Japengo has finally opened its renovated Mall of the Emirates location with an updated menu, a sushi bar and open kitchen. Over at Dubai Marina Mall, Burj Al Hamam has opened another location in Dubai, with one more due next year at the Mall of the Emirates. The Lebanese restaurant was founded in 1958 and is still run by the founder Fayez Elias Khoury's sons. Both chains are operated by BinHendi Enterprises. More Lebanese cuisine comes in the form of Man2ooshe, which has opened its fourth outlet on Shaikh Zayed Road.

FIRST CHEF AT GOURMET ABU DHABI NAMED

Japanese chef Shinichiro Takagi is the first chef to be announced for the fifth Gourmet Abu Dhabi in 2013. The capital's annual food festival will take place over 16 days at over 20 restaurants next February. Takagi will be preparing kaiseki cuisine during a special guest spot at Teatro at the Park Rotana, from February 6-9.

By Yusra Farzan, Staff Reporter

RESTAURANT PROMOTIONS

GO ONLINE

For more dining options and deals, go to gulfnews.com/tabloid

THE PALACE DOWNTOWN DUBAI

Thiptara: Celebrate Loy Krathong Festival today with a four-course menu from 7-11.30pm at Dh275 per person. Call 04-4287806

GRAND HYATT DUBAI

The Market Café: A taste of Argentine flavours from December 4-9 at Dh195 per person including soft beverages. Call 04-3172222

THE ADDRESS MONTGOMERIE DUBAI

Nineteen: Saturday Roast: selection of meats, accompanied by roast potatoes, seasonal vegetables and starter and dessert buffet at Dh235 including soft drinks and Dh325 including selected house beverages. Call 04-3905600

THE ADDRESS DUBAI MALL

Ember Grill & Lounge: Churrasco nights every Friday. From 7-1pm at Dh195 including soft drinks or Dh265 including unlimited selected beverages. Call 04-8883444

TAJ PALACE DUBAI

Sakura: Asian night buffet every Friday from 7-11pm at Dh99 per person, children below six years dine free and those between six and 12 years get 50 per cent discount. Call 04-2232222

PARK HYATT DUBAI

Thai Kitchen: Hot pot every Saturday and Sunday priced at Dh150 per person. Call 04-3172222

OASIS BEACH TOWER

Thyme: Friday Brunch, with kids activities and free pool access, at Dh140 per person. Call 04-3154200

HOLIDAY INN, AL BARSHA

Xennya Terrace: Bbq dinner with salad bar from 6.30-10pm, every Friday. Dh95 per person. Call 04-3234333

HATTA FORT HOTEL

Jeema: Saturday gourmet night: five-course gourmet dinner for Dh395 per person and stay in the chalet-style rooms for free. Call 04-8145133

AL MUROOJ ROTANA DUBAI

Double Decker: Friday brunch offering roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, salad and desserts with unlimited select beverages for Dh189. Call 04-3211111

National Day special

JUST FALAFEL

50 per cent discount on Emirati meals at any of their 18 outlets across the UAE.

OPTIONS, DUBAI WORLD TRADE CENTRE

Special menu available from tomorrow until December 14. Call 04-3293293

JUMEIRAH ZABEEL SARAY

Imperium: Taste of Arabia Emirati cuisine lunch from 12.30-4pm; dinner from 6.30-11pm at Dh225 per person, 50 per cent discount for children below 12 years. Call 04-4530444

EMIRATI FOOD GLOSSARY

The Barzh.ae team share their top ten Emirati foods and drinks

1. KAHWA

Lightly roasted coffee beans, ground and brewed, with cardamom and occasionally saffron or cloves, added to the mix. Best served extremely hot in small portions. It is often served with dates or other sweets as guests enter. Kahwa is a drink you will find in every Emirati living room any time of day.

2. HALEEB

Heated milk cooked with either cardamom, saffron, zaatar, cumin or a combination thereof.

We at barzh love a hot cup of zaatar haleeb on a cold winter's night in the desert!

3. CHAMI

Made by skimming the cream off fresh laban, it is a delicacy eaten with tamer (ripe dates) most often in the winter. The flavour combination of the chami and tamer makes for a great, tasty snack as well as a delicious appetiser.

4. CHIBAB

The closest international comparison of chibab bread is probably

pancakes. For the best chibab experience, have it hot off the pan, with some honey or cheese.

5. KHMEER

Khmeera is the Arabic word for yeast. And due to it being one of this bread's main components, it was named after it. Khmeer bread is best enjoyed with cheese and honey.

6. MATHROOBA

Mathrooba is a dish mainly made of rice/wheat/oats cooked with meat and a selection of Emirati spices. A

delicious, flavourful main course. The barzh team's favourite!

7. MALIH

Malih, salted dried fish is a delicacy in Emirati cuisine. It can be made of many types of fish that are sliced and heavily salted.

8. BALALEET

Vermicelli pasta cooked with sugar and saffron and cardamom powder, giving it a unique sweet taste. It is usually served with a savoury omelette on top and a bit of cheddar cheese.

9. LGAIMAT

Little crispy balls or dumplings of batter deep fried. Sweet dibs (date concentrate syrup) is poured on lgaimat to give a shiny golden finish. A must-have after Ramadan iftar, with gahwa.

10. MHALA ZAYED

This sweet bread is named after our late beloved leader Shaikh Zayed [Bin Sultan Al Nahyan.] It's a variation of the traditional mhala with saffron added to the mix.