



Dining Customs and Cuisine

For centuries Jordan has been a highway between Europe, Asia and The Middle East. This influx and mixing of people over the centuries has contributed to a diverse food culture. Many dishes, such as hummus, baba ghanoush, tabbouleh, falafel and kebabs all share the same Arabic and Mediterranean culinary roots.

The traditional Jordanian breakfast is a bowl of hot fuul (boiled fava beans mashed with lemon juice, olive oil and chopped chilis), and mopped up with fresh-baked pita. The staple street snack in the Middle East is falafel, small balls of a spiced chickpea paste deep-fried and served stuffed into pita, along with some salad, tahini, and optional hot sauce. Up and down the country you'll also find shwarma stands.

If dining in a restaurant, mezze plates are typically rolled out before larger main dishes, so be sure to save room. Main courses are almost entirely meat-based. Good fish is rare, and pork is forbidden under Islam.

Without argument, the premier national dish is Mansaf, and its preparation is taken very seriously. It is served on very special occasions, weddings especially. Chunks of boiled lamb or mutton are served on a bed of rice, with pine nuts sprinkled on top and a tart, creamy sauce of jameed (pungent goat's-milk yoghurt) on the side to pour over.

Most Arabic sweets are packed with enough sugar, syrup, butter and honey to make your teeth ache. But they are generally very small bites and often consumed with coffee or tea for an afternoon snack. Fresh fruit is the traditional way to round out a meal. Street markets display fresh fruits, including apples, oranges, mandarins, peaches, grapes, dates and pomegranates.

The main focus of every Jordanian village is a coffee house, where friends and neighbors meet. The national drink is tea; a strong, dark brew served scalding-hot and milk-less in small glasses. But coffee comes in a close second. Turkish coffee is what you'll come across most often. Made by boiling up cardamom-flavored grounds in a distinctive long-handled pot, it's served in small cups along with a glass of water as chaser.

Drinking alcohol is forbidden under Islam. Alcohol is widely available, but you have to look for it.

Dining Etiquette

Jordanians serve family, friends, and guests with great pride in their homes; no matter how modest their means. A "Jordanian invitation" means that you are expected to bring nothing and eat everything.

Mealtimes are often a communal affair with numerous plates served at once and people taking the portion of each dish closest to them. In traditional settings, eating with the right hand is the acceptable method, and men and women dine separately.

You're likely to be eating with your fingers at least some of the time. Flaps or pockets of flat bread count as knife, fork and spoon – torn into pieces for scooping up dips, mopping up sauces, tearing meat off the bone and constructing personal one-bite sandwiches.

Source material:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/middle-east/jordan/food-drink/>

<http://uncorneredmarket.com/jordan-food/>



[Flatbread with Lamb and Tomatoes \(Lahmacun\)](#)

Serves several as part of a mezze spread

This recipe is designed to make four small flatbreads. You can decide to make it into one large or two smaller breads. You can also adapt this recipe to suit yourself by purchasing ready-made pizza dough at your grocery store. I would guess that a one pound bag would equal the yield of this recipe.

Photo credit: Neven Mrgan- originally posted to Flickr, titled [Lahmacun](#). Used under [Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike Generic 2.0](#).



Roasted Cauliflower with Tahini Sauce
Serves several as part of a mezze spread

I've adapted this recipe from the Jerusalem cookbook. Instead of frying the cauliflower it gets roasted in the oven.

Ingredients

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 teaspoon ground cumin
2 heads cauliflower, cored and cut into 1 1/2" florets
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Sauce

¾ cup tahini paste
2 cloves garlic, minced to a paste
¼ cup flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
¼ cup chopped mint
2/3 cup Greek yogurt
¼ freshly squeezed lemon juice, plus grated zest of one lemon
1 teaspoon pomegranate molasses
about ¾ cup water

Directions

Heat oven to 500°. Toss together oil, cumin, cauliflower, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Transfer to two rimmed baking sheets; spread out evenly. Bake, rotating pans from top to bottom and front to back, until cauliflower is browned and tender, 25 – 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine tahini and all remaining sauce ingredients. Stir well with a wooden spoon as you add the water. The tahini sauce will thicken and then loosen up as you add water. Don't add too much, just enough to get a thick, yet smooth, pourable consistency, a bit like honey. Add the cauliflower, taste and adjust seasoning. To serve, spoon into a serving bowl and finish with a few drops of pomegranate molasses and some mint. If you don't have pomegranate molasses I think it would look beautiful garnished with some pomegranate seeds.

Adapted from "Jerusalem," by Ottolenghi and Tamami

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[Parsley and Bulgur Salad \(Tabbouleh\)](#)

Serves several as part of a mezze spread

Unlike most American versions of Tabbouleh, which are mostly bulgur, this authentic version is mostly herbs. Feel free to adjust with more bulgur if you prefer.

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Semolina Cake (Harissa)
Serves 18-24

This is a hands-on recipe. You'll see what I mean. I've adapted this recipe from food.com, and others like it on the Internet to greatly reduce the sugar called for. So while it may not be tooth-achingly sweet, it is still plenty sweet.

The semolina called for in this recipe should be fairly easy to find in a well-stocked grocery store, Italian markets and bulk bins. But if you can't find it, a ready substitute for semolina is farina, or more commonly known as the comforting breakfast cereal, Cream of Wheat! Just make sure you are not using the instant variety.

The recipe that I tested provided somewhat unusual instructions for mixing this batter with your bare hands. I tried it and it was fun! Indulge your inner child and follow directions exactly!

Ingredients

3 cups semolina (or Cream of Wheat)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup desiccated (unsweetened, shredded) coconut, optional
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup unsalted butter, melted and cooled
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking soda
1 cup plain yogurt
whole blanched almonds or pistachios, to garnish

Syrup

1 cup sugar
1 cup water
 $\frac{1}{2}$ small lemon, juiced, or $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. orange or rose flower water

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Make sure you have all your ingredients measured beforehand. It's hard to pull things out and measure with a messy hand.

Next make the sugar syrup. Bring the sugar and water to a boil on high heat. Then lower the heat and continue to simmer for five minutes, remove from heat and add your choice of flavoring.

Grease the pan with a light film of butter. With my bowl of melted butter sitting there at the ready it was efficient to just dip my fingers into it and grease the pan that way.

Mix the semolina, coconut (optional, but I used it and found it gave a very subtle taste), sugar and butter in a large bowl. Here's the fun part: you get to use your hands to do this! You can make a well in the middle and pour the butter into the well. Then just start by tipping the semolina in from the edges of the bowl, eventually using your hands to incorporate everything. That way you won't get super greasy hands. The mixture feels crumbly and quite pleasant in your hands.

In a separate bowl stir the yogurt and baking soda together, wait a few minutes until the yogurt doubles in size. When the yogurt has doubled (or almost) pour it on top of the semolina mix, and again, feel free to use your hands to mix.

Gently pat the batter down on a small jellyroll pan or a 9 x 13 baking dish. I used a small jellyroll (1/2 sheet pan) and it worked out perfectly. The cake mix should not be more than 1" thick. If it is, bake the cake in a bigger pan or take out the extra and bake it in a separate pan.

Now, using a butter knife, cut a diamond or square pattern in the cake. I cut mine into squares, 3 rows by 6 will give you 18 squares, or 4 rows by 6 for 24 squares. I know that diamonds are more traditional, but then you have all those odd corner pieces that don't really add up to much. Press your choice of nut in each piece.

Bake for 30-35 minutes until it is a bronze color. Make sure to check after 30 minutes, mine was done at that point. Remove from the oven, and while it is still hot pour the syrup all over the cake. Although it is recommended to let the syrup cool and then drizzle over the cake I poured hot syrup over the hot cake and it may have been absorbed even better than cold syrup would have. Do use all the syrup – I found that the cake soaked it up immediately – and make sure to cover all the edges and corners adequately.

To serve you will have to re-cut along the lines again. This can easily be made one day ahead of time and stored in an airtight tin.

Adapted from:

[Food.com's Semolina Cake](#)