

الجزيرة

# Salt & Sand

Where Emirati recipes  
meet the stories of the land

Food is more than sustenance; it is a living expression of our identity, the heart of our heritage, a reflection of our values, and a bridge between generations. Emirati cuisine tells the story of our land, our people, and the timeless traditions that have shaped who we are. From the aromatic machboos that grace our family gatherings, to the delicate luqaimat shared during celebrations, each dish embodies the generosity of our spirit, the artistry of our ancestors and the essence of the enduring Emirati hospitality.

As a modern city built on deep cultural roots, Dubai is a global culinary capital that is home to diverse offerings, from MICHELIN-starred restaurants and establishments that have made their mark in the World's 50 Best list, to hidden eateries that can be found on an Old Dubai cultural food tour, one of Lonely Planet's top global experiences for 2026. Amid this diversity and creativity, it is our Emirati cuisine that holds pride of place, remaining as the original heartbeat of this city's culinary story. It is a reminder that the soul of this city lives in its kitchens, in the warmth of its people, and in the shared connections around the table.

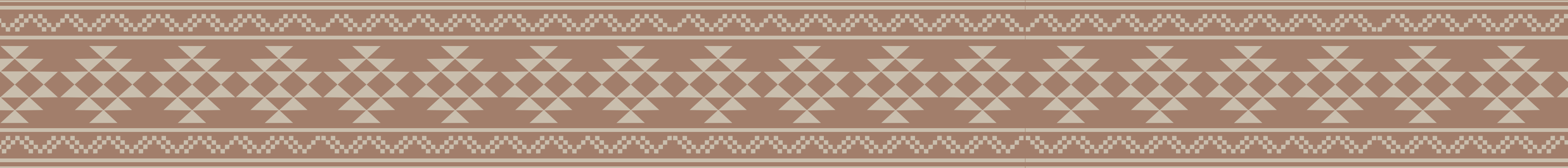
As we welcome the world to Dubai, we recognise our responsibility and opportunity to preserve, share, and elevate our culinary legacy so every resident and visitor experiences the true taste of our culture. Our cuisine reflects the soul of the Emirates: resourceful, generous, and rooted in community. It speaks of pearl divers breaking their fast with harees, of Bedouin families sharing coffee under desert skies, and coastal communities perfecting the day's fresh catch. These stories are the threads that form our culinary tapestry, inspiring chefs, storytellers, and travellers alike.

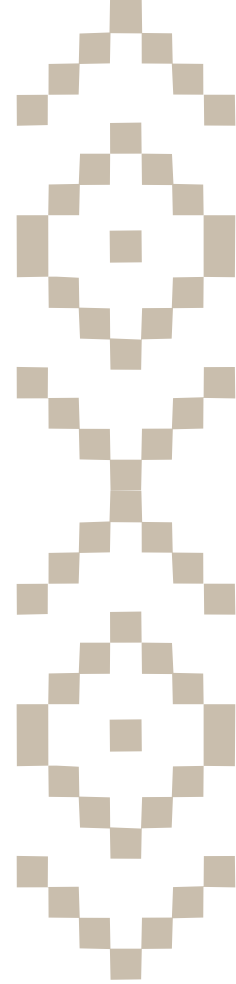
Salt & Sand is both an invitation and a resource for chefs, hoteliers, restaurateurs, and culinary professionals, a guide to understanding and celebrating Emirati flavours and traditions, enabling them to strengthen their role as cultural ambassadors. It champions cultural authenticity while promoting sustainable growth across tourism and hospitality, aligning with the goal of the Dubai Economic Agenda, D33, to further consolidate Dubai's position as a leading global destination for business and leisure.

By embracing Emirati cuisine and sharing its stories, we safeguard our cultural identity while shaping Dubai's future as a culinary pioneer. Together, we ensure every guest leaves with not only memories of remarkable dishes, but also a deeper appreciation of the Emirati spirit that infuses every meal, and an understanding of the warmth and hospitality that define our people and our city.

Welcome to Salt & Sand, a celebration of taste, tradition, and togetherness.

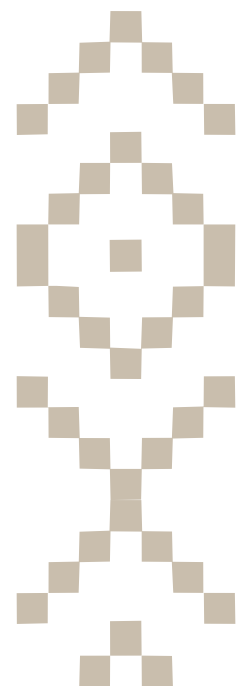
**Ahmed Al Khaja**  
CEO of the Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment,  
part of the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism





# A Guidebook of Emirati Cuisine

Salt & Sand explores Emirati cuisine through the recipes that define it and the stories that shaped them. Moving between table and land, food and culture unfold as one continuous narrative.

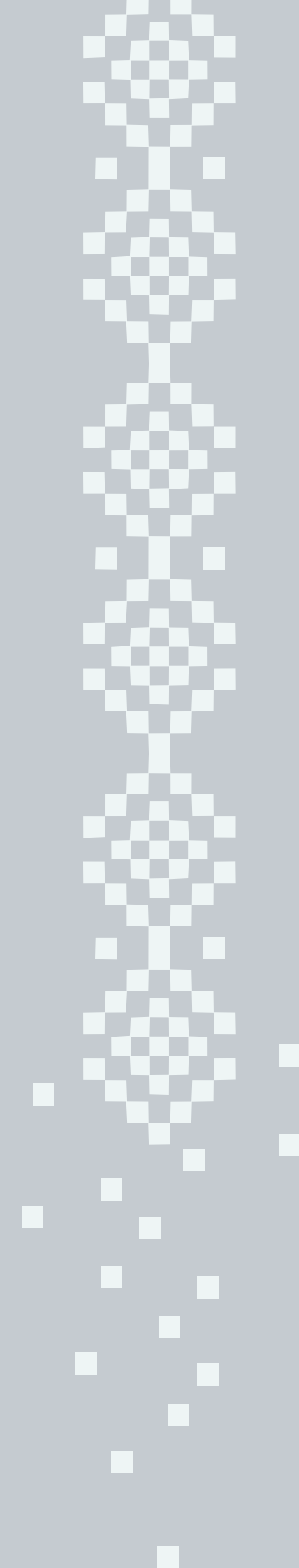


# Salt

**The Table.**

The flavour, the preservation, the craft, and the culinary identity of the UAE.

It represents everything tangible: ingredients, recipes, methods, and the act of making food.





# Meats

# غوزي خروف

## Lamb Ghouzi

Lamb Ghouzi is a traditional Emirati dish often prepared for gatherings, where rice is cooked in spiced stock and served with tender lamb on top. The rice absorbs the flavour as it cooks, while the lamb is simmered until soft enough to pull apart. It's assembled on a large platter and finished with saffron, nuts, and raisins.

### Ingredients

#### Meat

1 whole lamb shoulder or leg  
(or large lamb pieces)  
2 onions, quartered  
4 garlic cloves  
2 dried black loomi  
4 cardamom pods  
1 cinnamon stick  
1 **tsp** Bezar spices  
Salt to taste

#### Rice

4 **cups** basmati rice, soaked  
3 **tbsp** ghee  
1 onion, finely sliced  
1 **tsp** ground cardamom  
1 **tsp** ground cinnamon  
½ **tsp** ground black pepper  
A **pinch** of saffron, soaked in warm water  
Salt to taste  
Garnish (optional)  
Fried almonds, cashews or pine nuts  
Raisins

### Method

#### 1. Cook the lamb

Place the lamb in a large pot with onions, garlic, loomi, cardamom, cinnamon, and salt. Cover with water and simmer gently until the meat is tender and aromatic. Remove the lamb and reserve the stock.

#### 2. Prepare the rice

In a large pot, melt the ghee and sauté the sliced onion until soft and lightly golden. Add ground spices and stir until fragrant. Add the soaked rice, followed by measured lamb stock. Season lightly and cook until the rice is fluffy and infused with spice.

#### 3. Assemble

Arrange the rice on a large serving platter. Place the lamb on top and drizzle with saffron water. Finish with nuts and raisins if using.

#### To serve

Serve hot, family-style. The rice should be fragrant and light, the lamb tender and deeply seasoned, designed to be shared.



# ثرید

## Tharid

Tharid is a meat and vegetable stew served over flatbread. The stew is poured directly over the bread so it softens and absorbs the broth, creating a layered texture. It's typically served in one dish, with the bread forming the base and the meat and vegetables on top.



### Ingredients

**500g** mutton chunks with some bones  
**1 tsp** ghee  
**1** large onion thinly sliced  
**1** clove garlic  
**1** large tomato chopped  
**2 tbsp** tomato paste heaped  
**2 tsp** Bezar spice blend  
**1/4 tsp** turmeric powder  
**1/4 tsp** cumin powder  
**1/4 tsp** cinnamon powder

**1/4 tsp** cardamom powder  
**1 tsp** black pepper more for spiciness  
 Salt to taste  
**1** big loomi crushed  
**150g** pumpkin chunks  
**1** large carrot peeled and cut into rounds  
**2** koosa peeled and cut into rounds  
**1** potato peeled and cut into chunks  
 Coriander leaves for garnish  
 Regag bread, to serve

### Method

In a pressure cooker, add the ghee. Add the garlic and sizzle. Add in the onions and sauté on high flame till they turn golden brown and smells fried. Add the tomato and tomato paste and cook just till mashed. Add in all the spice powders and the loomi and give a good mix. Add the washed and drained mutton, add in the salt. Add a cup of water and close the lid. Pressure cook for 3-5 whistles, till the mutton is almost done. Allow the pressure to go by itself. Open the lid, add in the vegetable chunks. Adjust the seasoning. Close and cook for one whistle. Take off and allow the pressure to go. By this time, the mutton should fall off its bone and the vegetables should be cooked but still in shape. Open the lid, and check the seasoning. Add the coriander leaves. Add more hot water if needed. To serve, layer the dish with regag or saj bread. Pour the stew over the bread for it to soak. Top with the mutton chunks and vegetables.



# مضرووبة

## Mathrooba

Mathrooba is made by cooking grains and meat together until they break down into a thick, smooth mixture. Ghee is added during cooking, giving the dish richness and structure. The final texture is soft and cohesive, closer to a porridge than a rice dish.



### Ingredients

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 red onions (finely chopped)
- 1 kg chicken legs (about 4 large ones), skin on, bone in
- 6 garlic cloves (finely grated)
- 40g fresh ginger (peeled and finely grated)
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tsp cumin seeds (finely ground using a pestle and mortar)
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds (finely ground using a pestle and mortar)
- 1 tsp Emirati spice powder
- ½ tsp chilli flakes
- ¾ tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 dried lime (black or regular), pierced a couple of times with a sharp knife
- 600g plum tomatoes roughly grated
- 3 tbsp tomato puree (paste)

- 40g fresh coriander (roughly chopped, plus an extra 1 tbsp, to serve)
- 20g dill fronds (roughly chopped, plus an extra 1 tbsp, to serve)
- 200g basmati rice (washed until the water runs clear, then drained)
- 3 tbsp lemon juice
- Fine sea salt and black pepper

### For the topping

- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 3 onions (halved and thinly sliced)
- 3 mild fresh chillies (a mixture of green and red, left whole)
- 40g unsalted butter

### Method

Heat the oil in a large, lidded, deep-sided, heavy-based pan over a medium-high heat. Add the red onions and cook for 3 minutes, stirring occasionally, just to soften. Add the chicken legs and cook for 6 minutes, turning on both sides. Stir in the garlic, ginger, spices and dried lime and cook for 2 minutes, until fragrant. Add the tomatoes, tomato purée and herbs and cook for 2 minutes more. Pour in 1 litre of water, then stir in the rice, 2 teaspoons of salt and a generous grind of pepper. Bring to a simmer, cover, turn down the heat to its lowest setting and leave to cook for 80 minutes, stirring every 20 minutes or so to prevent burning.



# صالونة دجاج

## Chicken Saloona

Chicken Saloona is a tomato-based stew made with chicken, vegetables, and spices. Everything is cooked together until the broth thickens slightly and the ingredients soften. It's usually served with rice or flatbread.

### Ingredients

**1 kg** chicken cut into medium pieces

**3 tbsp** oil

**2** onions thinly sliced

**1 tbsp** heaped Bezar

Salt to taste

**4 cloves** garlic pounded

**¾ tsp** turmeric powder

**¼ tsp** cinnamon powder

**¼ tsp** cardamom powder

**2** whole loomi dried lime

**1 tsp** black pepper powder

**2** tomatoes chopped

**1** large carrot peeled and chopped

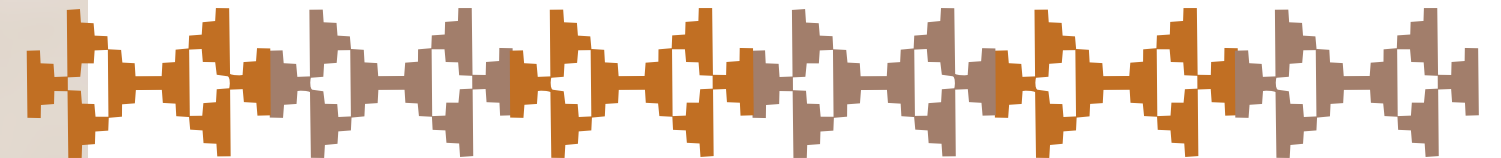
**1** large potato peeled and chopped

**1 tbsp** tomato paste

**1 tsp** lime juice

**1 tsp** paprika powder optional

**5 tbsp** coriander chopped



### Method

Heat oil in a saucepan. Add the chicken, onion, Bezar and salt and cook for five minutes. Turn the chicken occasionally. Add the other spices, garlic and loomi and cook for another five minutes. Add the remaining ingredients except the coriander, and sauté for a couple of minutes. Add in 2 cups of water, adjust salt. Cook on simmer till the chicken is done and the vegetables have become soft. Add in the coriander leaves and serve hot with plain rice and salad.

# هريس

## Harees

Harees is made by cooking wheat and meat together until both soften and combine into a smooth consistency. It is lightly seasoned and finished with ghee. The texture is thick and uniform, and it is served warm.

### Ingredients

**1 cup** harees (whole wheat berries)  
**1 kg** chicken pieces (bone-in or boneless)  
**1** medium onion, roughly chopped (optional)  
**1** cinnamon stick  
**1 tsp** black pepper, to taste  
**2-3 tsp** salt, or to taste  
 Water (approx. 4-5 cups of reserved stock/water)

### For Garnish:

Ghee (clarified butter)  
 or melted butter, fried onions,  
 and/or ground cinnamon

### Method

**Soak the Wheat:** Soak the wheat berries in water overnight at least 8 hours. Drain them well before use.

**Cook the Meat:** In a large pot, boil the chicken (with the optional onion and cinnamon stick) for 20-30 minutes until very tender.

**Prepare the Stock:** Remove the chicken and de-bone, shredding the meat into small pieces. Strain the reserved stock and set it aside.

**Combine Ingredients:** In a large pot, add the soaked wheat, shredded chicken, salt, and pepper. Pour reserved stock/water over the mixture to cover by about 2-3 inches.

**Simmer:** Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat to very low. Cover and simmer for approximately 1-2 hours (or up to 4 hours for an even creamier consistency), stirring occasionally to prevent the harees from sticking to the bottom of the pot.

**Mash:** Once the wheat is tender and the consistency is thick and porridge-like, use a hand blender or a traditional wooden masher to blend the mixture until smooth.

**Serve:** Transfer the harees to a serving dish. Melt ghee or butter in a small pan until it begins to brown and becomes aromatic, then pour it over the top of the harees.

**Garnish:** Fried onions or a sprinkle of ground cinnamon, and serve hot.



# مرقوقة

## Margooga

Margooga is a one-pot dish made with meat, vegetables, and dough. Pieces of dough are added during cooking, where they soften and absorb the broth, thickening the dish. It is served as a complete meal in a single pot.

### Ingredients

#### For the Dough:

**1 cup** whole wheat flour

**½ tsp** salt

**½ - ⅔ cup** water

#### For the Stew:

**1 tbsp** olive oil

**800g** skinless whole chicken, cut into 12 pieces

**2** medium onions, finely chopped

**1 tsp** ginger-garlic paste

**3** large tomatoes, chopped

**2 tbsp** tomato paste

**1 tbsp** Bezar

**1 tsp** chili flakes (optional)

Salt to taste

**3 cups** hot water, plus more as needed

Whole Spices: 2-inch cinnamon stick, 2 bay leaves,

2 dried black limes (loomi)

Vegetables: Carrots, potatoes, zucchini, or

eggplant pieces can be added

Fresh coriander leaves for garnish

### Method

**Prepare the Dough:** In a bowl, mix the flour and salt. Gradually add water and mix until a firm dough forms. Knead for a few minutes, then cover the dough and let it rest for 20 minutes. Divide the dough into four equal balls and keep them covered.

**Start the Stew.** Heat the oil in a large, deep pot over medium-high heat. Add the whole spices (cinnamon stick, bay leaves, loomi) and fry for a few seconds to release their aroma. Add the chopped onions and sauté until soft and translucent. Stir in the ginger-garlic paste and cook until the raw smell disappears.

**Cook the Chicken & Base.** Add the chopped tomatoes, tomato paste, Bezar, chili flakes, and salt. Mix well and cook until the tomatoes break down. Increase the heat and add the chicken pieces.

Cook, stirring occasionally, until all the chicken has turned white. Simmer. Add enough hot water to just cover the chicken. Bring the stew to a boil, then reduce the heat, cover, and simmer until the chicken is tender (about 30-40 minutes). If using hard vegetables like potatoes or carrots, add them during this stage. Add the Dough. Roll out one ball of dough very thinly. Tear it into rustic strips or pieces and drop them directly into the simmering stew. Repeat with the remaining dough balls. Stir gently to ensure all dough pieces are submerged and separated.

**Finish and Serve:** Continue to simmer uncovered for another 10-15 minutes, or until the dough is fully cooked and the broth has thickened slightly. Adjust seasoning if needed. Garnish generously with fresh coriander leaves and serve warm.

# شوربة هريس

## Harees Soup

Harees Soup is a thinner version of traditional harees. Wheat and meat are cooked and blended into a lighter consistency while keeping the same base flavour. It is served warm and can be adjusted in thickness.



### Ingredients

**1 cup** harees (whole wheat), soaked overnight  
**1 kg** chicken pieces  
**1** medium onion, roughly chopped  
**1** cinnamon stick  
**1 tsp** black pepper  
**1 tsp** salt (or as per taste)  
**1 cup** water  
**200g** tomatoes  
**20g** fresh coriander  
Ghee (clarified butter) or melted butter  
Fried onions, and/or ground cinnamon as desired.

### Method

Soak the wheat for at least 8 hours (preferably overnight). Heat it in the pot and ensure you do not leave it alone for more than 10 minutes without stirring. Using the bottom of your ladle, mash the wheat berries as they cook. If you prefer a creamier harees, use a food processor or an immersion blender to process the soup a bit after it has finished cooking. In a large pot, boil the chicken for 20-30 minutes until very tender. Shred the meat into small pieces. In a large pot, add the soaked wheat, shredded chicken, salt, and pepper. Add broth or water and stir till it thickens. Serve hot.



# عرسية Arseya

Arseya is made by cooking rice and chicken together, then mashing or blending them into a smooth, thick texture. It is finished with ghee and served hot. The consistency is soft and slightly elastic.

## Ingredients

1 kg chicken (whole)  
1L water  
2 cups short-grain rice, washed and drained  
1 large piece of cinnamon  
½ tsp cardamom powder  
1 tsp salt  
¼ tsp black pepper powder  
1 cup Arabic ghee

## Method

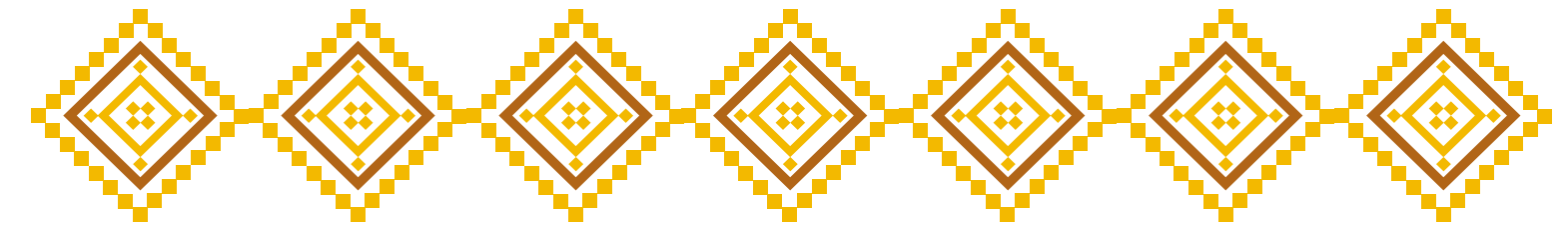
In a large pot, add the chicken, water, cinnamon bark, and salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer until the chicken is very well cooked. Debone the chicken and cut it into very fine pieces. Strain the reserved chicken broth back into the large pot. Add the washed rice, chopped chicken, salt, pepper, and cardamom powder. Stir well. Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and simmer for about 30 minutes.

Mash the mixture: Turn off the heat. Blend on high speed, or use a large, heavy spatula to mix the chicken and rice until smooth and cohesive. Serve with a generous amount of melted ghee.

# مجبوس

## Machboos

Machboos is a rice dish cooked in spiced broth with meat or chicken. The rice absorbs the stock and spices as it cooks, while dried lime adds a sharp note. The meat is served on top, and the dish is presented on a shared platter.



### Ingredients

**1 cup** basmati rice (washed & soaked)  
**500g** chicken or lamb pieces  
**1** large onion, finely sliced  
**1 tbsp** garlic paste  
**1 tbsp** ginger paste  
**2** tomatoes, chopped  
**1 tbsp** tomato paste

Fresh coriander (handful, chopped)  
**1** whole dried lemon (loomi), pierced  
**2-3 tbsp** oil  
**1-2 tsp** machboos spice mix  
 (cardamom, cinnamon, black pepper,  
 cloves, cumin, coriander, turmeric,  
 ginger, and dried lime (loomi))

### Method

Heat oil in a pot. Add sliced onion and cook until soft and golden. Add garlic and ginger paste; stir until fragrant. Add meat or chicken and brown on all sides. Add chopped tomato, tomato paste, coriander, and dried lemon. Stir. Pour in water to cover meat. Cook until the meat is tender. Season with machboos spice mix and salt. Add soaked rice and enough broth to just cover. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer until rice is cooked and fluffy. Serve hot with a side of salad or yoghurt.



# Fish

# سمك مشوي

## Samak Mashwi

Samak Mashwi is grilled fish marinated with garlic, spices, and lemon. It is cooked over direct heat until tender and slightly charred. It is usually served with rice.



### Ingredients

1 whole fish (sea bass, sea bream, or red snapper are ideal), or 4-6 fillets

2 **tbsp** olive oil

3 cloves garlic, minced or crushed

1-2 lemons (juice)

2 **tsp** ground cumin

1 **tsp** ground coriander

¼ **tsp** red pepper flakes (optional, for heat)

salt and pepper to taste

Garnish: Lemon slices, fresh coriander, or parsley

### Method

**Prepare the Fish:** Rinse the fish well and pat it completely dry with paper towels. For a whole fish, make 2-3 diagonal slits on both sides to allow the flavours to penetrate. Season the inside cavity (if using a whole fish) with salt and pepper and optionally some lemon slices or herbs.

**Make the Marinade:** In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, minced garlic, lemon juice, cumin, coriander, red pepper flakes, salt, and pepper. Mix well to form a paste or marinade. Brush or rub the marinade evenly over the entire surface of the fish (inside and out, or on both sides of the fillets). Allow it to marinate for at least 15-30 minutes.

**Grill the Fish:** On a grill/BBQ, place the fish in a grilling basket or directly on a preheated grill over medium-high heat. Cook for about 4-6 minutes per side, depending on the thickness, until the fish is opaque and the juices run clear.

**In the Oven:** Preheat the oven to 200°C (400°F). Place the fish on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Arrange some lemon slices on top and bake for 15-20 minutes, or until cooked through.

**Serve:** Carefully transfer the cooked fish to a serving platter. Garnish with fresh coriander or parsley and serve hot with extra grilled lemon wedges, which can be squeezed over the fish right before eating.

Samak Mashwi is served with white rice.



# مُغَر مَالِح

## Mogar Maleh

Mogar Maleh is made using preserved salted fish cooked with rice and spices. The fish is rinsed and prepared first to reduce its saltiness, then combined with the rice. The flavour remains deep but more balanced after cooking.



### Ingredients

- 2 pieces** of salted fish (maleh)
- 4 cups** of rice, boiled and drained
- 4** minced onions
- 2** minced tomatoes (optional)
- 1 tbsp** garlic with ginger, minced
- 3 tbsp** ghee (clarified butter)
- 1 tbsp** fresh coriander
- Spices:** ¼ tsp each of turmeric, cinnamon, black pepper, Arabic spices (Bezar), and cardamom.

### Method

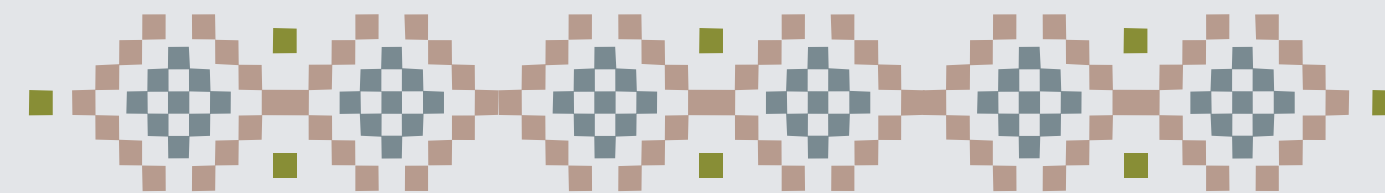
Rinse the salted fish thoroughly multiple times to remove excess salt. Boil the fish for about 30 minutes, then drain the water, and wash the fish well again to remove any remaining skin or spines. In a pot, melt the ghee. Fry the onions, garlic, and ginger until they become lightly brown. Add vegetables and spices: Add the tomatoes, coriander, and all the spices to the pot. Stir and cook for about 5 minutes to allow the flavours to combine. Gently place the prepared fish pieces into the pot and turn them over for about 2 minutes, ensuring they are coated in the spice mixture. Add the partially cooked rice to the mixture. Stir gently to combine all ingredients. Let the dish simmer over low heat for approximately 30 minutes, allowing the rice to absorb all the rich flavours.



# تحتة مالح

## Tahta Maleh

Tahta Maleh is a traditional dish of salted fish mixed with rice and spices, where the fish is cleaned, cooked, and folded into the rice as a single combined dish. Mogar Maleh uses smaller cuts with stronger salting and a deeper cured flavour, while Tahta Maleh uses larger cuts for a meatier texture and a milder salt balance.

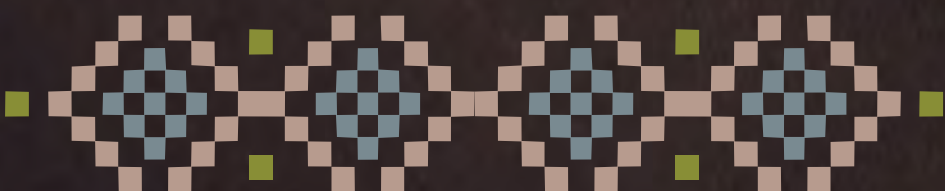


### Ingredients

**2 pieces** salted fish (Maleh)  
**4 cups** rice, boiled and drained  
**4** onions, finely minced  
**2** tomatoes, minced  
**1 tbsp** garlic and ginger paste  
**¼ tsp** each of turmeric, cinnamon, black pepper, Arabic spices (Bezar), and cardamom.  
**3 tbsp** ghee

### Method

Rinse the fish several times to remove excess salt. Boil for 30 minutes, drain, then clean thoroughly, removing skin, bones, and impurities. Melt ghee in a pot. Sauté onions, garlic, and ginger until lightly golden. Add tomatoes and spices, stirring gently for five minutes. Add the fish, turning carefully, and cook for two minutes. Fold in the rice, reduce heat, and let the dish simmer gently for 30 minutes.



# جشيد

## Jasheed

Jasheed is made from finely shredded fish, traditionally shark, cooked with spices and aromatics. The mixture is sautéed until dry and slightly granular, then served over rice with ghee.



### Ingredients

- 2 kg** shark fish
- ½ cup** cooking oil
- 4** small onions, sliced
- 1 tbsp** garlic cloves, chopped
- 5 tsp** fresh green chilli, chopped
- 2** bay leaves
- 3 tbsp** spice mix (to make at home toast whole spices such as peppercorn, cumin, coriander, cloves, cardamom, chilli, cinnamon, nutmeg and turmeric in a dry pan until fragrant)

- 3 pieces** dried lemon
- 100g** ghee
- 2 tbsp** ginger, chopped
- 1 tbsp** ground turmeric
- Lemon juice, to taste
- Salt, to taste
- 50g** fresh coriander (garnish)

### Method

Place the fish in a pot filled with water and boil for a few minutes. Separate the meat from the bones. Tie the meat in a cloth, strain and squeeze to release as much moisture as you can. Blend the meat until you get a powder-like consistency. In a pan, add oil and sauté the onion until golden, then add garlic and chilli and sauté for a few more minutes. Add the fish and pan-fry for 2-3 minutes, then add the spice mix and all the other ingredients except coriander. Mix well and fry until the fish is evenly cooked on both sides. Serve on top of plain white rice and garnish with some ghee or clarified butter and fresh coriander.

**Tip:** Emperor fish can be substituted for shark meat.



# صالونة سمك

## Fish Salounah

Fish Saloona is a light stew made with fish, vegetables, and spices in a tomato-based broth. The fish is added towards the end to keep it tender. It is served with rice.

### Ingredients

**1** whole firm white fish  
(hamour, kingfish, or grouper),  
cleaned and cut into pieces  
**2 tbsp** oil  
**1** onion, finely chopped  
**3** garlic cloves, minced  
**2** tomatoes, finely chopped  
**1 tbsp** tomato paste

**1** green chilli, slit (optional)  
**1 tsp** turmeric  
**1 tsp** ground coriander  
**½ tsp** ground cumin  
**½ tsp** black pepper  
**2–3** cups water or light fish stock  
Fresh coriander leaves  
Salt to taste

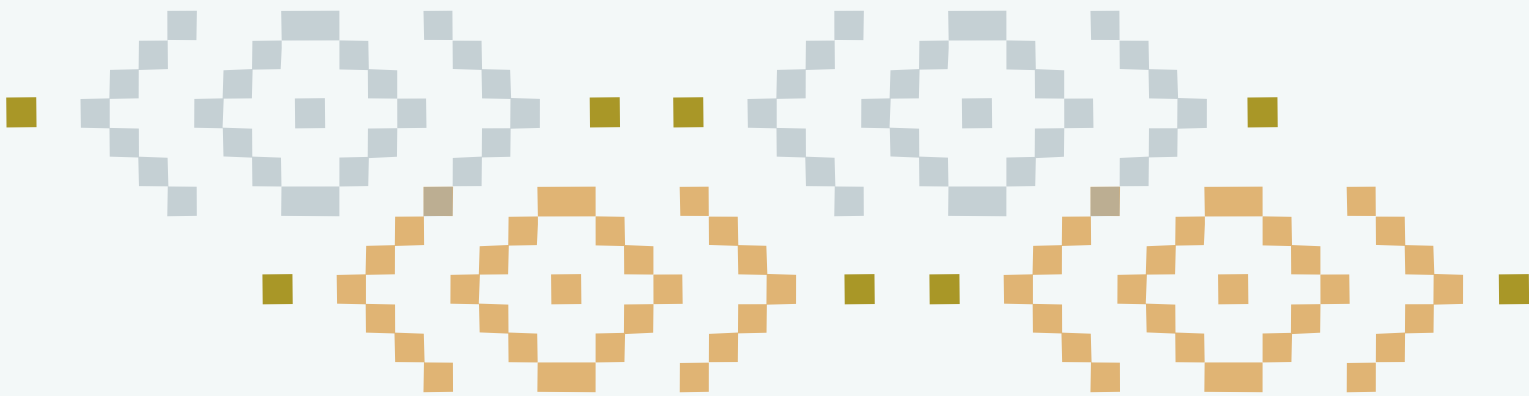
### Method

Heat oil in a pot over medium heat. Add onion and cook until soft and translucent. Stir in garlic and green chilli, cooking gently until fragrant. Add tomatoes and tomato paste. Cook until the mixture deepens in colour and becomes rich. Sprinkle in turmeric, coriander, cumin, black pepper, and salt. Stir well to release the spices. Pour in water or stock and bring to a gentle simmer. Add the fish pieces carefully. Cover and cook until the fish is just tender and the broth is well infused. Finish with fresh coriander.

Serve hot with plain rice. The broth should be light yet deeply spiced, carrying the freshness of the sea and the warmth of slow-cooked aromatics.

# محمر Muhammar

Muhammar is a sweet rice dish made with date molasses, ghee, and spices. The rice absorbs the syrup as it cooks, giving it colour and flavour. It is often served alongside savoury dishes.



**Ingredients**

- 1kg rice
- 1 cup date syrup
- 1 cup water
- 3 cardamom pods
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 3 cloves
- ½ cup ghee

**Method**

In a pot, add the water, date syrup, cardamom, cinnamon sticks and cloves. Add the basmati rice and stir gently until it comes to a boil. Add the ghee, cover, and simmer on low heat for 14 minutes.

Serve warm alongside fish, allowing the sweetness of the rice to contrast beautifully with the savoury, delicate flavours of the sea.





# Breads



رقاق

## Regag

Regag is a thin flatbread made from a runny batter spread onto a hot surface. It cooks quickly, forming a crisp edge while remaining soft enough to fold. It can be served plain or filled with ingredients such as egg or cheese.



### Regag Bread Ingredients

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup water (adjust as needed for a thin, runny batter)
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp oil or melted butter (optional, for softness)

### Method

- Prepare the batter:** In a mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, and water until the mixture is smooth and has a consistency similar to crepe batter.
- Heat the pan:** Place a non-stick skillet or a flat griddle (called a tawa) over medium-high heat. Lightly grease it with a few drops of oil.
- Cook the bread:** Pour a small ladle of batter onto the hot pan. Immediately use the back of the ladle or a folded cloth. to quickly spread the batter into a very thin, even circle. This action is key to achieving the characteristic thinness of Regag.
- Add fillings (optional):** If you desire a filling (like a whisked egg and cheese, Oman chips), spread it over the cooking bread before it fully sets.
- Finish cooking:** Cook for 1-2 minutes until the bread turns golden brown and gets crispy on the edges. Flip it over and cook the other side for about 30 seconds.

# جباب Chebab

Chebab is a fermented pancake made with a batter flavoured with cardamom and saffron. The batter is rested before cooking, creating a soft texture with lightly crisp edges. It is usually served warm with honey or cheese.

## Ingredients

**1 cup** all purpose flour  
**½ cup** milk  
**1 egg**  
**2 tbsp** sugar  
**¼ tsp** salt  
**A pinch** cardamom powder  
**A pinch** saffron  
**1 tsp** yeast  
**Scant 1/2 tsp** baking powder  
**100 ml** water (depending on consistency)  
**1-2 tbsp** vegetable oil

## Method

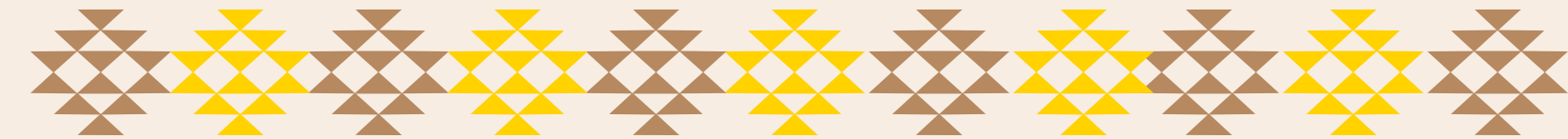
In a bowl, pour the milk, egg, sugar, salt, yeast, baking powder, cardamom powder, saffron, and water. Gradually add in the flour little at a time and combine everything using a whisk. Cover with a cling wrap and set aside for around 30 minutes to ferment. On a non-stick pan, pour ladles of batter to form pancakes and wait for holes to form on the top and when batter looks slightly done, flip and cook the other side.

Serve them warm with honey and cream cheese.



# خمير Khameer

Khameer is a soft bread with a slight sweetness, flavoured with dates, saffron, and cardamom. The dough is enriched, resulting in a tender texture once baked. It is commonly served with honey or cheese.



## Ingredients

**2 cups** of all purpose flour  
**½ tsp** instant yeast  
**3 tbsp** sugar  
**½ tsp** salt  
**½ tbsp** baking powder  
**¾ cup** warm milk  
**2 tbsp** olive oil  
**½ tsp** cardamom powder  
**¼ tsp** saffron  
**2 tsp** sesame seeds

## Method

Preheat the oven to 200°C (400°F). Take warm milk in a bowl and add the saffron thread to it. Mix well and keep it aside. In a large mixing bowl, add your flour, yeast, sugar, salt, and gradually pour in the warm saffron milk mixture. Bring everything together using your hands until a rough dough forms. Once smooth and elastic, divide the dough into 4 equal pieces and shape them into a ball. Let the balls rest (covered) until the oven is preheating. Using a little flour to dust, roll each piece of dough ball into a ¼-inch thick circle. Keep the rolled flatbread covered with a cloth to avoid drying out.

Place it on a baking tray. Brush the top of the dough with the saffron milk and sprinkle the sesame seeds on the surface. Let it bake for about 3 minutes. Check to see if the Khameer is evenly browned on all sides. Serve the Emirati Khameer at room temperature or slightly warmed with cheese or honey.





# Desserts

# بلاليط Balaleet

Balaleet is a traditional Emirati breakfast dish made with sweet vermicelli and eggs. The vermicelli is cooked with sugar, saffron, and cardamom, then combined with eggs to create a balance of sweet and savoury. It is served warm.

## Ingredients

**200–250g** vermicelli  
**2 tbsp** ghee or butter  
**½ cup** sugar  
**1 tsp** ground cardamom  
**A pinch** of saffron (soaked in warm water)  
**2 tbsp** rose water or orange blossom water  
**4** eggs  
**A pinch** of turmeric or black pepper (optional)  
Salt to taste

## Method

### Cook the sweet noodles

Boil vermicelli until just tender. Drain. In a pan, melt ghee, add vermicelli, sugar, cardamom, saffron (with water), and rose/orange blossom water. Toss gently until glossy, fragrant, and slightly caramelised. Set aside.

### Make the eggs

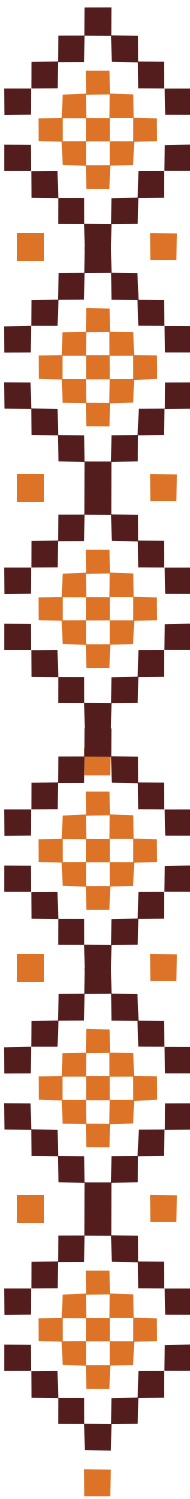
Beat eggs with salt (and turmeric/pepper if using). In a non-stick pan, cook into a thin omelette or soft scrambled layer. Keep it delicate.

### Assemble

Place the sweet vermicelli on a plate. Lay the egg omelette neatly on top (or underneath).

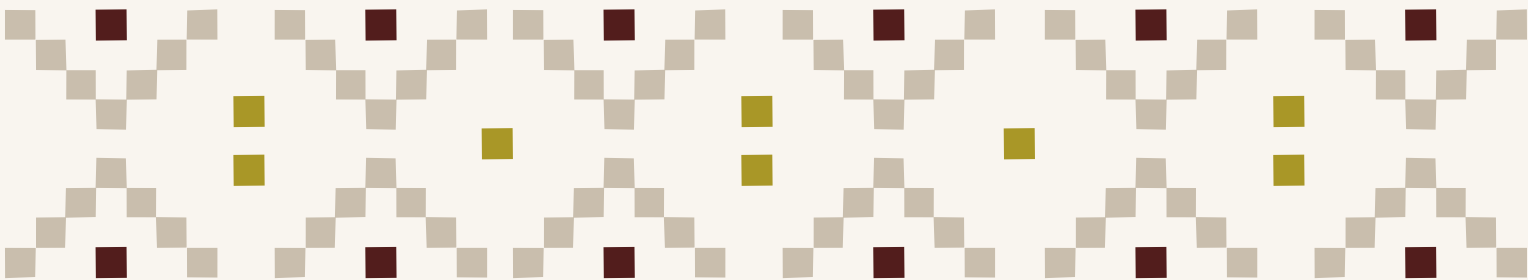
### Serve with

Karak chai or plain yoghurt to balance out the sugar.



# فرنبي Farni

Farni is a milk-based dessert thickened with rice flour. It has a smooth, soft texture and is flavoured with cardamom and rose water. It can be served warm or chilled.



**Ingredients**

**4 cups** milk  
**¾ cup** rice flour  
**¾ cup** sugar  
**¼ cup** rose water  
**1 tsp** ground cardamom (steep the cardamom tea bag in 2 tbsp hot water to make cardamom water)

**To serve**  
Ground pistachio  
**50 g** slivered almonds  
**½ tsp** cinnamon  
**A pinch** of sugar

**Method**

Place milk, rice flour and sugar in a saucepan over medium-low heat. Whisk constantly until the sugar dissolves and the mixture starts to thicken. Make sure to scrape the sides so that it doesn't stick. Add the rose water, cardamom water and continue to cook until it starts to become glossy. Pour the mixture into moulds and refrigerate until set. On a small pan, toast pistachios, almonds, cinnamon and sugar lightly. Just before serving, garnish with nut mixture.



# لقيمات Luqaimat

Luqaimat are small fried dough balls that are crisp on the outside and soft inside. They are coated with date syrup or sugar syrup while still hot. They are typically served immediately.

### Ingredients

#### Dough Ingredients:

**30g** water (35°C (95°F))  
**8g** yeast  
**180g** white flour  
**8g** sugar  
**8g** corn starch  
**1 tsp** cardamom  
**4g** oil  
**175g** warm water  
**1L** oil for frying

#### Syrup Ingredients:

**50g** water  
**200g** sugar  
**20g** blossom water

### Method

In a small bowl, mix 30g warm water with yeast and let it sit for a few minutes to activate. In a larger mixing bowl, combine flour, sugar, and cornstarch. Add the yeast mixture and begin mixing. Slowly pour in the 175g of warm water while mixing, then add cardamom and oil. Stir until a smooth batter forms.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the dough rise in a warm place for about an hour until doubled in size. Heat the frying oil in a deep pot to 170°C (338°F). Using a spoon or your hands, drop small portions of dough into the oil. Fry the dough balls until golden brown, turning occasionally for even cooking. Remove and drain on paper towels.

For the syrup, bring water and sugar to a boil until it reaches 110°C (230°F). Add blossom water and stir. Toss the hot luqaimat in the syrup until well coated. Drain excess syrup and serve immediately. A more traditional alternative is a drizzle of date syrup.

# خنفاروش

## Khanfaroosh

Khanfaroosh is a spiced fried dough made with saffron and cardamom. The batter is rested before frying, resulting in a soft interior and lightly crisp exterior. It is served warm.

### Ingredients

1 **tbsp** active yeast  
 3 **tbsp** sugar  
 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  **cups** warm water  
 2 **cups** whole wheat flour  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  **tsp** saffron  
 1 **tsp** ground cardamom  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  **tsp** salt  
 2 eggs  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  **tsp** rose water  
 Vegetable oil, for shallow frying

### Method

In a small bowl, dissolve yeast and sugar in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of the warm water and leave for 5 minutes, or until foamy. In another bowl, mix flour, saffron, cardamom, and salt. Add eggs, rose water, yeast mixture and remaining water and stir until blended. Cover with a kitchen towel and let rise in a warm place for about 45 minutes, or until doubled in size.

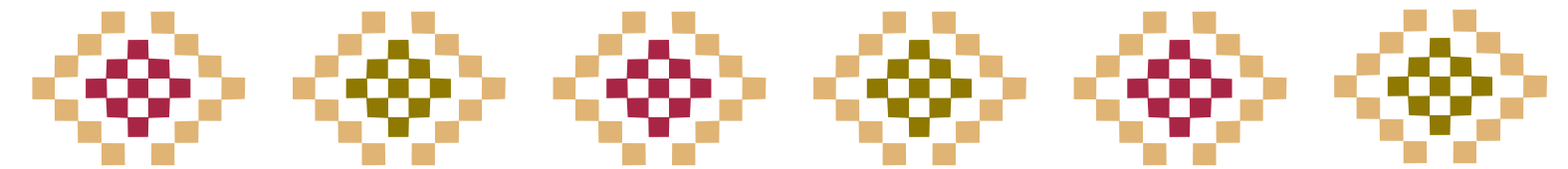
Heat oil to 160°C (325°F) in a shallow frying pan. Take a tablespoon of dough with an oiled spoon, place in the frying pan, patting slightly with the back of the spoon to form a disc. Fry for 3 minutes on each side, until golden brown. Repeat to shape and fry remaining dough. Drain on paper towels. Arrange on a serving plate.





# بثيثة Batheetha

Batheetha is made by combining dates with flour, ghee, and spices. The mixture is worked together until soft and cohesive. It is served in small portions.



## Ingredients

1 **cup** dates (pitted)  
 ½ **cup** roasted flour (wheat or all-purpose)  
 2–3 **tbsp** ghee  
 1 **tsp** ground cardamom  
 A **pinch** of saffron (optional)  
 Chopped nuts for topping (almonds or walnuts)

## Method

Warm the ghee in a pan over low heat. Add the dates and gently mash until soft and cohesive. Sprinkle in the roasted flour, cardamom, and saffron. Stir slowly until the mixture is smooth, rich, and aromatic. Remove from heat and shape into small portions or serve warm as is. Finish with chopped nuts. Best enjoyed warm, when the spices are most expressive and the texture is soft and luscious.

# خبیصة Khabeesa

Khabeesa is made by cooking flour or semolina with ghee and sugar. The mixture is stirred until it thickens and develops a slightly grainy texture. It is served warm, often with nuts.



## Ingredients

**¼ cup** semolina  
**500 ml** low fat milk  
**A pinch** of salt  
**2 tbsp** honey  
**½ tsp** cardamom powder  
**2 tbsp** grated coconut  
**2 tbsp** crushed cashew nuts  
**4-6 strands** of saffron  
**1 tsp** ghee

## Method

Dry roast the semolina in a saucepan on low flame till slightly browned. Add in the milk and whisk continuously till well combined and no lumps. Add in all the remaining ingredients and cook till the mixture thickens, stirring occasionally. Add ghee, switch off the heat and serve warm.

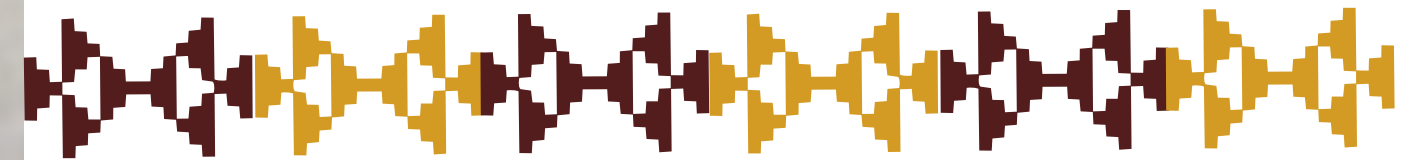
You may garnish with toasted coconut, and toasted cashew nuts.





# محلّی Mhala

Mhala is a soft pancake made from a batter of dates, flour, and eggs. It is cooked on a pan until lightly crisp at the edges. It is served warm, often with honey or cheese.



## Ingredients

**115g** date paste  
**2 cups** warm water  
**2** large eggs  
**1 cup** wholewheat flour  
**1 tsp** yeast  
**¼ tsp** salt  
**1 cup** Arabic Ghee  
**1 cup** Chami cheese

## Method

Soak the date paste in warm water in a bowl for five minutes until soft. Transfer to a blender jar. Add the remaining ingredients and grind to make a smooth batter. Empty the batter into a large bowl and set aside to rest for an hour. Heat a fry pan, drizzle with little ghee. Pour a ladle of batter and spread. Allow it to crisp up before flipping. Cook till both sides are done.

Serve with a drizzle of honey, date syrup or some Chami cheese.

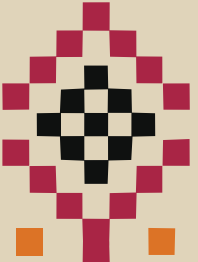
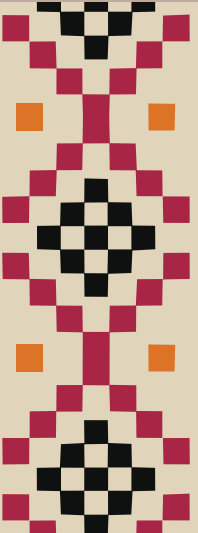
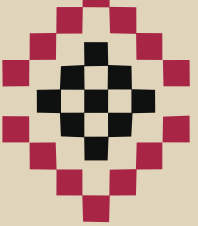
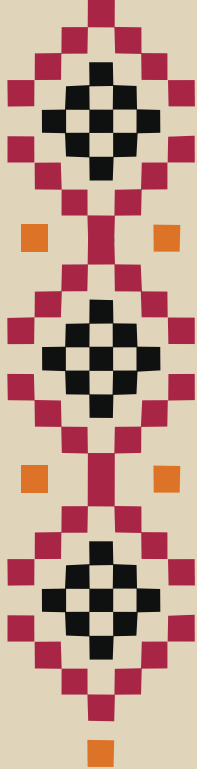
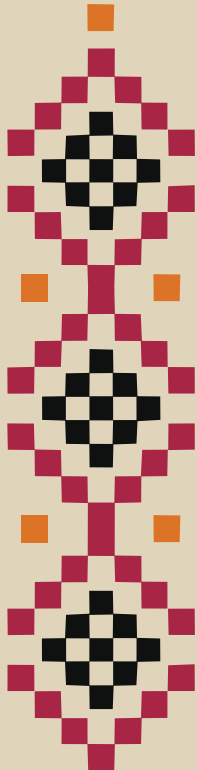
# Sand

**The Soul.**

The geography, the rhythm of life and the way community and tradition were shaped by the land.

The rituals between meals and the way hospitality evolved from within.





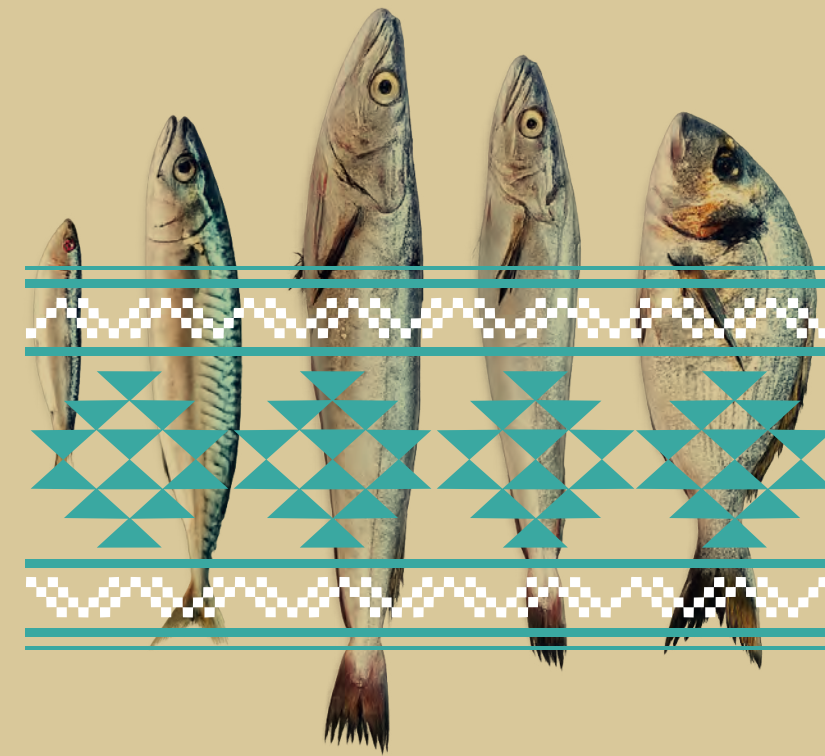


Ingredients

Qahwa

Qahwa holds a formal place in Emirati hospitality. Lightly roasted coffee brewed with cardamom, it is served first when guests arrive. The preparation and serving follow established etiquette. Cups are filled partially and refilled until declined. The host stands. The guest receives.

Recognised by UNESCO as part of intangible cultural heritage in the region, Qahwa is less about caffeine and more about respect. It signals that the guest is welcomed and acknowledged.



## Ingredients

# Salt

Some foods were made for the moment. Others were made to wait. Maleh, salted fish, existed for movement. It stayed when fresh food couldn't, travelled when homes were left behind, and fed families across distance. It wasn't preserved for flavour, but for certainty. Food that waited had value. In Emirati kitchens, endurance was its own know-how.



Ingredients

Loomi

In Emirati kitchens, lemon isn't just an accent. It matures into purpose. Green, brown, black, each stage carries a different role.

Green loomi brings sharpness to salads. Brown loomi deepens stews. Black loomi dissolves slowly into stock, leaving behind warmth rather than bite.

These layers of flavour echo older journeys. For generations, Emirati traders travelled by sea to India, returning with spices and ideas that shaped how citrus was used and understood. What arrived bright and sharp learned to soften, deepen, and last.



The mountains stand  
as a testament to  
those before us,



who cooked and  
endured in the  
harshest terrains.



Dates are deeply rooted in the land itself. They sit at the core of Emirati food culture. Long before modern trade, date palms provided nourishment, shade, and economic stability in desert communities. The tree itself was valued for everything it offered, fruit, fibre, shelter.



Ingredients

Dates

The UAE is home to hundreds of varieties. Among the most recognised are Khalas, known for their balanced sweetness and soft texture; Fardh, darker and firmer with a deeper flavour; and Lulu, round and glossy with a mild, honeyed taste. Each region favours its own.

Dates are eaten fresh during harvest, dried for storage, pressed into pastes, folded into desserts, or served whole with coffee. During Ramadan, they are traditionally the first food eaten to break the fast.

Offering dates is more than custom. It is a gesture of welcome rooted in history, one that connects agricultural life with the present day.



Ingredients

# Vegetables

Beyond the known dates, the UAE's landscape supports a varied range of vegetables. Mountains offer access to water through wadis, a rare advantage in an arid landscape. This allows farms to produce vegetables, poultry, eggs and meat for the communities.





## Ingredients

# Honey

Honey is produced with distinct character, each variety deeply tied to the terrain it comes from. Sidr honey, valued for its medicinal properties. Samar honey, amber in colour, with notes of caramel and butterscotch. Ghaf and wildflower honeys, shaped by shrubs and seasonal blooms.

## Ingredients

# Cardamoms

Cardamom is one of the most recognisable aromas in Emirati kitchens. It moves between Qahwa, rice dishes, breads, and desserts without feeling out of place.

Its use reflects regional trade connections and shared culinary heritage across the Gulf. Yet in the UAE, it has become embedded in everyday life. The scent of cardamom often signals welcome. It is the smell that meets guests at the door.



Spices are more than seasoning; they are whispers of trade, a language of aroma, and a quiet ritual of remembrance.





### Ingredients

## Bezar

The Emirati spices known as Bezar blend (cumin, coriander, fennel, fenugreek, black pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, and turmeric) draws from trade routes that once connected the Gulf to India, East Africa, and the Levant.

In the kitchen, the blend is used to warm rather than overwhelm. It appears in rice dishes, stews, and meat preparations, shaping the base of the flavour rather than sitting on top of it. The mix represents movement, ingredients that travelled, settled, and became part of everyday Emirati cooking.



## Ingredients

# Nuts

Nuts entered Emirati sweets through trade and remain associated with generosity. Pistachios, almonds, and cashews were once valued ingredients, added carefully rather than casually.

They appear most often in festive desserts prepared for Ramadan, weddings, or gatherings. Their texture contrasts softness, but their presence also signals effort. A dish finished with nuts suggests occasion, something prepared with attention rather than necessity.





## Ingredients

# Chami Cheese

Chami is a soft cheese made in Al Ain, one of the agricultural centres of the UAE. Crumbly and mildly tangy, it reflects a dairy tradition shaped by desert life, where preservation and simplicity mattered.

It is most often served with fresh dates and a drizzle of ghee, especially at breakfast or alongside coffee. The combination is practical and balanced, salt against sweetness, richness against freshness.

Chami rarely stands alone as a dish. It appears as part of a spread, woven into daily routines and informal gatherings. Its role is supportive, familiar, and quietly local.



Ingredients

Grains

Rice became central to Emirati cuisine through maritime trade. Imported basmati gradually replaced older grains and adapted to local cooking styles.

Today, rice anchors dishes served at weddings, religious holidays, and large family gatherings. It absorbs stock, spice, and meat juices, ensuring nothing is separate on the plate.

In communal dining, where meals are shared from a central platter, rice carries both flavour and structure. It makes the meal cohesive and generous.



# Cooking with the Land



Before walls and stovetops, there was open sky and shifting sand. Traditional Emirati cooking grew from what was available, firewood, clay, earth, and time. A pit in the desert became an oven. Embers became a steady grill. A clay cylinder held heat long enough to bake bread for the day. These methods are gestures of adaptation, patience, and gathering shaped by a landscape that asked for resourcefulness and rewarded it with flavour.

# مظبي Mathbi

A fire crackles over smooth, flat stones until they are white-hot. Once the flames subside, marinated meat, lamb or chicken, is laid directly onto the searing surface. It is seasoned simply, cooked steadily, and eaten immediately.

Mathbi belongs to desert evenings and shared plates passed by hand. It reflects the true Bedouin spirit: mobile, practical, and deeply communal.

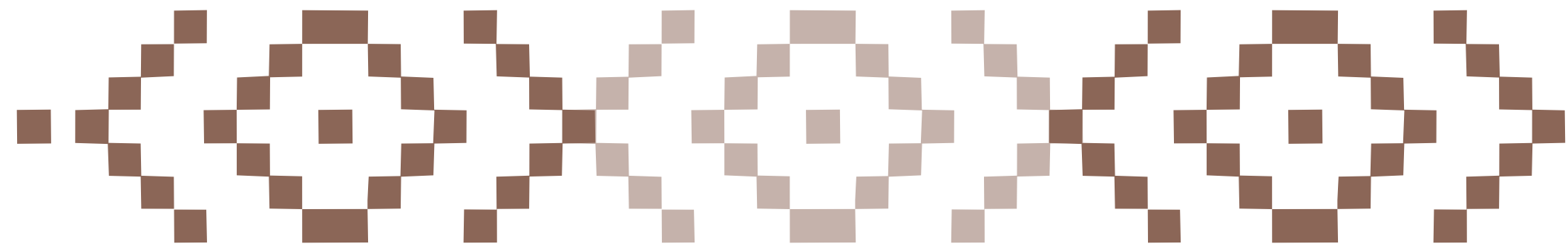




# مدفون Madfoon

Madfoon literally translates to “buried.” The desert sand becomes an oven, and time does the rest. A pit is dug into the earth and fired until the sand is intensely hot. The meat, wrapped carefully, is lowered into the heat and buried, trapping every drop of moisture beneath the dunes. Hours later, it emerges impossibly tender and fragrant.

Often prepared for celebrations, Madfoon is a reminder that the best meals require patience and that the anticipation is as important as the feast itself.



الجدر

# Jedr

Large metal pots set over open firewood. These vessels are the backbone of hospitality used for Harees, Machboos, and soups prepared in generous, abundant quantities. This is cooking at scale: weddings, Ramadan, and great family gatherings.

The Jedr anchors the space, and the rhythmic act of stirring becomes a part of the ceremony itself, signaling that the community is about to be fed.





الجمـر

# Al Jammār

Here, the cook relies on nothing but instinct and experience. Food is placed directly into the heart of glowing embers or buried beneath a blanket of hot ash. Without elaborate tools, the Jammār method achieves a unique alchemy: the coals act as a dry, steady heat that locks in moisture and deepens the natural flavour of the ingredient. It is cooking in its most primal, essential form.

# التنـور Tanoor

The Tanoor is the heartbeat of the hearth. This cylindrical clay oven, fired by wood, radiates an intense, consistent heat. Dough pressed against its curved interior puffs and browns in seconds, while meat hanging inside roasts slowly, absorbing the smoke. Unlike the nomadic methods of the open desert, the Tanoor represents settlement, the warmth of a courtyard, and the grounding rhythm of daily life.



# The Ingredients That Shape Emirati Culture

Emirati cooking is built from ingredients shaped by land, sea, and trade. Some grow locally in desert soil. Others arrived by boat and stayed.

This glossary gathers the staples that appear across dishes. Spices, grains, dairy, herbs, and preserved goods that form the backbone of everyday cooking. Some are centuries old. Others became part of the kitchen through exchange and movement.

Together, they reflect how flavour in the UAE was formed: through environment, adaptation, and connection.

- Coffee or Qahwa

Dates

Honey (Sidr, Samar, Ghaf, Wildflower + Acacia)

Basmati Rice

Broken wheat

Arabic ghee

Vermicelli

Fish - Dried (King Mackerel / Long Tailed Tuna)

Fish - Fresh (Hammour / Kingfish / Snapper)

Fish - Minced (Shark)

Fish Sauce or Mehwaya

Meat (Chicken/Beef/ Lamb/Camel Meat)

Semolina

Cardamom

Saffron

Olives

Cinnamon

Nutmeg
- Pistachios

Cashew nuts

Almonds

Butternut squash

Walnuts

Raisins

Star anise

Sesame

Cumin

Turmeric

Red chilli powder

Curry leaves

Yoghurt

Cheese

Chami cheese

Red peppercorns

Black peppercorns

Cinnamon sticks

Cloves

Bay leaves

Loomi (Lemon - Dried)

Lemon - fresh
- Rosewater

Olive oil

Chickpea

Parsley

Bezar (cumin, coriander, fennel, fenugreek, black pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, and turmeric)



# Thank You

This work would not have been possible without the generosity, passion, and craft of those who shared their time, stories, and traditions.

- Gerbou Restaurant
- Chef Musabbeh Al Kaabi
- Chef Faisal Al Hamoodi
- Chefs Abdulrahman & Maitha
- Chef Fawzeia Della Al Harmoodi
- Suwaad Al Suwaidi
- Malak Tariq Al Farsi
- Sumaya Al Shamsi
- Moein Al Bastaki
- Hamad Al Reyami
- Fatima Ibrahim
- Bassam Al Ansari
- Ahmed Al Falasi
- Yakoob Al Ali
- Sakina Suhail Mohammed
- Soumaya Dahech
- Fatma Aref Salem Mohammed Ibrahim
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