

# 8 of the BEST

## FOODIE EXPERIENCES

Tempt clients to taste the Middle East with a foodie experience, writes **Katie McGonagle**

**1** he foods and flavours of the Middle East have been slowly working their way onto our dining tables in recent years, thanks in no small part to Yotam Ottolenghi, the Israeli chef who's credited for proving vegetarian food really can be delicious.

Whether you've feasted on falafel during Veganuary, swapped sugar for the natural sweetness of dates, or sprinkled za'atar and sumac on your supper to liven it up, you're bang on trend – but the people in this region have been eating this way for centuries. Here's how to get your clients closer to these tasty ingredients with some of the best foodie experiences in the Middle East.



### EAT YOUR WAY AROUND JORDAN

Forget fine dining – the best food is always what ordinary folk eat, and that's just what clients will get when they visit a women-run cafe in Jerash, one of the 'highlights' on National Geographic Journeys' Explore Jordan tour. Travel 2 product and commercial executive Jennifer Watson says: "With any trip to the Middle East, food is an essential element and this tour is a great introduction to the local delights. An exclusive highlight is preparing your own traditional Jordanian meal with a lively group of women at Beit Khayrat Souf. The cafe is run and managed by women seeking financial independence and is just one of G Adventures' G for Good programmes around the world."

**Book it:** Travel 2 can package up the eight-day Explore Jordan tour with flights from Heathrow on September 19, from £1,889 per person. [travel2.com](http://travel2.com)



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### LEARN TO COOK IN JERUSALEM

The Israeli capital is known for its religious landmarks and ancient archaeological sites, but in between all that history and culture, there's also an exciting food scene worth discovering. That's why Cox & Kings has chosen the city for its new foodie short break, which starts with a tour of its bustling *shuk* (market), Mahane Yehuda, led by a local chef. That's followed by a cooking workshop and a day exploring the city's foodie highlights, and an excursion into the rural Jerusalem Hills to visit a goat's cheese farm, winery and brewery.

**Book it:** Cox & Kings' four-night foodie trip stays at the five-star American Colony Hotel, with flights, private transfers and activities, from £2,495. [coxandkings.co.uk](http://coxandkings.co.uk)



PICTURES: Dima Cabral; Benemac; David Berridge; Eatenal Zest; G Adventures

### HAVE A DECADENT BRUNCH IN DUBAI

This expat heaven is famed for its Friday brunches, signalling the start of the weekend with no-holds-barred affairs of unlimited indulgence. Some of the best are at Atlantis The Palm, a resort already known for top-notch dining, but that really comes into its own for this weekly feast. Choose from non-stop drinks and dancing with a DJ soundtrack at Saffron's party brunch, sushi and sake at World of Nobu, or cooking classes and kids' activities at Gordon Ramsay's Bread Street Kitchen & Bar.

**Book it:** Emirates Holidays offers a three-night stay in an Ocean Room with complimentary upgrade to half-board and flights from Gatwick from £869. Brunch costs £113 at Saffron, £124 at Nobu and £75 at Bread Street Kitchen, all including drinks. [emiratesholidays.com](http://emiratesholidays.com)

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### DINE OUT IN DOHA

Dubai isn't the only spot where international hotel brands, world-class chefs and an appetite for quality dining converge to create some truly outstanding eating. If Only's Arabia product and commercial manager, Susan Greenhorn, recommends The St Regis Doha for its varied dining, with no fewer than 10 restaurants, including big-name brands such as Gordon Ramsay and Hakkasan, plus the option to have the chef prepare a private in-room meal. She says: "The St Regis Doha Grand Brunch would definitely be my top choice for a Friday brunch, with 16 food stations, nine liquid bars and live entertainment. What's more, if you have a taste for A-list eateries, the hotel also boasts the prestigious Opal by Gordon Ramsay, home to the largest sommelier's selection in Doha."

**Book it:** If Only offers four nights' half-board at The St Regis Doha from £1,019, including private transfers and taxes, flying with Qatar Airways on May 7. [ifonly.net](http://ifonly.net)







# Discover Ajman

*Experience the emirate's natural beauty*

Ajman is a new and exciting destination in the Middle East, with so much to offer your customers. The emirate is located just 30 minutes from Dubai airport and is full of cultural attractions, nature and wildlife, a variety of activities and sports, and much more. The range of accommodation on offer, as well as its small size and great value for money, makes it an enticing new destination.

Ajman is bursting with natural beauty. From its beaches to its mangroves, there are many places to explore nature and wildlife.

Al Zorah nature reserve is a great place to start. Home to an unspoilt environment and about 60 species of bird, the nature reserve showcases Ajman's natural beauty at its finest. It's also where you can find the

## WIN A trip to Ajman!

You could win one of five places on a fam trip to Ajman in September, in partnership with Travel 2 and Emirates. Each qualifying booking you make with Travel 2 & Emirates until June 30 will be entered into a prize draw. One booking = one entry, so make as many as you can. We will announce the winners in *Travel Weekly!* For terms and conditions, visit [comp.travelweekly.co.uk/discoverajman](http://comp.travelweekly.co.uk/discoverajman)

**TRAVEL2**



famous resident flamingos. The best way to really experience the nature reserve is by taking to the water in a canoe or kayak. Your customers can also embark on a guide-led tour of the nature reserve, and there's even the chance to do it at night where visitors can see the mangroves sparkle under the moonlight.

Ajman's beauty stretches all the way up to the coastline. The emirate boasts natural beaches, with soft white sand and bright blue waters. Many hotels also have their own private beaches, where your customers can relax and take in the magnificent views of the Arabian Gulf.

### BOOK IT

Three nights at the 5\* Fairmont Ajman, on a bed & breakfast basis, costs from £489 per person, based on two people sharing, including flights from Gatwick

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## DESTINATIONS

FOODIE HOLIDAYS | MIDDLE EAST

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### EAT BRUNCH ON THE BEACH IN RAS AL KHAIMAH

Take freshly shucked oysters and lavish platters of seafood, standout views over the Arabian Gulf, a cocktail bar on the beach and a DJ-run after-brunch party, and you've got the recipe for the hugely popular Barefoot Brunch at Al Hamra beach at the Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah. It has just resumed for the season and takes place from 1pm-4pm on the second and fourth Friday of each month.

**Book it:** Prices start at £62 including soft drinks, £83 with beer and wine, or £95 adding spirits and cocktails. Lead-in rates at the hotel start from £591 per room based on two sharing. [ritzcarlton.com](http://ritzcarlton.com)

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### GO WINE TASTING IN ISRAEL

It doesn't get much better than a tasting at a family-run winery – except, perhaps, when the winemaker doubles up as a chocolatier and can combine two of your foodie clients' favourite indulgences. Tishbi Winery, an hour's drive north of Tel Aviv, produces a range of wines including sweet and kosher varieties, along with a host of pastries, chocolates and wine preserves, and serves them up with a menu showcasing some of the best Israeli cuisine at the on-site Zichron Restaurant.

**Book it:** Cyplon can include a Tishbi Winery visit on tailor-made Israel holidays, from \$12 per person for a wine tasting, and \$17 for wine and chocolate. [cyplon.co.uk](http://cyplon.co.uk)



## DESTINATIONS

### MIDDLE EAST | FOODIE HOLIDAYS



#### BEST OF THE REST

**Dine by the Dubai Fountain**  
Views don't get much better than from the Amal restaurant at the Armani Hotel, set in the Burj Khalifa and overlooking downtown Dubai. Be sure to book ahead for dinner to see the fountain and light show at night.

**Authentic eats in Ajman**  
Leave flash hotel restaurants behind for Emirati favourites at Ajman restaurant Qdeemek & Ndeemk, which features cardamom-infused omelette *balaleet*, spicy chickpea dish *dangaw* and date syrup-covered doughnuts known as *luqaimat*.

**Offshore indulgence**  
The QE2 is more than just another Dubai brunch. This elaborate feast is made up of nearly 200 dishes ranging from Indian curries and British roasts to artisan cheese and live cooking stations.

**Sweet treats in Abu Dhabi**  
Families will love the 'freakshakes' – extravagant milkshakes topped with M&Ms, chocolate cookies, lollipops or even an entire slice of cake – at Black Tap in Yas Mall.

#### EAT WITH A FAMILY IN AMMAN

Dining in local restaurants is as close as many visitors get to experiencing traditional dishes in an authentic atmosphere, but book your culture-hungry customers on an escorted tour and they'll get to delve even deeper by meeting local people and even eating with them at home. One of the Be My Guest experiences on Trafalgar's Jordan tour is to dine with the Khzoz family in their home in Amman. Guests will arrive to find the fragrances of *sawani dija* (chicken stew) and *maglobeh* (a rich rice dish cooked on the stove then flipped upside down to be served) filling the house, then sit down to hear stories of Jordanian life, while enjoying a delicious family meal. It's sure to be one of the most memorable moments of their visit.

**Book it:** The meal is included on the second day of Trafalgar's six-day Jordan Experience tour, which starts at £1,195 including hotel accommodation, some meals and in-country transport. Flights not included. [trafalgar.com](http://trafalgar.com)

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#### GO LOCAL IN MUSCAT

Oman is known for its fine hotels and with them, fine dining, whether you want a swish afternoon tea at Al Bustan Palace or seafood by the sea on a private beach at The Chedi Muscat. So far, so sophisticated, but if your clients want a slice of real life as well, send them on a city tour of Muscat to see the local fish and vegetable markets, and take a stroll around the souks. Across the road is traditional restaurant Bait Al Luban, set in a 140-year-old guesthouse, where the decor is as authentic as the dining and the view overlooks the national museum – it's an ideal place to refuel between sightseeing stops.

**Book it:** Viator offers a half-day private city tour visiting the markets along with the Grand Mosque, Mutrah Souk and Al Alam Palace, from £149. [viator.com](http://viator.com)



PICTURE: shutterstock