



HODEMA'S HOTTEST F&B TRENDS FOR 2016



What's on the menu for the coming year? **Toufic Akl**, partner handling operations at Hodema consulting services reveals their annual hospitality predictions

From the newest ingredients to the latest concepts, food trucks to traditional dishes, the industry is geared to serve up ideas to keep menus fresh. The Middle East region has never really been a trend setter in the global Food and Beverage sector. What's fashionable to eat and drink is traditionally imported from United States or Europe, but to a certain extent, this is changing, with Arab entrepreneurs entering the industry with new concepts. Arabs love to eat in generous quantities so Western food trends are not always a success in the region. "Nouvelle-cuisine", mini-sized dishes or genetically modified foods for instance are in contradiction with the local culture and thus never made it in this market. Also, consumers increasingly communicate their thoughts about food, drinks or service quality through social media. Ultimately, they have a big say in the success or failure of a new food trend or concept.

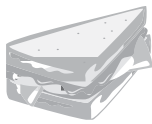


Smartphone applications

With more and more people using smartphones, restaurants and bars are increasingly developing applications to target their customers. Applications using geolocation and a user-friendly platform are particularly effective to encourage delivery services. Other must-haves include online reservation, pre-orders and customer feedback. Zomato and Talabat.com are famous illustrations of this trend.

Food trucks

As in other parts of the world, mobile restaurants are starting to be a hit in the region. This trend, which started with ice cream trucks in the United States, then evolved to music festivals and large companies, is now increasingly famous in Arab cities such as Beirut, with Classic Burger trucks, Kuwait with the Nomad Kitchen and Dubai with Moti Roti. The idea is to buy a simple truck equipped to cook and sell food in different parts of the city. This allows professionals to offer a limited menu to a targeted population. Food trucks are offering fast-food as well as gourmet meals.



Road food

Road food is a higher version of street food. Simple dishes remain but the quality of ingredients, decor and atmosphere is upgraded. This trend is best represented by "better burgers" – such as Brg. Co, open in Beirut and London – which have been a hit for the past five years and will continue being popular. Upgraded shawarma places such as Shawarmanji and sandwich shops like TSC The Sandwich Company are also developing rapidly.

Fast casual restaurants

Upgraded fast food restaurants are on the rise as they offer healthier food in a comfortable and neat setting. Like in the case of Prêt à Manger in Europe, fast casual restaurants are highly branded establishments where clients are offered a quick and affordable meal with limited service. Such outlets are still rare in the Middle East but they are surely a fast developing trend.



Coffee

The coffee consumption being in constant expansion worldwide, more and more coffee shops will open in the region. These outlets serve two

purposes: they offer a variety of coffee based beverages and brand themselves as socializing hangout places in countries where the hot climate encourages people to meet indoors rather than outside. A recent development is to offer high quality coffee and a variety of blends, as well as new roasting and serving techniques such as chemex or aeropress. An example of a successful coffee house concept is Maison Samira Maatouk in Abu Dhabi (opening soon in Beirut).

Healthy food

As in other parts of the world, Middle Eastern customers are increasingly mindful about healthier food, weight loss and food allergies. This results in a return to locally produced ingredients and a change in cooking methods. Fried food for instance is being more and more frowned upon while traditional cooking is valued.



Homegrown concepts

Homegrown concepts based on the country's local cuisine are also often integrating a modern touch in the cooking technique and also original recipe ingredients are proving very successful. Concepts like Tawlet in Beirut, Logma in Dubai or Aseel in Jeddah promote a modern image of their country's cuisine, ie: contemporary design and branding, while remaining loyal to the local traditions.



Functional foods

A functional food or beverage is one that offers higher health benefits, a "superfood" in other words. This trend started with quinoa and other seeds but has recently evolved to include dates; a very popular fruit in the Middle East. 2016 will be the year of date salads and date cakes. On the savory side of things, kelp is the new kale. Kelp ticks all the "functional food boxes": it is packed with protein, off the chart with nutrients and encourages eco-friendly sea vegetable farming.



Juice bars

Juice has always been a celebrated beverage in the Middle East. Today, the juice industry is growing fast thanks to its health and wellbeing connotation. As a result, juices moved from being served in basic street shacks and carts to a complete health-oriented concept such as Juice Up in Lebanon or Jamba Juice in Dubai. These venues partly owe their success to the fact that they serve traditional squeezed fruits but also squeezed vegetables, plants and high protein or "detox" beverages.