

Moroccan Cuisine

Moroccan cuisine is influenced by Morocco's interactions and exchanges with other cultures and nations over the centuries. Moroccan cuisine is typically a mix of Berber, Arabic, Andalusian, and Mediterranean cuisines with slight European and sub-Saharan influences.

Ingredients

Morocco produces a large range of Mediterranean fruits, vegetables and even some tropical ones. Common meats include beef, goat, mutton and lamb, chicken and seafood, which serve as a base for the cuisine. Characteristic flavourings include lemon pickle, argan oil, cold-pressed, unrefined olive oil and dried fruits. As in Mediterranean cuisine in general, the staple ingredients include wheat, used for bread and couscous, and olive oil; the third Mediterranean staple, the grape, is eaten as a dessert, though a certain amount of wine is made in the country.

Flavourings

Spices are used extensively in Moroccan food. Although some spices have been imported to Morocco through the Arabs for thousands of years, many ingredients – like saffron from Talaousine, mint and olives from Meknes, and oranges and lemons from Fes – are home-grown, and are being exported internationally. Common spices include cinnamon, cumin, turmeric, ginger, paprika, coriander, saffron, mace, cloves, fennel, anise, nutmeg, cayenne pepper, fenugreek, caraway, black pepper and sesame seeds. Twenty-seven spices are combined for the famous Moroccan spice mixture *ras el hanout*.

Common herbs in Moroccan cuisine include mint, parsley, coriander, oregano, peppermint, marjoram, verbena, sage and bay laurel.

Structure of Meals

A typical lunch meal begins with a series of hot and cold salads, followed by a Tagine or Dwaz. Often, for a formal meal, a lamb or chicken dish is next, or couscous topped with meat and vegetables. Moroccans either eat with fork, knife and spoon or with their hands, using bread as a utensil depending on the dish served. The consumption of pork and alcohol is uncommon due to religious restrictions.

Main dishes

The main Moroccan dish most people are familiar with is couscous, the old national delicacy. Beef is the most commonly eaten red meat in Morocco, usually eaten in a tagine with a wide selection of vegetables. Chicken is also very commonly used in tagines, or roasted.

Lamb is also heavily consumed, and since Moroccan sheep breeds store most of their fat in their tails, Moroccan lamb does not have the pungent flavour that Western lamb and mutton have.

Since Morocco lies on two coasts, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, Moroccan cuisine has ample seafood dishes. European pilchard is caught in large but declining quantities. Other fish species include mackerel, anchovy, sardinella, and horse mackerel.

Other famous Moroccan dishes are *Pastilla* (also spelled *Basteeya* or *Bestilla*), *Tanjia* and *Harira*, a typical heavy soup, eaten during winter to warm up and is usually served for dinner. It is typically eaten with plain bread or with dates during the month of Ramadan. *Bissara* is a broad bean-based soup that is also consumed during the colder months of the

year.

A big part of the daily meal is bread. Bread in Morocco is principally made from durum wheat semolina known as *Khobz*. Bakeries are very common throughout Morocco and fresh bread is a staple in every city, town and village. The most common is whole grain coarse ground or white flour bread or baguettes. There are also a number of flat breads and pulled unleavened pan-fried breads.

In addition, there are dried salted meats and salted preserved meats such as *Khlea* and *G'did* (basically sheep bacon), which are used to flavour tagines or used in “*el rghaif*”, a folded savoury Moroccan pancake.

Salads

Salads include both raw and cooked vegetables, served either hot or cold. Cold salads include *zaalouk*, an aubergine and tomato mixture, and *taktouka* (a mixture of tomatoes, smoked green peppers, garlic and spices) characteristic of the cities of Taza and Fes, in the Atlas. Another cold salad is called *Bakoula*, or *Khoubiza*. It consists of braised mallow leaves, but can also be made with spinach or arugula, with parsley, cilantro, lemon, olive oil and olives.

Desserts

Usually, seasonal fruits rather than cooked desserts are served at the close of a meal. A common dessert is *kaab el ghzal* (gazelle ankles), a pastry stuffed with almond paste and topped with sugar. Another is “*Halwa chebakia*”, pretzel-shaped dough deep-fried, soaked in honey and sprinkled with sesame seeds; it is eaten during the month of Ramadan. Coconut fudge cakes, “*Zucre Coco*”, are popular also.

Seafood

Morocco is endowed with over 3000 km of coastline. There is an abundance of fish in these coastal waters with the sardine being commercially significant as Morocco is the world's largest exporter. Sardines were used in the production of garum in Lixus.

At Moroccan fish markets one can find sole, swordfish, tuna, tarbot, mackerel, shrimp, conger eel, skate, red snapper, spider crab, lobster and a variety of mollusks.

In Moroccan cuisine, seafood is incorporated into, among others: *tajines*, *bastille*, *briwat*, and *paella*.

Drinks

The most popular drink is green tea with mint. Traditionally, making good mint tea in Morocco is considered an art form and the drinking of it with friends and family is often a daily tradition. The pouring technique is as crucial as the quality of the tea itself. Moroccan tea pots have long, curved spouts and this allows the tea to be poured evenly into tiny glassed from a height. For the best taste, glassed are filled in two stages. The Moroccans traditionally like tea with bubbles, so while pouring they hold the teapot high above the glasses. Finally, the tea is accompanied with hard sugar cones or lumps. Morocco has an abundance of oranges and tangerines, so fresh orange juice is easily found freshly squeezed and is cheap.

Snacks and Fast Food

Selling fast food in the street has long been a tradition, and the best example is Djemaa el Fna square in Marrakesh. Starting in the 1980s, new snack restaurants started serving

“Bocadillo” (a Spanish word for a sandwich). Though the composition of a bocadillo varied by region, it is usually a baguette filled with salad and a choice of meats, Mozzarella, fish (usually tuna), or omelette.

Dairy product shops locally called Mhlaba, are very prevalent all around the country. Those dairy stores generally offer all types of dairy products, juices, and local delicacies such as Bocadillos, Msemen and Harcha.

Another popular street food in Morocco is the snails, which are served in their stew in small bowls and eaten using a toothpick.

In the late 1990s, several multinational fast-food franchises opened restaurants in major cities.