

To my mother

Street food

The heart of
Mediterranean
Cooking
Simona El-Harar

“I grew up with street food and it is in my blood. There is something special about the way a smell can draw you to a place. You can then directly see what people are preparing and your mouth starts to water.”

There is no real definition of street food, other than the obvious: it is eaten on the street. It has a very long history and almost certainly predates restaurants. When they excavated Pompeii, they found evidence of many street food vendors. As for the food itself, it is as varied as any type of sit-down restaurant food. However, it is possible to say what street food is not. It is not fine dining. It is not meant to be. It can be beautiful to look at but it is essentially designed to be eaten quite quickly and possibly on the move.

Street food is, of course, found all over the world. From fish and chips eaten in newspapers in the UK to pizza in Italy, a hot dog at a ball game in the US, or crab meat omelettes in Thailand. This book focuses mainly on recipes from the Levant and the Mediterranean but in some respects, street food, wherever it is from, has a few common characteristics. The food needs to be packed with flavour and needs to appeal to your senses through smell and colour.

Often, the menu at good street food vendors is limited. They might only prepare one dish but this is part of the pleasure and it can be a good sign that they know what they are doing. I would avoid like the plague a street food vendor that boasts sushi, pizza, and burgers (these really exist) as I am looking for something much more authentic.

Whether it is just a hole in the wall serving one specialised dish or an elaborate bakery, the principle is the same. You smell, you see, you buy, and then you eat. No fine crockery or damask tablecloths, street food is directly about the eating experience. You choose the table on which the food is eaten, whether that means a park bench or a sunny beach.

One aspect of street food that gives me the greatest pleasure is eating something with my hands. That is part of the beauty of street food, no need to be precious about it. It should taste great but it doesn't have to be 'Instagram perfect'.

Israel is a country that brings so many different cultures together and each one carries its food with it. This book gathers recipes from Yemen, Turkey, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, and many others that are all present in the diverse melting pot that is Israel. While putting together recipes for this book, it became clear that different regions very often have slightly different ways of making a similar dish. I have tried to keep these recipes as simple as possible so that you can experience the street food vibe in your own home. These recipes are some of my favourites for you to share with others.

Simona El-Harar

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Vegetarian



Condiments and snacks



Fish



Meat



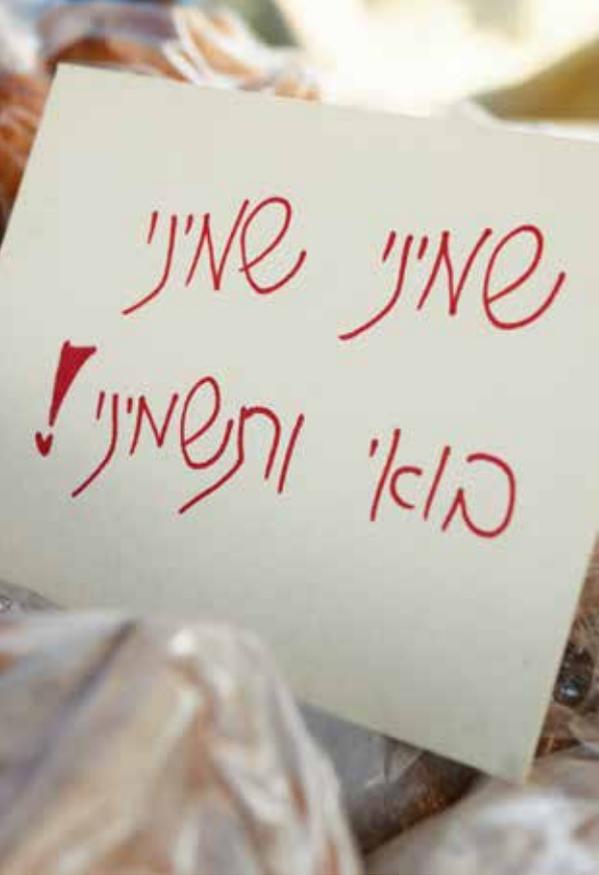
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Falafels

Falafels are perhaps the first thing that everyone associates with Middle Eastern street food. What is not to like? Perfect for vegetarians and meat-eaters alike, these crispy, crunchy balls of deliciousness are really easy to make. There is one important rule and that is you can't make good falafel with tinned chickpeas; so plan ahead and soak the chickpeas overnight.



18

30 min + overnight soaking

+ 1h rest

200 g dried chickpeas,
soaked overnight

1 large bunch of parsley

**1 large bunch of fresh
coriander**

1 small green chilli pepper

3 cloves of garlic

1 tsp cumin

1 tsp salt

½ tsp ground cardamom

Juice of half a lemon

½ tsp baking soda

Sunflower oil for frying

1. Soak the dried chickpeas overnight. Make sure there is at least 5 cm of water above the chickpeas so that they have enough water to soak up.
2. The next day, drain the chickpeas and rinse with cold water. Roughly chop the parsley, coriander, green chilli, and garlic cloves.
3. Put the chickpeas, parsley, coriander, chilli, garlic, cumin, salt, cardamom, lemon juice, and baking soda in a food processor and pulse a few times until the texture is that of coarse sand. You do not want the texture to be too fine.
4. In a large bowl start to pack the mix together. Cover and refrigerate for about 1h. This will help the mix to bind together when you fry them.
5. Heat about 8 cm of oil in a large pan over moderate heat. Take the chickpea mix and form them into balls about the size of a golf ball. You will want to squeeze the mix together quite firmly to prevent the balls from breaking up.
6. Gently place the prepared balls into the hot oil, which should be around 180°C: test the oil temperature by putting a little of the mix into it. It should immediately start bubbling. Cook until the balls are turning a golden brown.

Serve with a salad of your choice, tahini (see page 35), and Harissa (see page 98).

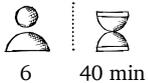






Sabich

This is truly a classic street food recipe, which has its origins in Iraqi cuisine. One of my favourite things to do is to walk in Tel Aviv's streets because there are so many places that serve Sabich. There is something about the combination of ingredients in this dish that creates a perfect balance. The soft hummus, sautéed potatoes, Amba, Zhug, and grilled aubergines all complement each other perfectly. It is like a savoury version of the vanilla ice cream, peaches, and raspberry coulis that make up a Peach Melba. The flavours seem to give you a warm embrace. There are so many different variations of this dish but this is my way of making it. You can either serve it in pitta bread or present it on a plate with bread to accompany.



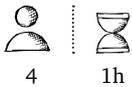
6 eggs
2 large potatoes
2 large aubergines
2 tbsp olive oil
1 portion of hummus
(see page 24)
1 tsp Amba (see page 118)
1 tsp Zhug (see page 70)
Tahini (see page 35)
1 sliced lemon
3 pieces of pitta bread
Salt

1. Put the eggs in a pan of cold water and bring to the boil. Boil for about 7 minutes and then transfer them into a bowl of cold water. When they are cold, peel and cut in halves.
2. Peel the potatoes and then parboil for about 10 minutes. Drain and leave to cool.
3. Slice the aubergines into slices about 2 cm thick. Slice the cooled potatoes into slices about 1 cm thick.
4. Pour a little olive oil into a large frying pan and heat over medium heat. Put in the potato and aubergine slices and fry gently until they are golden brown. You may need to do this in more than one batch depending on the size of your frying pan.
5. When the potatoes and aubergines are nicely browned, remove them from the pan and drain them on kitchen paper.
6. To compose the Sabich, cut the pitta bread in half and then open each half with a sharp knife to create a pocket.
7. Start by putting about two dessert spoons of hummus into the pocket and spread it around the inside of the bread. Next, put all the rest of the ingredients: fried potatoes, aubergines, Amba, Zhug, hard-boiled eggs, and Tahini. Finish with a slice of lemon.



Aubergine Burgers

I love vegetarian burgers but some recipes require quite a lot of preparation. This recipe is so easy that it can be made any time you feel a little hungry. For me, the aubergine is one of the best vegetables. The key to getting this recipe right is to cook it slowly and carefully . After trying this, you will never want minced beef in your burger again.



4

1h

2 large aubergines

4 classic burger buns

(or any other bread of your choice)

A few leaves of salad

2 ripe tomatoes

4 tsp harissa (see page 98)

100 ml tahini (see page 35)

50 ml olive oil for basting the aubergines

Sea salt

1. Preheat the oven to 160°C. Depending on how large your aubergines are, you can either cut them in large rings with a thickness of about 4 cm or cut them lengthwise to form a steak of about 8 x 6 x 4 cm. Slice the tomatoes.
2. Line a baking tray and place the aubergine steaks onto it. Brush both sides of the steaks generously with olive oil. Season slightly with sea salt.
3. Place the steaks in the oven for 45 minutes. Every 10 to 15 minutes remove them from the oven, turn them over, and brush again with olive oil. When the aubergine steaks are golden and very soft, remove them from the oven.
4. Cut your burger buns in half and spread harissa paste on each side of the buns. Make your burger with the rest of the ingredients finishing off with the tahini sauce on top. Eat immediately.

Thanks

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