

Four decades ago...

Four decades ago, the very mention of the words 'dining in Abu Dhabi' may have conjured up images of a romantic dinner under the stars, in a tent pitched amidst the desert sand dunes. With Arab culture placing heavy emphasis on guest comfort, visitors would be seated on plush cushions and soft carpets – in essence, treated like royalty. Before the guest, would lay a huge plate of spiced mutton and rice, dishes of dates, and flat bread produced on a hot stone and all washed down with rich camel's milk, the sweet, minted Suleimani tea or the heady Arabic coffee flavoured with cardamom. Dining near the sea would produce an array of spiced fish, which had been wrapped, secreted under the sand with a fire burning atop – and again, accompanied by the staple rice.

As time moved on, so did the culinary offering, influenced by workers from throughout the Middle East, Levant and sub-continent. It could now feature rich biryani or a tempting spread of mezza – a collection of dishes, usually served in small amounts – served complete with Arabic coffee or tea.

Some of the common mezza dishes which guests would see before them include 'tabbouleh' – a salad-like fare consisting mainly of finely chopped parsley, tomatoes, bulgur and mint, served with olive oil – and hummus – a paste made from olive oil and chickpeas, usually consumed with pita flatbread. Kofta, balls of ground beef or lamb, mixed with onions and spices and served with spice sauces is another mezza dish that guests could be offered.

Four decades later...

Today, while dining in a traditional goat's hair tent out in the desert, or sampling the delights of sand-oven fish, are still options thanks to tour operators' dune dinner and island sailing packages, restaurants in Abu Dhabi have preserved the hospitality synonymous with Arab dining, as well as the taste of authentic Arab cuisine.

The emirate now also boasts numerous top-tier international restaurants. This change in Abu Dhabi's culinary fortunes was heralded by the arrival of towering skyscrapers, the influx of foreign talent and the increasingly sophisticated palates of UAE nationals, expatriates and overseas visitors.

A tour through the city reveals many establishments offering European cuisine from France, Switzerland, Spain, Greece, Germany and most notably, Italy. The number of Italian restaurants in this emerging capital is second only to restaurants serving Middle Eastern cuisine.

Additionally, with the city establishing itself as the Middle East's cultural hub, visitors will also find many fine Asian restaurants serving bona fide Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Korean cuisines. These sit remarkably easy alongside popular tex-mex restaurants.

With Abu Dhabi's culinary scene having evolved over the past two decades to include a stunning line-up of both Western and Asian cuisines complementing the more traditional Middle Eastern delights, it leaves many wondering: What is the next stage of evolution for Abu Dhabi's gastronomy scene?

The answer is simple: **Gourmet Abu Dhabi.**

Presented By



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