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FOOD AND BEVERAGE TRENDS



Toufic Akl, partner at Hodema consulting services, predicts what will be hot in F&B in 2018

First let's take a look at this year's fads. We witnessed an upsurge in protein dishes against carbs, an increased focus on quality ingredients and the boom of kale. We also saw the success of a more unlikely trend, that of blue drinks. Inspired by cocktails made with curaçao, fans of blue hues took it to another level by adding blue wine to the menu. We salute their efforts, although we doubt the trend will last. So what does 2018 have in store for us?

Breakfast redefined

Let's start with what comes first: the morning meal. With its key ingredients of avocados, toasts, yogurt, fruits and granolas, among others, hitting an all-time high in popularity, breakfast is well and truly enjoying the limelight, to the extent that its serving times have been extended to pretty much anytime. Bakeries and cafés are thus diversifying their offerings, with greater use of eggs, fruits and cereals, and incorporating more protein-based ingredients on their menus to offer us breakfast at any time of the day. IHOP in the US and Paul in France were the pioneers for concepts across our region such as Dubai's The Sum of Us, Kuwait's The Breakfast Club and Beirut's newest creative concept, The Sage Parlour, which will open in early 2018.

On the veg of glory

The ever-growing demand for healthier food is also fueling our love for vegetables. An analysis of Pinterest users' habits suggests that people's ideas of traditional comfort food have shifted from dishes such as fried chicken or a combo of burger and fries toward vegetarian and vegan dishes. The word 'veggies'

in Pinterest comfort food searches rose 336 percent in the last year, while lasagna, macaroni and stroganoff were at 69 percent, 55 percent and 50 percent respectively. Vegetables are undoubtedly taking center stage, sometimes enlivened by proteins. If you haven't yet tasted the 'Cauliflower with Shawarma' at Baron in Beirut, make a booking today!

“ People now want to know what has gone into a dish, and how the food was processed ”

'Free from' temptation

Our plates are going green, and, while not new, the trend is getting greener by the day. Smoothies, bread made with ancient grains, cereal bars with seeds, plant milks... natural ingredients are on a roll! So 'free' will definitely be 2018's key trend. Alongside free from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and conservatives, people are now also asking for gluten-free, dairy-free and refined-sugar-free meals. While diners with allergies have long been hardcore supporters of these trends, a growing number of people are converting to the 'free from' diet. Almond, coconut and rice are becoming substitutes for traditional flours and milk-based produces. Raw honey and brown rice syrup are slowly replacing refined sugar. In this quest for health, newbies are joining the superfood club. Today is all about turmeric, an ancient Indian spice with a powerful and bioactive medicinal compound called curcuma that aids the digestive system. There's also a newcomer in the baking hood - cassava flour, widely used in parts of Asia and South America, is both gluten and grain-free. And let's not forget the chaga mushroom, currently considered the most nutrient-dense mushrooms on the planet. Their antioxidant components make them the ultimate immune-boosting superfood, while additional properties help normalize blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

When it comes to beverages, in the coming year, we'll be raising our glasses to charcoal-infused drinks, which help the body get rid of unwanted substances and toxins. Charcoal also gives hot and cold drinks a darker twist, as can be seen in creations such as the Black lemonade or Goth latte, which are sure to be talking points at the bar or around the table.



Responsible sourcing

Ethical eating is also playing a part in improving our health. While we never really used to think about the former life of that steak on our plate, our attitude toward the origins of what we eat has changed drastically. People now want to know what has gone into a dish, and how the food was processed. These demands come with growing social awareness. For example, customers are asking what a restaurant is doing to help the local community when procuring its ingredients or whether the supplier is respecting the products used and the environment.

A taste of Hawaii

Alongside growing requests for healthy options in restaurants and supermarkets, there are also some exciting new trends on the horizon for 2018, including the poke bowl. Fans of Hawaii will already be in the know about this concept, but for



us amateurs, the poke is a raw fish salad, traditionally served with salmon, tuna or octopus. Sushi outlets have claimed ownership of the dish, but poke bowls can also be found in restaurants serving international cuisine. Poke bowls are an easy alternative to meat, come in various flavors and are fast to prepare, all of which contribute to their growing popularity.

“The latest fad is going to come from above, in the form of drones that are set to become your new deliveryman”

Eating out at home

The wave of ‘no-seat’ restaurants is also being ridden by caterers and home chefs. Caterers such as Nicolas Audi Catering in Beirut offer full meals that can be delivered to offices or homes, whether you’re hosting a big reception or just having a few friends

over. Home chefs are usually individuals with a passion for cooking and often specialize in a specific ethnic cuisine or cakes and pastries, like ‘Petites choses’ by Yasmine Idriss Tannir in Dubai. No-seat restaurants, otherwise known as catering businesses, benefit from reduced occupational costs, including low or no rent, a smaller payroll since there is no service personnel, and don’t require large, upfront investments.

Apps on the menu

For those who don’t have the time or inclination to cook every now and then, an increasingly wide array of mobile applications (apps) means that satisfying those hunger pangs is easier than ever before. Zomato, Ubereats, Zaatar W Zeit and more are now just a click away, whether you’re on your sofa or at your desk. However, the latest fad is going to come from above, in the form of drones that are set to become your new deliveryman. Google is teaming up with

Chipotle to test burrito deliveries and Domino’s pizza drones have already started operating in New Zealand. The question of who will be handling the drone traffic control center has yet to be answered.

Instagrammable

And finally, one last word for trend lovers. Whatever you eat and wherever you eat it, don’t forget to share it on social media. Instagram is now where everything happens. Customers are posting their best eating and drinking experiences there, thus challenging restaurants to not only offer a great taste, but to also have an ‘Instagram worthy’ presentation for their meals, drinks and venue. On top of being an efficient advertising and reviewing tool, Instagram enables us to learn about new trends in the blink of an eye.

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