

Beyond falafel



There are some interesting differences between the traditional food of the UAE and other countries in the region, and five-star Mezlai at Emirates Palace showcases this distinction.

Upon our arrival, we were invited into the majlis for dates, sweets and the customary cup of welcoming coffee. Despite the functional seating, the authentic decor and music create a traditional setting with all the opulence you'd expect of Emirates Palace.

Historically, the UAE didn't have the resources to produce an extensive national cuisine, but masterful Emirati chef Ali combines traditional ingredients with his own innovation to create a menu that is sure to appeal to his global clientele while remaining true to his heritage.

We started with hot and cold mezze, but our salads and flat breads and dips – such as the uniquely Emirati pan-fried fish egg salad with onions, garlic, lemon and local spices – were nothing like other Arabic standards.

Some of Mezlai's dishes are ones you're not likely to find elsewhere, like the lamb shoulder medfoun, lamb threed, veal hariz and shrimp hamsat. Others – like the tender, flavourful mixed grill and fresh bread baked – are simply excellent versions of regional favourites. By the end, we were stuffed but we were still able to make room for our Emirati desserts – shebab, crepe-style pancakes with saffron and cinnamon, and sago, made of sago pearls simmered in sugar, saffron and cardamom.

Though not every dish is 100 percent Emirati, Mezlai is still a great place to celebrate our unique nation.

Laura Fulton

What? Mezlai

Where? Emirates Palace

Cost: Comprehensive set menus start at AED 380 per person

Why? A distinctive Emirati experience – excellent ingredients prepared to perfection

Why not? Those looking for a traditional Emirati experience should be aware that Mezlai offers a wide selection of premium beverages that some may find offensive

We say: Whether you dine in a private alcove, in the dining room or alfresco, Mezlai is well worth checking out

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