

Lebanon: A Land of Traditions and Hospitality

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Abstract

A small yet beautiful country tucked on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon can boast of its cultural and food heritage. Lebanese food is most popular these days, especially in the Middle East. It is favorable for vegetarians and non-vegetarians too. It's gaining popularity in Indian soil as well, gradually in the metros. Lebanon's diverse culture is a result of its influence of various religious, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups. Family and kinship play a central role in Lebanese social relationships, in both private and public life. Family structure is typically traditionally largely patriarchal; women are active in education and politics.

Keywords

Lebanon, Lebanese, cuisine, Arab

Glimpses of Custom and Culture in Lebanon

Lebanon consists of a heterogeneous population. Phoenician Greek, Armenians, Arabs, and Kurds are a part of its demography. Arabic is the official language though French and English are spoken too. Its official name is Al-Jumhūriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah (Lebanese Republic).

Cultivable land is scarce, but the climate and the presence of springs favor the intensive cultivation of a variety of crops on mountain slopes and in the coastal region. The market

vegetables, bananas, and citrus crops are grown along the coastal plains. Along the foothills, the principal crops are olives, grapes, tobacco, figs, and almonds. Fruits like peaches, apricots, plums, and cherries are planted, while apples and pears thrive too. Sugar beets, cereals, and vegetables are the main crops cultivated in Al-Biqā'. Poultry is a major source of agricultural income. Cattle like goats and sheep are also raised.

Lebanon is known for its picturesque landscape. Some of the popular destinations in Lebanon are Afqa, Al Arz, Al Beka, Jwar Al Hoz etc



Image 1: Afqa



Image 2: Al Arz



Image 3: Al Beka



Image 4: Jwar El Hoz

Arab, as well as European influences, are quite visible in the culture of Lebanon.

Lebanese citizens observe a variety of holidays. Those celebrated by the Christian community include Easter and Christmas, the dates of which vary, as elsewhere, between the Catholic and Orthodox communities. Eid al-Fitr (which marks the end of Ramadan), Eid al-Adha (which marks the culmination of the hajj), and the

Prophet Muhammad's birthday are celebrated by Lebanese Muslims; Ashoora, a holiday particular to Shia Muslims, is also observed. National holidays include Lebanon Liberation Day on May 25 and Independence Day on November 22.

Lebanese Food

Lebanese cuisine is one of the most popular cuisines in the world. From the mouthwatering Hummus to the national treasure of Kibbeh, Lebanese dishes have found their way into every food lover's heart and stomach. The national dish of Lebanon is kibbeh, a blended paste of fresh lamb and bulgur wheat with spices.

Throughout history, there have been many influences on Lebanon and its food. Some are ancient, like the Ottoman, Levantine, and Persian and Roman empires.

Lebanese food has become popular over the past few decades. This is a result of the contribution and influence of many external factors too. During ancient times Beirut, its capital, was known as the Paris of the Middle East. Many travelers visited and passed through Beirut and this added a dash of new ingredients, customs, and inspirations that have created the Lebanese cuisine that we see and eat today.

Lebanese cuisine is characterized by a healthy mixture of herbs and vegetables, fruit, olives, olive oil, laban (yogurt), rice, and khubz (flatbread). Meals often consist of a selection of shared dishes presented all at once on several small plates, often including hummus, stuffed grape leaves, pickled vegetables, grilled meats, and tabbouleh (tabbūlah), a salad made from herbs, tomato, onion, bulgur wheat, lemon juice, and olive oil. Kibbeh, an oval ball of seasoned meat stuffed into a dough made from bulgur and meat, is often considered the national dish.

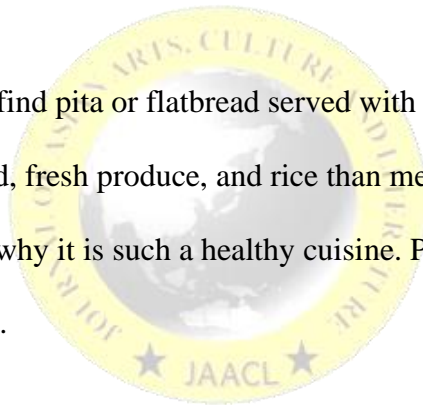
Olive oil and garlic are essential ingredients in the preparation of almost every dish.

Lebanese food is rarely served as one large meal. Instead, it is served as mezze – many small dishes that allow you to share and taste each option.

Lebanese dishes will use a lot of fresh herbs, spices, and other condiments to infuse flavors into the dish. Another traditional Lebanese condiment is pomegranate molasses. This sweet drizzle is a perfect accompaniment to our flavor-packed salads.

For a Lebanese host, bread is the life of the food. In some Arabic dialects, the word for bread means ‘life’.

This is the reason we will find pita or flatbread served with almost every meal. In fact, we might consume more bread, fresh produce, and rice than meat in the average Lebanese dish. This is one of the reasons why it is such a healthy cuisine. Pita bread is perfect for scooping up dips or spooning salads.



Tabbouleh is not only one of the most beloved dishes in Lebanese cuisine today but has been as such for a very long time. The popular salad is believed to have been around in Lebanon for as long as 4,000 years!

Kanafeh was created around the 7th century by the Islamic Caliphate in Damascus as a rich Suhoor meal to help Muslims fasting in Ramadan.

Gubibate is considered the ancestor of the modern Lebanese Kibbeh, which has evolved to contain more complex ingredients over the years.

Fattoush and Fatteh, as may be obvious from their similar names, belong to the same family of dishes known as Fattat, which roughly means “crumbs” or “fragments.”

In Fattat dishes, fried or toasted pita bread is broken up over the plate to add a crunchy texture and a distinct taste to the recipe.

The world-famous word Shawarma comes from the Turkish çevirme that stems from çevirmek, i.e., “turn” or “rotate,” which is the cooking method of the shawarma.

Not only is Falafel one of the most popular dishes in Lebanon, but it’s also the second most common dish made of chickpeas in the world. What’s number one? Hummus, of course!

Hummus, the dip made of chickpeas ground with tahini paste, olive oil, and seasonings, is a common dish in Lebanon. It is garnished with a drizzle of olive oil and boiled yet whole chick peas. Hummus is often served with warm pita bread.

Baba Ghanoush, a dip of mashed roasted eggplants mixed with tahini paste, garlic, and white vinegar (if one is looking to lighten the color), is a popular cold appetizer dip served along with pita bread.

Traditionally, Christians made Baklava with 33 layers of filo dough, with each layer representing 1 year of the life of Jesus Christ. The delicious sweet pastry is also a common dessert for Muslims in Eid al-Fitr.



Image 5: Cold Mezze



Image 6: Hummus



Image 7: Kibbeh



Image 8: Shawarma

Lebanese people pride themselves on the ability to make fresh produce. The addition of herbs and spices add flavor to an already healthy yet tasty food. So everyone can enjoy the vegetarian options as well.

I, myself, am very fond of Lebanese food. I reside in the Kingdom of Bahrain and Lebanese dishes are our weekend dinner quite often. Here in Bahrain, we have numerous Lebanese outlets which are regularly visited by Arabs and expatriate both. Lebanese food is a good amalgamation of taste and a healthy diet due to the nutritious value attached to each preparation. Every mouthful is a delight when you're eating Lebanese food.

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- Food pictures are my personal clicks of a small outlet in Bahrain called Lebanese Oven.

About the Author

Nivedita Roy is a teacher by profession. She is an English Language teacher in an American curriculum school in the Kingdom of Bahrain. She pursues writing as a passion. She is a bilingual author and poetess. She has coauthored 7 anthologies till now. Her first Solo book "Gallery de Heart", a collection of English poems released in 2020. She often hosts book talk shows and poetry recitals on a couple of platforms on Facebook.

