

Traditional Emirati cuisine topped the bill at **Britain's first Halal Food Festival** last weekend when the Australian MasterChef favourite, Amina El Shafei from Saudi Arabia, prepared Igeimat, a traditional Emirati sweet flavoured with saffron



Hakkasan Dubai has a new weekend brunch: **Yum Cha** features a variety of dim sum with two main courses and three kinds of dessert, plus beverages. Friday, noon to 4pm, from Dh278. For reservations, call 04 384 8484



'I can't stop learning just because I'm 88'

For the 88-year-old Hajra Mohammed, age isn't a hurdle. The Bangalore-based grandmum has published her first cookery book to become one of India's oldest first-time writers. Priti Salian reports

Hajra Mohammed opens her eyes every morning to her one-year-old great-grandson's videos on her newly acquired iPad. Mohammed, who turned 88 this year, started picking up computer skills recently with her daughter Nighat's help. She now has a Facebook account in her name where she responds to all recipe requests from friends and relatives all over the world. For a woman of her age who is recovering from an injured back and spending a lot of her time in bed, it is no easy feat.

The Bangalore-based grandma hasn't allowed age to become a hurdle. She published her first book at 85 and became one of the oldest first-time Indian writers.

"It was my determination and my granddaughter's persistence that helped me publish the recipes I learnt and practised to perfection over the years," Mohammed says. Her Dubai-based daughters Tasneem and Nighat Mohammed consider themselves lucky to have grown up on "the world's best food". "Mum is a remarkable woman with an amazing zest for learning. She has the courage to motivate herself with her aches and pains and do what she loves," they say.

Mohammed's first book, *Hajra's Recipes of Life for Life: Delectable Muslim Cooking*, is for those who want a taste of Kutchi Memon cuisine, closely guarded by this Muslim community. A joke that goes about the Kutchi Memons is that even if they are generous enough to share their recipes, they purposely leave

out one or two ingredients. Is that why it took Mohammed so long to decide that she could write a book on a cuisine she has mastered?

"I had the idea of a book 15 years before it got published," she says. It didn't happen until 2010 because a publisher was hard to find. Some feathers were definitely ruffled on the book's release. "Several people from my community were shocked that I revealed so many of our secret cooking rituals and masalas," laughs Mohammed.

But surprisingly, a lot of Kutchi Memons bought her book. Some use it themselves because it is methodically written; others sent it to their children studying abroad because the recipes are easy to follow.

"Our food is not only scrumptious but also healthy. Our biryani, for ex-

ample, is cooked in minimal oil and spices as opposed to a lot of other Indian bryanis," says Mohammed.

As a teenager, cooking was not on Mohammed's mind. When most Indian girls were expected to hone their culinary skills, she enjoyed reading and music. "LPG [liquefied petroleum gas] wasn't available then and my father didn't let me cook with firewood."

Unfortunately for Mohammed, both her parents died when she was still in her teens and she had to move in with her brothers. Her sister-in-law was instrumental in helping her become the expert cook she is today. She got married at 22; when her husband died 10 years later, she was left to bring up three young children all by herself. To eke out a living, she held cooking and baking classes at home and sold handmade dolls to a handicrafts emporium.

Today, she says it is her passion for cooking and learning that has given her the edge.

"The first thing I do is hit a bookshop when I visit a new place, to look at recipe books. An exciting recipe on a TV show finds a way into my diary and is soon tried out in the kitchen," she says. "Love your cooking - put your heart and soul into it to get the best results."

She's excited about publishing her next recipe book, which she plans to call *Hajra's Favourite Recipes*.

"This time, I'll type all the recipes myself," she says with a smile.

Sukha jhinga (Dry spiced prawns)

Serves 4
Ingredients
500g prawns, sliced and deveined
½ cup oil

Marinade
2 tsp garlic paste
2 tsp cumin powder
3 tsp red chilli powder
8 green chillies, finely chopped
4 tbsp finely chopped coriander leaves
Juice of one lemon
Salt to taste

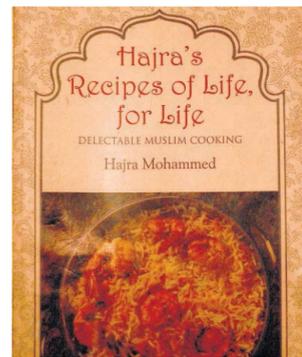
Seasoning
4 tbsp oil
½ tsp cumin seeds
10 curry leaves

Method
1 Wash the prawns and dry them with a clean kitchen towel.

2 Combine the marinade ingredients and rub them into the prawns. Refrigerate for two hours.

3 Heat ½ cup of oil in a pan and fry the marinated prawns for about 3-5 minutes, until they lose their translucency, but remain crunchy.

4 Heat the oil for seasoning in another pan. Add the cumin seeds and curry leaves. Once the cumin seeds crackle, remove from heat and pour the seasoning onto the fried prawns. Serve hot.



Hajra Mohammed, right, and her cookery book, above. Abhinav Chawla

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*truffle specialties



It's truffle month at Armani/Ristorante

Rebecca McLaughlin-Duane visits Armani/Ristorante in Dubai's Burj Khalifa, which is honouring the Italian truffle this month with two new classic and contemporary menus

Rolling out tomorrow, the seven-course offering is the brainchild of the restaurant's head chef, Alessandro Salvatico.

We stepped inside his kitchen for a masterclass on the black and white seasonal treasures. Under his watchful eye, we learnt how to cook seared langoustines with black truffle and the ultimate white truffle risotto.



Seared langoustines with Jerusalem artichoke cream and black truffle

Ingredients For the artichoke cream 500g Jerusalem artichokes 60g shallots Olive oil 1.5l vegetable stock	Method 1 Peel the Jerusalem artichoke and cut into cubes. 2 Dice the shallots, roast in a casserole dish with some olive oil, then add the Jerusalem artichokes. 3 Add the vegetable stock and cook for 30 minutes. 4 Add salt and pour slowly into a blender while hot to obtain a smooth sauce. 5 Cube and sauté the pumpkin with some olive oil, garlic and fresh thyme until	golden brown. 6 Sear the de-shelled, seasoned langoustine quickly with the garlic, thyme and rosemary. 7 In the same pan, sauté some Brussels sprouts leaves until translucent; season to taste. 8 Put some artichoke cream on a plate; place the langoustine, pumpkin and sprout leaves on top. Finish with a dash of chicken stock, olive oil and julienned black truffle.
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For the langoustines 16 pieces of langoustine 15g of black truffle 80g Brussels sprouts 100g pumpkin butternut 10g garlic cloves 30g fresh thyme 30g rosemary 60g chicken juice seasoning: salt and pepper	Method 1 Peel the de-shelled, seasoned langoustine quickly with the garlic, thyme and rosemary. 2 In the same pan, sauté some Brussels sprouts leaves until translucent; season to taste. 3 Put some artichoke cream on a plate; place the langoustine, pumpkin and sprout leaves on top. Finish with a dash of chicken stock, olive oil and julienned black truffle.
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Risotto vialone nano with white truffle

Ingredients 400g Risotto Vialone nano 80g butter 80g Parmesan cheese 20g white truffle 2g white truffle oil 5g thyme 20g olive oil 20g veal jus 100g carrots 100g celery 100g onions 100g broccoli	Method 1 Make a vegetable stock with the carrots, onions and celery. 2 Roast the rice with some olive oil in a casserole pan. 3 Add the stock; constantly stir for 16 minutes for an al dente result. 4 After 11 minutes, slowly add more	stock. Be careful not to overcook the rice. 5 Remove from the hob and incorporate the butter, Parmesan, a pinch of thyme and a drizzle of white truffle oil. 6 Serve with white truffle shavings, truffle oil and a dash of veal jus.
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• Armani/Ristorante's truffle menus will run until the end of November. Chef Alessandro Salvatico will host a gourmet truffle gala dinner on October 15. Truffle masterclasses will be held on Friday and November 8. For reservations and tickets, call 04 888 3888 or visit www.dubai.armanihotels.com