

**In a Class of its Own.**  
Al Mourjan sits on its prime spot on the Doha Corniche (beside the Orry statue).



# Lebanese Delights

**By Cecilia Leigh**  
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**Al Mourjan, home of Lebanese Cuisine and the only restaurant on the Corniche, turns one this year. We dive into a vat of garlicky goodness and check out what's kept them hopping since they opened.**

The best food tastes like your mom made it. And possibly cut the crusts off for you.

So, considering Mohamed Al-Sadek's mom likes his food, it's got to be good.

"She loves it! My mother's an excellent cook herself, and I learnt a lot from her," said Al-Sadek, owner of Al Mourjan. "At home you take care, you take time, to perfect your cooking. So when you go to a restaurant and they say 'wow this tastes just like home', that means it's good."

That's step one, he says, in preparing quality Lebanese food.

"Lebanese food takes time if you really want it perfect," he said. "You have to pamper it. The chefs should be in love with what they do, they should be impassioned about creating food. And this does take time, you cannot make something quickly."

Arabic food is one of the oldest cuisines in the world. The cradle of civilization is smack dab in the middle of the Middle East, making the land of milk and honey more a land of hummus and tabbouleh.

"Civilization started in this part of the world. People used the very basic and natural

ingredients that they cultivated on their land. They used a lot of olive oil, they used a lot of garlic and onion, spices and peppers. It's basically using vegetables and turning them into different plates or appetizers which we call mezzeh" he said.

Al Mourjan serves over 100 different types of mezzeh.

And it's popular— Al- Sadek says it's probably in the top-five cuisines worldwide.

"Wherever you go in the world, you can find hummus. Hummus is the most difficult appetizer to make, by the way. To perfect it is nearly impossible," he said.

But that doesn't stop people trying.

"Why? Because it's so tasty!"

It's also extremely healthy, something diet-conscious folks, no matter their nationality, leap at. Vegetarians, particularly before the days of soya-bologna and tofu-everything, attacked Lebanese cuisine with gusto, as many dishes in a traditional mezzeh are not only meat free, but also high in protein and iron. Not to mention delicious—the Lebanese do things with chickpeas that are almost sinful.

But with so much competition, it's hard to stand out. When most of your customers think they know what babaganoush tastes like after purchasing a frighteningly-purple container of it at the local grocery store, you've got to be really special to leave a mark.

Al Mourjan tries to make their mark with authenticity.

"Every dish that you taste here is really the authentic taste of Lebanon," said Al-Sadek. "Lebanese food is about the right mixture, the right blend. When you're eating good Lebanese food you don't need to add pepper, you don't need to add salt, you don't need to add lemon juice or extra olive oil. A good restaurant would know how to bring out that perfect blend, that perfect mixture."

Blending together the old and the new, and trying to match the gorgeous architecture of the restaurant and the Doha skyline with food that does it justice, was Al-Sadek's biggest challenge he says.

He's got Lebanese chefs in the kitchen, and tries to make sure that everything that hits his customers' tables is something he, and his mother, would gladly eat.

"I would recommend (customers) try a few Lebanese restaurants and then come to Al Mourjan and taste the difference," he said. "They're all good, but our food tastes completely different. It's done authentically. It's done the way it was done 30, 40, 60 years ago in Lebanon. A lot of Lebanese restaurants cook their food quickly. Our food is done by hand—we chop, we don't use a blender. And that takes time."

But then, so should your meal, according to Al-Sadek.

"It's very social. Everybody is sharing. This is what mezzeh is all about, everyone sharing. Everybody sitting, sharing, talking and eating. This is something very beautiful and very nice about Lebanese, and Arabic food in general."

For more information, call 483-4423.



## When you go:

Take their hummus, muhammara, and tajine for a spin— all three are the best in the city, and the tajine is one of Mohamed's personal favourites!

Feeling Carnivorous? Order the lamb chops: in fact, order two. You won't be disappointed.

Looking for a little atmosphere? Al Mourjan keeps their patio, which juts out into the bay, open even as the weather heats up—the breeze from the water and strategically located fans keeps it cool. Delicious food lit by the light of the moon is sure to impress.

## Take to the water on an Al Mourjan Dhow Cruise:

they do the catering, you do the lounging like an Egyptian Pharaoh.



**Love Bites.** Mezzeh should overwhelm the senses with scent and colour, even before it explodes on your tongue.

