

Treasures Beyond Food

A Palestinian food tour is more than just food. It's a fascinating voyage of discovery, and each bite reveals the essence of the country's cultural heritage. By participating in these experiences, tourists support local farmers and artisans while gaining a deeper understanding of the Palestinian people's unique connection to their land and flavors.



By Fidaa Abuhamdiya

When you decide to explore a new destination, you may look forward not only to sightseeing but also to dining and tasting local food and beverages. After all, every taste carries a story that reflects the country's landscape, history, heritage, and cultural identity. Palestine is best known as a religious destination and makes news regarding its politics. But like many other countries, it is also making a name for itself in the field of gastronomic tourism. This growing trend significantly impacts the local economy and offers visitors a comprehensive cultural experience.

A food tour of Palestine is more than just the satisfaction of an appetite. It is an opportunity to delve deeper into the culture and stories behind each delicious bite. It is a journey that offers an authentic taste of Palestine and allows participants to live like a local during their experience. In addition, it facilitates encounters with local farmers, supports small producers of ethnic food, and strengthens small businesses and initiatives. Many visitors who come to Palestine do so intentionally, enduring a number of occupation-related obstacles.

I speak from personal experience because I witness how such tours take visitors to locations that offer authentic Palestinian food and drink. One of my favorite stops is Khadra, a small shop in the heart of Ramallah's old city, where tourists can enjoy and taste fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables that are sourced from local farms. Tasting food at Khadra is not only an experience of flavors but also honors the resilience and commitment of Palestinian farmers who endure all kinds of adverse circumstances, including settler violence and harassment by occupation soldiers, to preserve their land and local traditions. Similarly, the youth village

Kufur Ni'ma near Ramallah organizes food events and offers courses with the goal of raising awareness through food among youth and the population in general of the importance of the land. Ramallah's Dalia Association also organizes events at Bait Alkarmeh, its kitchen that is located in Kufur Aqab, aiming to expand and enhance the Palestinian food culture.

Those with a passion for food will be happy to know that some Palestinian chefs organize cooking classes that take participants to local markets where they carefully select the ingredients they need for their dishes. Tourists can

Taking internationals to Al-Reef farm at Al-Jeeb, near Jerusalem.





At Khadra in Ramallah.

immerse themselves in Palestinian traditions and flavors while learning how to cook authentic dishes. Classes are offered by Dar Al-Majus in Bethlehem, Tashkeel in Hebron, and Dar Alkalima University in Bethlehem, Sacred Cuisine offers cooking classes and food tours in Jerusalem, and Housh Alsiryán's chef Fadi Kattan offers food tours in Bethlehem, to name just a few.

In the summer, no gastronomic tour of Palestine is complete without a stop at one of the very popular and charming local cafés. Visitors can indulge in the tradition of enjoying tea with mint at Al-Inshirah in Ramallah or Sami in Bethlehem. Alternatively, the numerous

local juice shops you find in all Palestinian cities, including Jerusalem, entice visitors with the alluring aromas and vibrant colors of a wide variety of freshly squeezed seasonal fruit juices. Tourists will be delighted by a scoop of ice cream with Arabic gum and pistachio in one of the famous shops such as Rukab or Baladna in Ramallah. In Jenin, watermelons, the city's symbol, are popular and consumed frequently during summer. In Nablus, despite the hot weather, a stop at one of the old city's *knafeh* shops, such as Al-Aqsa, is a must for all visitors – here, you can also watch how cooks prepare one of the most famous and delicious sweets of Palestine. Qalqilya is worth a trip to get delicious coffee and fully immerse yourself in high-quality spices and roasted nuts at Alrasheed shop. In Hebron, street vendors sell a traditional sweet called *dahdah* (made of semolina and ghee, filled with cinnamon, nuts, and shredded coconut, and covered with powdered sugar) and *karabij halab* (a deep-fried thick stick of dough that is dipped in 'ater (syrup) just before it is served).

Stretchy Rukab ice cream.



Falafel are offered everywhere in Palestine, but in each city, they have their unique flavor. Enjoy them with salad and pickles in pita bread or for breakfast with hummus and *ful* (smashed fava beans). You definitely should not miss the ones offered by Umbashi Falafel in Jenin or Falafel Abusamaha in Al-Bireh.

At local bakeries – which you find in every city and town, such as Mario's in Al-Bireh – visitors have the chance to try many kinds of *mana'ish* (small salty pastries and pies) prepared from local ingredients that include olive oil, *zaatar* (thyme, either fresh or dried and mixed with sesame seeds), Palestinian goat cheese, eggs, or meat. In Jerusalem, be sure to taste *ka'ek simsim* (sesame bread), sold by street vendors around Damascus Gate and the Garden Tomb. In Hebron, visitors can find delicious *fattet al-krum*, a summer salad made with old bread, tomatoes, and *laban jameed* (a special sauce made of dried goat or sheep milk yogurt). Visit one of the popular *sha'abi* restaurants that offer *mansaf* (lamb meat cooked in dried sheep and goat-milk yogurt, served on a piece of thin bread that is covered with a bed of rice, and topped with roasted almonds or pine nuts), *maqloubeh* (meat, fried vegetables, and rice placed in layers in a pot and flipped upside down before serving; the vegetarian version is tasty as well), or *kidre* (a dish that originates from Hebron, is prepared with rice, meat, and *samn baladi* (ghee), and cooked in the oven in a special pot made of copper). And if you wish to eat *musakhan* (a very popular authentic Palestinian dish of onions that are succulently fried in olive oil, served on thick oven-baked *taboun* bread that has been drenched in olive oil and chicken broth, adorned and enhanced by the special taste and color of sumac, and topped with roasted almonds) head to Tulkarem, as their *musakhan* ensures a unique experience!

In terms of drinks, Palestine offers tourists a range of options for all tastes, and local drinks can accompany the delicious Palestinian local cuisine from north to south. Wine is made from international grapes to produce Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, or Rosé wines or from indigenous Palestinian grapes, such as Nadim Bituni and Cremisan Baladi red wines and Hamdani Jandali and Dabouki white wines. Local producers include Latroun Winery, Taybeh Winery, Domaine Kassis, Philokalia Natural Winery, and Cremisan Wine Estate. If you prefer a local beer, you can choose from a wide selection of beers and ales drafted by Taybeh Brewing Company or Shepherds from Birzeit Brewery. If you like something a bit stronger, arak made by local producers such as Muaddi Craft Distillery, Arak Philokalia, or Arak Ramallah will delight your palate. And those who prefer to avoid alcohol should definitely take a stroll across the souqs that are found in all towns and cities and stop to enjoy one of the traditional fresh drinks, such as *kharroub* (carob) and *sous* (licorice), that are sold by peddlers who tend to don the local street vendors' traditional red dress, wearing wide trousers and a *tarboush* (fez).

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