



## Fresh from the kitchen Sandra Phinney

# The friendly pleasures of the Middle East

**J**ordan. A word that is both romantic and mysterious, but because Jordan is located in the Middle East, it also conjures up images of war, strife, and issues of safety. So Jordanians find themselves in a tough neighbourhood, as reports from Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq frequently paint a disquieting picture in this part of the world. Lucky for me, however, I discovered first-hand that Jordan is as safe as my hometown, when I was invited on a press trip. The journey was to celebrate the inaugural direct flight from Montreal to Amman, and to discover the lure of this magical country.

The capital city, Amman, is cosmopolitan and full of contrasts. Modern buildings are located within yards of ancient temples, Roman theatres, and stunning Mosques—one grand cultural mosaic. I especially loved the old shopping district call the souq and the colorful food market there. Older folks were a bit shy but the young

guys were, err, entertaining (and flirtatious) and loved having their pictures taken so they could see themselves on the LCD monitor.

Throughout the two week journey, I often roamed off on my own and continuously heard, "Welcome to Jordan!" One day I stepped into a small side shop where an old man was selling everything from tea pots, to rope, soap and second-hand men's jackets. With a big smile he bid me to come to the rear of his shop and proceeded to pour me a glass of Shaai (incredibly sweet black tea). We then had a great chat getting by with sign language and body motions.

Another day I entered a ladies dress shop to get out of the sun and also to

find the cost of traditional garments like a Mudraga. The store owner and assistant (two young men) were eating lunch:

hummus drizzled with olive oil and laced with Zatar, (a mixture of ground oregano, thyme, sumac, salt and dried lemon), a big jar of homemade goat cheese balls in oil, and large rounds of Khubez (similar to pita bread) which they used instead of utensils. Instantly I was offered a chair and food. Saying "no" was out of the question.

This kind of generosity is the norm here rather than the exception.

Jordanians are kind, soft spoken, respectful and have a gentle sense of humour. Women are a bit shy; men like to tease. They all have dancing eyes. And they are fiercely proud of their country and eager for people to visit.

*The food in Jordan is beyond wonderful. We chopped, diced, mixed, cooked and ate our way through a dozen traditional Jordanian dishes.*

### Magical days and nights

There were many highlights including off-roading in jeeps in the Wadi Rum desert, where *Lawrence of Arabia* was filmed, later spending the night in a camel hair tent. For dinner, we ate a traditional Bedouin meal called Zarp—buried lamb that's cooked in a pit in the sand. We dined around a blazing fire and danced like fools while Bedouins played stringed instruments and I drank Qahweh (Turkish coffee) way past my bedtime.

Another highlight was spending time in Petra—recently declared one of the seven new wonders of the world—often described as "a rose-red city half as old as time". One evening, we experienced "Petra by night", an hour's walk into the

siq, the way lit by 1,800 candles. Upon arrival we were offered Shaai and Qahweh then listened to a Bedouin chant while playing a Rahab (single stringed instrument), followed by another chap who roamed around playing plaintive tunes on a simple tin flute. Sitting on carpets spread on the sand along the entrance to the Treasury, we drank in the night. It was exquisite. Sacred.

Of course, the food in Jordan is beyond wonderful. We spent time at "The Petra Kitchen" in Wadi Musa, under the guidance of a chef and some local women. We chopped, diced, mixed, cooked and ate our way through a dozen traditional Jordanian dishes including Magloubet which means "upside-down". It was a chicken/rice dish made in a very large pot, then literally dumped upside down onto a huge platter. Quite dramatic—and delicious! (Included in the recipes below, all from The Petra Kitchen.)

We also managed to visit Mount Nebo where Moses saw the Promised Land, Bethany on the Jordan where archaeologists have determined that Christ was baptized, the ancient city of Jerash, and the famous "City of Mosaics" in Madaba. We snorkeled in the Gulf of Aqaba (Red Sea) and covered ourselves in black healing mud 300 kilometres north at the Dead Sea, then floated like corks in the deepest hypersaline lake in the world. And that's just part of our trip.

I yearn to go back to this amazing land. By the way, a woman who was on this trip organizes culinary tours and she now includes Jordan. The cooking lessons are at The Petra Kitchen. Contact me for more information! E-mail through [editor@theatlanticco-operator.coop](mailto:editor@theatlanticco-operator.coop)

### Magloubet

3 lb eggplants	4 C water
3 lb cauliflower	1 tsp salt
1 lb chicken or beef or lamb cut in chunks	1/2 C pine nuts
1 1/2 C long grain rice washed and drained	1/4 C butter to brown the pine nuts
1/2 tsp cinnamon	1/2 tsp paprika
2 1/2 C oil	1/2 tsp saffron

Cut eggplants and cauliflower into 1/2 in. chunks. Fry in hot oil until golden brown then drain. Cook meat and seasoning in the water, covered about 40 min. Remove meat. Brown pine nuts. In a large pot, sprinkle a tablespoon of rice on the bottom; place meat cubes on top; arrange eggplant and cauliflower over/around the meat; add the rest of the rice. Gently pour the hot broth into the pot. Cover and cook on low heat for 40 min. Invert over a large serving dish. Garnish with pine nuts.

### Galaya Bandura

8 tomatoes, finely chopped	1/4 C pine nuts
1/4 C olive oil	1 tsp. salt
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped	

Sauté pine nuts in the oil until light brown; then remove from oil. Now sauté garlic in the oil until light brown. Add tomatoes, salt and boil for 5 min., stirring constantly. Reduce heat and simmer 15 min. Pour in shallow serving dish and garnish with pine nuts.

### Shourbat Adas (Lentil Soup)

1 C brown lentils	1/4 C olive oil
6 C water	1 onion, finely chopped
1/2 tsp. salt	1/2 C parsley, finely chopped
1/2 tsp. cumin	croutons for garnish
dash of pepper	

Rinse lentils and drain. Place in pot with water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for half hour. Remove from heat; strain and puree, returning to broth in pot and mix. Add cumin, salt and pepper. Brown onion and add. Cook over medium heat 5 more min. Garnish with parsley and croutons and serve.

### Arabic Salad

2 large tomatoes	1 C parsley
1 green pepper	1 tsp. salt
1 C mint	1/4 C lemon juice
2 medium-size cucumbers	

Chop vegetables and herbs finely and mix. Add lemon juice and salt. Mix again.

### Salatat Khyar (Cucumber and Yoghurt Salad)

4 cucumbers	1 tablespoon salt
5 garlic cloves, crushed	sprinkle of dried mint
2 lb (1 kg) yoghurt	

Peel cucumbers and slice thinly. Put yoghurt in bowl, add everything and mix well.



Galaya Bandura, Lentil Soup, Arabic Salad and Salatat Khyar (Yoghurt Salad) are just a few of the exquisite dishes offered up at The Petra Kitchen