



Clockwise from left:
Enjoying ice cream
in Durban; Kazouza
in Cairo; Ibiza's quiet
side; my favourite
dish in New York this
summer: Wayan's
lobster noodles



Excursions to Al-Mokhtar ushered in the fall during my school days in Jeddah: I'd spend hours wandering the stationery aisles, coveting scented erasers and sparkly pens before settling for more practical supplies. But the highlight came afterward, when we sought sustenance in an empty lot behind the department store. There, at a stall dimly lit by a string of flickering lightbulbs, a vendor carved up glistening slices of mutabbaq: a savoury pancake of perfectly seasoned meat encased in crackling layers of fried dough, topped with a generous drizzle of lemon juice. This popular street food staple supposedly traces its origins to Yemen, though some map it back to Indonesia or India. All I knew was that it piqued both my palate and my culinary curiosity.

I went on to live in cities such as Hyderabad, New York and Cape Town, but Jeddah is where I first began to travel the world through food. There was the platonic ideal of a shawarma from the neighbourhood Lebanese spot, where I'd order mine with no pickles and extra shatta and let juicy rivulets chart down my chin; plump, charred morsels of mutton tikka from a Pakistani restaurant in Tahliya, doused in a fiery mint chutney I can still taste today; sloppy steak and cheese subs at Pizza Sheikh; and crispy orbs of falafel from a shop directly opposite Masjid al-Haram in

Makkah, where we'd head right after Umrah. All the flavours of the world seemed to commingle effortlessly in the Kingdom, and it didn't take an anthropologist to understand why. For centuries, religious pilgrims from far-flung corners have left their imprint on the region's culinary tableau; contemporary Saudi Arabia built on that legacy with the help of transplants from all over the globe.

The Middle East remains a confluence of cuisines, and in this issue – my first as editor in chief of *Condé Nast Traveller Middle East* – we're celebrating the way we eat today. Vidya Balachander brings us along on an ambitious quest to explore some of the UAE's unsung eating enclaves, Salma Serry visits Cairo's hippest cafés to see how Egyptian street food is evolving, and Nicola Chilton meets with the visionaries championing sustainable farming in Dubai. Farther afield, Katie Silcox tips us off to a new supper club bringing authentic Syrian home cooking to Athens, and digital editor Alice Holtham feasts on Ibiza's more wholesome side.

For many of us, the last year and a half was spent trying to slake our wanderlust by re-creating flavours from past travels in the familiarity of our home kitchens. Now, as we start to venture out into the world again, I hope you'll savour this issue and find inspiration for your next epicurean escape.

Sahtein,

SARAH KHAN Editor in Chief

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