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Saudi

**FOOD &
RESTAURANTS**

Everything you need
to know about dining in Saudi in 2022



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A TASTE OF SAUDI

Saudi's culinary scene is a heady mix of prized heritage dishes, traditional restaurants, Michelin-star dining and home-grown innovators, making it a gastronomical masterpiece





SOUL FOOD

From traditional dishes to contemporary cuisines, Saudi's culinary scene is one to be explored and appreciated

The story of Saudi cuisine is a narrative as old as time and a delicious one at that. Any tale chronicling the culinary evolution of the country will begin at the same starting point: with the nutritious, sustaining and much adored date. The fruit has been cultivated here since 7000 B.C and thanks to its energy-giving properties and appealing taste, has formed a staple part of Saudi diet ever since.

The cultural, religious and historical significance of dates, which feature on the country's national emblem as a sign of prosperity, cannot be overestimated; the date palm is mentioned more

“Saudi is home to 300 different varieties of date, each with their own unique flavour.”

than any other fruit-bearing plant in the Qur'an and in a tradition that is still observed, the Prophet Mohammed bestowed special status upon dates by breaking his

Ramadan fast with them.

Today, Saudi is the second-largest producer of dates in the world and is home to some 300 different varieties, each with their own unique flavour. The act of serving dates alongside qawah (Saudi coffee - more on this later) is one intrinsically bound with notions of hospitality and the date is an integral ingredient in many traditional sweets, from ma'amoul to hanini, klaija to al haysa (a deep dive into the desserts of Saudi follows). Many of these sweets are closely associated with Ramadan and have been staples on iftar tables for generations, with each family honouring their own carefully crafted recipes.

Although the country is famed for its sweet tooth, it's not all about desserts. Savoury food plays a significant role too and Saudi cuisine boasts a wealth of dishes, with each region bringing different recipes to this culinary table, influenced by local specialities, geographical location, proximity to ancient spice routes, climate, history and topography.

From the ghee-dressed dishes that originate in temperate Abha in the south, to seafood and fish recipes from coastal Jeddah, hearty warming plates from the Najd



Traditional arabic food



Najd Village restaurant



La Petite Maison, Riyadh

region and much more, the country's culinary history and the heritage-rich meals that form part of this menu are wonderfully diverse and absolutely delicious.

For all the regional variation, there is one dish that is universally adored and has been consumed across the country with such enthusiasm that it has earned itself the unofficial title of Saudi's national dish: we refer, of course, to fragrant, warming kabsa.

While the popularity of these foods has more than stood the test of time, the way in which they are consumed is shifting. In the past, both cooking and eating have been regarded as acts that take place primarily within the home and a belief

“These days there are many Saudi chefs creating innovative concepts.”

that home-cooked food is far superior to that served by restaurants has long prevailed. Nowadays, change is very much afoot and the country's restaurant dining scene has developed at speed over the last few years as the far-reaching consequences of Vision 2030 and the 2016 National Transformation Plan

begin to make an impact.

This type of development takes place in waves and the first ripple of the revolution was felt in the arrival of an influx of global chains, franchise operations and internationally-renowned names, spanning both high-end restaurants and fast-casual outlets. To shine the spotlight on just a few, the country is the relatively new home to the likes of contemporary Japanese spots Zuma and ROKA, the uber class Mediterranean favourite La Petite Maison, New York's Carbone, Peruvian hotspot Coya, and a clutch of born-in-the-UAE brands including BB Social Dining, Mohalla and trendy Japanese street food spot Akiba Dori. Not to mention big culinary



Maraya Social, AIUla



Coya, Riyadh



Uka, Riyadh

names making their mark on the scene, such as Michelin-starred chef Jason Atherton's Maraya Social in AIUla, and Vineet Bhatia's Maharaja in Al Khobar and Riyadh.

As well as bringing verve and vitality to Saudi's dining scene, a crucial consequence of this move was the unprecedented excitement it generated around the culture of eating out and increased appetite for the entire restaurant experience.

Maillard, Jeddah



Samer Hamadeh, the founder of Akiba Dori, grew up in Saudi and says that while he is thrilled with the reception that both Akiba Dori outlets have received so far (find them in Jeddah at the House Hotel, Jeddah and Riyadh's The Boulevard), what excites him the most as someone who has a huge amount of love and appreciation for the country, is the next step in the journey. "The food scene in Saudi has evolved at lightning pace - not just with international brands bringing their concepts into the market, but also with an explosion of home-grown brands. This is critical; home-grown brands fuel innovation and get young entrepreneurs excited about the future. I can't stress how important that is, so I'm really glad to see it happening in

Saudi."

This viewpoint is shared entirely by Ebraheem Hashem, the CEO and creative director at Food Passion ME, a company born out of a desire to change the dining landscape in the region for the better.

With concepts such as Brioché Gourmet Eatery, Mudakhan and Maillard already under their belts, they are well on the way to doing so. Hasheem explains: "The Saudi food scene has developed dramatically in the last few years; we moved from receiving concepts and franchising to creation. These days there are many Saudi chefs creating innovative concepts for both local and international cuisine."

Like Hamadeh, Hashem says that an appreciation for local talent is absolutely

crucial to developing the Saudi food scene further, both within the country itself and on a global scale. Looking back on his own experience (Brioché was one of the first Saudi-chef run outlets in Jeddah), Hashem believes that the success of many home-grown brands can be attributed to the way in which they demonstrated a real understanding and respect for the local culture and its people, while at the same time bringing something new to the culinary world. "These home-grown concepts not only filled a gap in the market and provided a clean, safe and delicious option for eating out, but also changed the old belief that restaurant food was inferior to homemade food," he explains.

"Initially we were often mistaken for a franchise



Akiba Dori, Jeddah



Mudakhan, Jeddah



as people didn't expect a high-quality experience from a totally local venue. This paradigm shift is what we are most proud of; we are a Saudi-bred restaurant that serves quality food, has an understanding of culture and is contributing to a bright future for the culinary scene," adds Hashem.

A desire to champion the talent, ideas and ambitions of regional chefs, concept developers and restaurateurs and add depth and diversity to the country's dining culture while doing so is being embraced from the very top down. To use an example, while the much-anticipated dining hub that is

Diriyah Gate's Bujairi Terrace – opening in 2022 – will be home to a number of globally renowned restaurants such as the Côte D'Azur's Bruno, London's Hakkasan and Madrid's Telat, against which the Saudi-born contingent will more than hold its own, thanks to the likes of GRIND, Somewhere, SUGAR, Sum +

Takya, Riyadh



Things, and Takya.

In terms of next steps, Hashem says another important result of this locally-driven food movement is the attention Saudi food is now garnering on a global scale. "Before the arrival of home-grown concepts, Saudi cuisine wasn't even considered a proper cuisine internationally. Our number one aim is to create a Saudi cuisine that can be exported to the world, to share the delicacies of Saudi and show the world that our food is amazing." As more people become aware of Saudi's

culinary scene, attention is increasingly drawn to these modern-day concepts. A consequence of which is a greater interest in Saudi's rich culinary past, it's time-honoured recipes and food and drink related customs.

With exactly that in mind and with a view to staying well ahead of the culinary curve, read on for our comprehensive guide to the food of Saudi: authentic dishes, contemporary dining destinations, traditional favourites, brilliant local brands, and delectable desserts included.

WHAT TO EAT + WHERE

Kabsa: When in Saudi the national dish of aromatic chicken and rice can be experienced at any local food outlet, and is a must-try.

For The Cool Kids:

The Saudi-born luxury concept store and cafe **Sum + Things** in Riyadh is contemporary cool incarnate. Shop for on-trend interior pieces while sampling the menu. (+966 11 445 5223)

The One To Watch:

Set to change the face of the foodie scene in Saudi, Diriyah Gate's 15,000sqm **Bujairi Terrace** is home to a folio of world-class dining destinations that includes Saudi-born Takya, Grind and Somewhere, alongside global venues Hakkasan, Tatal and Flamingo Room by tashas.

Currently Trending:

With venues in Jeddah and Riyadh, **Akiba Dori** is having a moment bringing Japanese street food to Saudi in kitschy-cool surroundings.

@akibadori

SAUDI CUISINE

Saudi's rich heritage is ever-present in its exceptional, flavoursome food, from kabsa to sweet Saudi pancakes



A DELICIOUS TASTE OF SAUDI

Take a culinary journey around Saudi with these regional dishes

Given the sheer size of the country, its centuries old history, diverse landscapes and influences, it's no surprise that Saudi's cuisine is as richly varied as the magnificent landscapes its renowned for.

From dishes that originate in coastal towns to soothing staples and meals inspired by mountain-living, here's our guide to the regional gems popular in different areas.

REGION: AL BALAD, JEDDAH.

The dish: Muttabaq

Jeddah's favourite street food, muttabaq sees thinly stretched dough topped with minced meat, eggs and leeks, or spring onions before being folded into a rectangle shape and shallow fried until crisp on the outside. The whole chillies and lemon wedges served on the side are just the thing for cutting through the richness of the snack.

Where to try it: Abu Zaid

Abu Zaid was established in 1964 and their muttabaq has been pleasing patrons ever since. Affordable and tasty, we're big fans of both the meat muttabaq and the much-talked about Double Salty with Cheese.

*Various locations across Jeddah.
www.abuzaidrest.com; (+966 9200 03670)*



“Muttabaq is quite possibly Jeddah’s favourite street food.”

MUTTABAQ

The word muttabaq in Arabic means “folded”. There are similar versions of the bread found in places such as Yemen and other regions of the Arabic world and Iran.

REGION: HIJAZ

The dish: Saleeg

Known affectionately as Saudi's answer to Italian risotto, saleeg sees short-grain white rice cooked in chicken stock with butter and milk until thick and creamy.

The finished dish is usually served on a large platter with ghee-drizzled, roasted chicken pieces placed atop the rice. Accompaniments are pickled lemons and a chilli-tomato sauce known as duggus.

Where to try it: Hijazi Kitchens and Restaurant

Traditional dishes reign supreme at this no-frills spot in Makkah. While the menu is filled with comfort food favourites, it's the soothing, aromatic saleeg that customers really rave about. (+966 55 360 0230)

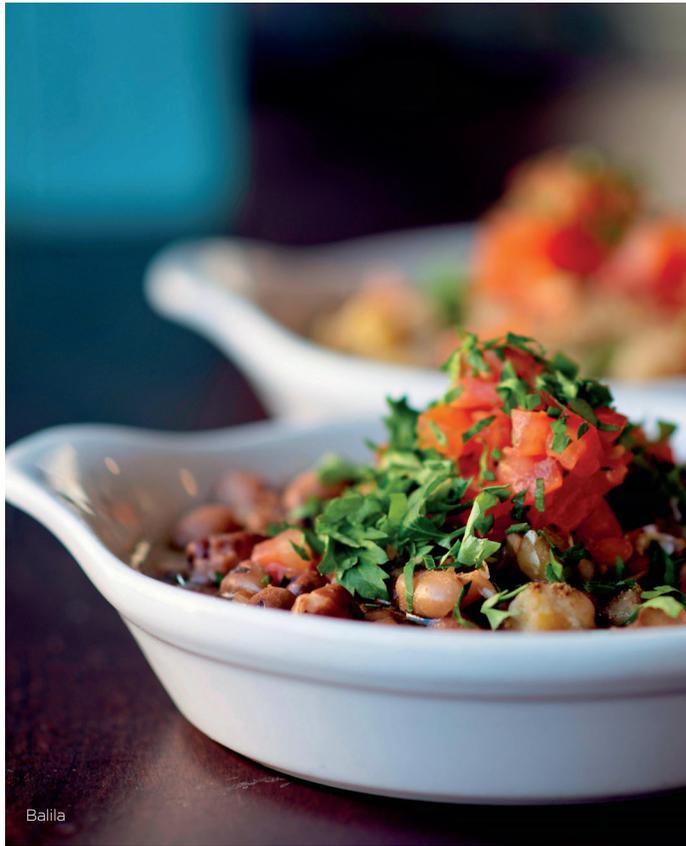
AL SHOQIYAH, MAKKAH

The dish: Balila

Boiled chickpeas combine with crunchy cucumber, tangy vinegar and an array of spices in this refreshing Hijazi dish. Well-loved across Saudi, balila is considered a Ramadan essential and is often eaten straight after Taraweeh prayers.

Where to try it: Al Balad

As any purist will tell you, if you want to taste balila at its finest head to Jeddah's historical Al Balad district during Ramadan and buy a bowl from one of the traditionally-dressed street food vendors who sell tasty wares from carts festooned with twinkling lights and colourful decorations.



Balila



Saleeg

REGION: RIYADH

The dish: Harees (jareesh)

This sustaining, centuries-old dish is a true Ramadan staple enjoyed nationwide. While exact ingredients vary from region to region and household to household, the course ground wheat and lamb porridge known as harees or jareesh tends to be gently spiced with the likes of black pepper, dried black lime and cardamom and is often served topped with sprigs of fresh parsley.

Where to try it: Suhail

Those who fancy sampling an upmarket twist on tradition should make their way to Suhail. Here, the refined Riyadh jareesh is finished with perfectly caramelised onions and a generous smattering of gold leaf before being delivered to your table in an elegant white pot.

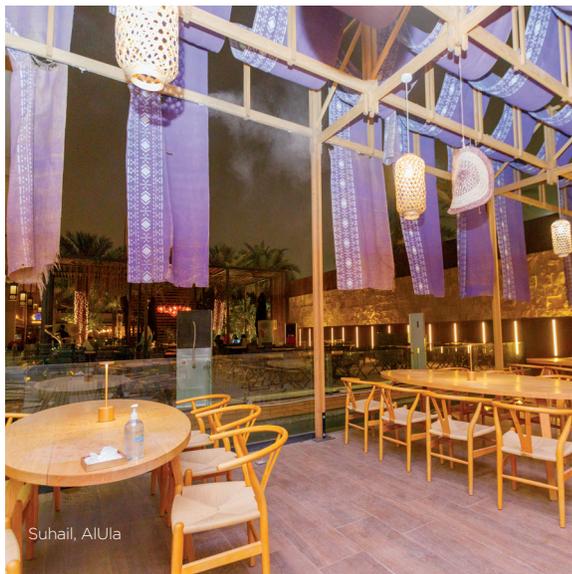
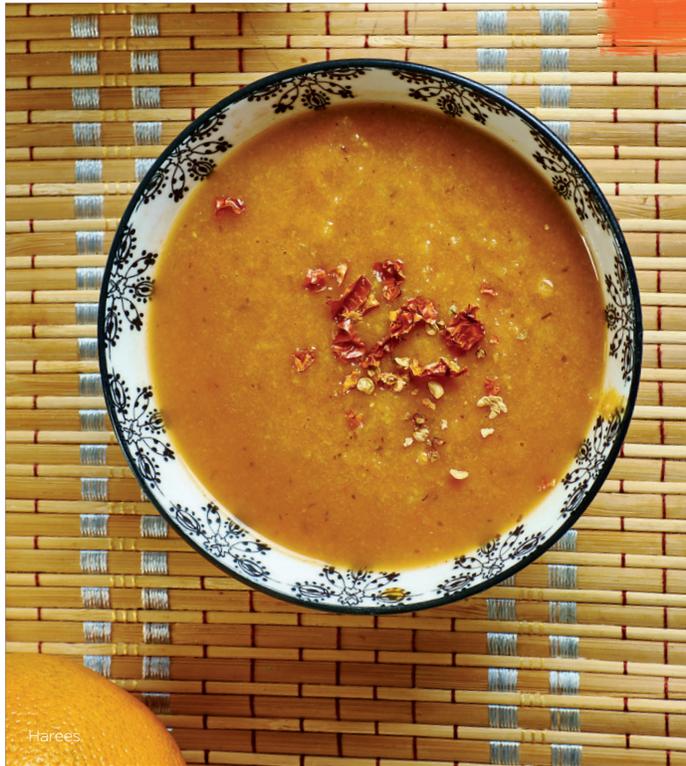
Diyafa Plaza and Old Town AlUa, www.suhailrestaurant.com, (+966 92 000 2690)

The dish: Zurbian

On special occasions - think weddings and festivals - tables across Saudi groan with platters of zurbian. The perfect dish for feeding a crowd, marinated meat (lamb, mutton, chicken or beef) is cooked in an aromatic, spiced tomato-yogurt sauce before being piled onto golden, saffron-streaked rice and finished with caramelised onions, raisins, toasted cashews and almonds.

Where to try it: Al Saeed

Popular with both locals and expats alike, this no-frills spot is renowned for being one the



Acoustic, Riyadh



best places to visit if you want to sample traditional Saudi food. Al Saleed's fragrant zurbian is regarded as a standout dish for good reason - go hungry and you won't be disappointed.

Al Anwar, As Sina'iyah, Riyadh, (+966 11 495 6009)

The dish: Masabeeb

Otherwise known as Saudi pancakes, these light and fluffy beauties might be diminutive in size but they certainly deliver on taste. Made from a yeast, milk powder and wholewheat flour batter, masabeeb are fried until golden before being drenched in honey, ghee or date syrup while still warm from the pan. Simple, but oh so sweetly satisfying.



Where to try it: Acoustic Restaurant and Art Gallery

There are several different types of pancakes on the breakfast menu at the ever-classy Acoustic, each as delicious as the next (hello, granola parfait and crispy cornflake versions).

That said, we thoroughly recommend tucking into their Arabic Pancakes, which offer a savoury riff on tradition thanks to the addition of olives and salty cubes of white cheese.

Al Olaya, Riyadh, www.acoustic-ksa.com, (+966 11 416 4363)



Masabeeb

REGION: NAJD

Dish: Matazeez

Delivering a real flavour of the vast, desert highland that is the Najd region, matazeez is a meaty lamb stew rich with spices and vegetables – tomatoes, eggplant, pumpkin, zucchini, green beans – which is topped with flat disks of dumpling dough.

As the dish cooks the dumplings absorb the flavourful stew juices for a wonderfully hearty and satisfying end result.

Where to try it: Najd Village

This hugely popular spot prioritises making authentic Saudi dishes accessible to the people of Riyadh and they do so to tremendous effect with their matazeez, which features meltingly soft meat, a piquant, complex-tasting tomato sauce and golden pieces of freshly made bir dough. Mouthwatering.

Various locations including King Abdul Aziz Branch Road, Alyasmin, Riyadh.
www.najdvillage.com

REGION: ASIR PROVINCE

Dish: Jalamah

The southwest province of Asir is rightly famed for many things – stunning national parks, verdant forests and awe-inspiring mountain views included. When it comes to food, the one dish that everyone talks about is the regional speciality known as jalamah: young lamb and onions cooked in an aromatic gravy flavoured with cardamom, coriander, cinnamon and black pepper.



Thareed

Rice or flatbreads are served on the side for mopping up the aromatic sauce.

Where to try it:

In our opinion, the best jalamah is always a homecooked version.

If you're invited into a Saudi home and jalamah is on the menu, consider yourself lucky. Should that not seem likely, it's well worth seeking out an authentic recipe and attempting the dish yourself.

MUST-TRY: KABSА

Regarded as Saudi's national dish, kabsa is a mouthwatering combination of rice, slow cooked meat (usually lamb or chicken) and aromatic spices such as coriander, turmeric and cardamom. Traditionally served on a large platter, this is the perfect meal for a group of friends. Hearty, full of flavour, and lots of it to share.



REGION: EASTERN PROVINCE

The dish: Kanad

Seafood rules supreme in the Eastern Province's coastal cities and kanad might just be the most popular local fish of them all. With its meaty yet juicy texture, kanad tends to be treated simply and is most often served sliced into fillets and lightly fried.

Where to try it:

At elegant seafood restaurant YaMal Alteeb, matfyat kanad is a must-order dish; here the crispy, deep-fried fish is served with a generous pile of the rice of your choosing and plenty of gravy on the side.

*Shamaliyah, Dammam,
(+966 50 131 5159)*

The dish: Thareed

Often described as a savoury bread pudding, this hearty, wholesome dish calls for thin, unleavened bread to be layered with a meaty, slow-simmered spiced stew.

Thought to date back to pre-Islamic time, thareed is believed to have been a favourite dish of the Prophet Muhammad and is particularly popular during Ramadan.

Where to try it:

Thareed Restaurant

No clues or guessing what the star dish is as this restaurant - thareed is its speciality.

As simple as it is satisfying, when you're in need of some super comforting food this is the place to visit to sample some of the best thareed out there.

*Ittisalat District, Dammam,
(+966 138 433 127)*



HOME-GROWN HOT SPOTS

A booming dining scene has resulted in a slew of experimental, Saudi-born eateries that easily rival global names making their debut in Saudi



10 OF THE BEST LOCAL RESTAURANTS

Top spots, must-tries and forever favourites

From legendary fast-food joints that have been around for years, to much-loved shawarma spots and burger brands that have made their mark on Saudi's food scene in spectacular fashion, these are the places that are loved across Saudi.

AlBaik

So good it has to be tasted to be believed, the now iconic AlBaik has been serving up piece-after-piece of spice-dusted, crisp and crunchy-on-the-outside, juicy-in-the-centre fried chicken since as far back as 1974.

Order the signature chicken meal, up the ante with a filled-to-bursting big Baik sandwich or give one of the delicious seafood dishes a whirl - it's all good.

Various locations across Saudi, www.albaik.com/en, (+966 800 244 2245)

Al Saudi

Ask any local worth their kabsa where to sample the country's national dish and Al Saudi is likely to feature highly on the recommendations list. Classic comfort food is served in authentic style at a very fair price at this Riyadh institution



AlBaik

“Classic comfort food is served in authentic style at a very fair price at Al Saudi”

where a half chicken with rice costs a mere SAR21.

Riyadh, @alsaudi_sa, (+966 092 000 9515)

Brioché

This home-grown brand was set-up by a group of foodie friends looking to bring something different to the Jeddah breakfast and brunch scene and boy do they deliver. Here acclaimed



Tokyo, Riyadh

chef Hakim Bagabus oversees the menu which features a riot of internationally-inspired dishes, many of which are executed with a Saudi or Middle Eastern-inspired slant.

The vibe is contemporary-chic, the homemade brioche buns are incredible and the iced tea is good enough to make even the most committed coffee drinker think twice about their order.

3127 Alkayyal, Ar Rawdah, Jeddah, www.brioche.me, (+966 56 530 0060)

Hamburgini

With buns that are baked in-house and properly made patties seared on the grill just before serving, Hamburgini delivers a lesson in how to prepare burgers the right way. Opt for the signature or classic burger, crispy buffalo chicken, or ring the changes and go bun-less, then ponder

if you're a single, double or triple patty kinda person.

This chain has locations across Jeddah and Riyadh and stays open well into the night, so whatever time those burger cravings hit, you know where to go.

Various locations in Jeddah and Riyadh, www.hamburgini.com, (+966 9200 05341)

Mama Noura

Mama Noura might just dish out the tastiest shawarma in all of Riyadh. As bold a statement as that may be, this no-frills city stalwart backs up the claim in lip-smacking style thanks to standout sandwiches featuring soft, fluffy bread, juicy, just-carved meat, crunchy veg and thick and creamy garlic sauce.

The fresh juices, hot-from-the-oven-pies, large selection of meaty kebabs, crunchy, freshly baked falafel and

zippy, zesty salads are mighty fine, too.

Riyadh, various locations, www.mamanoura.com.sa, (+966 011 470 8881)

Nine Soft Serve

Ever-growing in popularity, this funky home-grown ice cream brand is a must-try when visiting Saudi. From its fabulous fluorescent pink ice cream touring truck beginnings, you can now sample Nine Soft Serve's signature smooth and creamy ices on Kohobar Corniche, at Riyadh Front and Boulevard, as well as in AlUla. Popular flavours include the tongue-tingly fresh Mango Passion (mango softie topped with passionfruit sauce), super-cute Sprinkle Softie and uber-indulgent double chocolate Brownie Explosion. Treats well worth the extra calories.

AlUla, Riyadh, Jeddah, @ninesoftserve

Porterhouse

Porterhouse and its aged-in-house, wood-smoked and charcoal premium steaks have been around since 2016. While the brand may be local there's a distinctly New York-style to the restaurant, thanks to the urban warehouse-style interiors and upscale, modern and moody lighting.

Interesting appetisers such as the lobster bread pudding, and luxurious sides and sauces really seal the delicious deal here, while on-trend additions to the menu (eyes on you meltingly tender wagyu sando) ensure that Porterhouse continues to feel cool and contemporary.

Riyadh, www.porterhouse-sa.com, (+966 11 217 0088)

Shawarmer

Another top-notch shawarma spot, Shawarmer boasts 50 plus branches across the Saudi and a stellar reputation to boot.

A commitment to perfecting the Middle East's favourite sandwich has served this place well, as has a willingness to experiment and innovate with flavours and ingredients - the tikka and pomegranate molasses sauces deserve a spot on your must-try list.

*Various locations across Saudi,
www.shawarmer.com,
(+966 092 000 8080)*

Section-B

This super-cool Saudi-born chain (found in Jeddah, Riyadh, Makkah and Khobar) is the tasty result of a collab between six friends obsessed with crafting a perfect burger.

From the classic B Burger with its Angus beef patty, slither of American cheese and crunchy dill pickles, to the fully loaded Triple S featuring deep-fried chicken drizzled with chilli oil, slathered with buttermilk sauce, and finished with fresh jalapenos and sweet pickles.

*Various locations across Saudi,
@sectionb_sa*

Tokyo

Since opening back in 1985 Tokyo has made a more than worthy name for itself as one of the top Saudi-born dining concepts around.

Serving classic to cutting-edge Japanese food, Tokyo is distinctly high-end, both in terms of the sophisticated surrounds (all dim lighting and sleek black leather booths) and elegant food, which fuses the modern with the traditional. That said, prices remain reasonable and the staff are charming.

*Riyadh, www.tokyoarabia.com,
(+966 092 000 9662)*



Nine Soft Serve

10 NEW VENUES TO KNOW NOW

The home-grown brands, restaurants and concepts set to make it big



Glaze - The Donut Boutique

Saudi's food scene is booming like never before. For all the international names and globally-renowned franchises setting up shop across the country, a slew of chefs, restaurateurs and concept developers are ensuring that local talent shines bright, too. These are the places that deserve a try.

Glaze - The Donut Boutique

Tapping into the global trend for gourmet doughnuts and giving it their own artisan twist along the way, the bakers at Glaze certainly know their way around a handcrafted, fried and fluffy

sweet treat. From frosting smothered originals to Nutella-drenched numbers, seasonal specials and fun homages to Homer Simpson, this Riyadh-born donut boutique has it all. *Riyadh, @glazedonuts.sa, (+966 22 214 994)*

Boga Superfood

When healthy eating is the order of the day (or the week, or the year), Boga Superfood is the home-grown brand that you need to know about.

This place prides itself on its bright and beautiful rainbow salads, seriously tasty sandwiches (the Italian-

inspired Chicken Pesto is our go-to) and sustaining Boga Bowls. For wholesome, healthy food that absolutely doesn't compromise on taste, look no further.

Various locations across Saudi, www.bogasuperfood.com, (+966 54 455 5379)

Circa

Jeddah's breakfast and brunch scene is thriving of late and if you fancy getting in on the action and securing yourself an early doors feast, Circa is the place to be (and be seen).

The menu features a cheery selection of trendy morning treats - stuffed Bombay Buns,

signature eggs Benedict and acai bowls included. For something more indulgent, the buttercream-filled, syrup-drenched cinnamon roll pancakes are irresistible, and you can always balance all that sweetness with a freshly pressed juice.

Jeddah, @dinecirca, (+966 55 561 0014)

Density Café

One for the true craft coffee aficionados amongst you. The artisan roasters and expert baristas at Density Café whip up some of the finest brews in Khobar - think silky-smooth lattes and rocket fuel espressos, as well as more bespoke coffees made with your choice of beans and their specialist kit. Expect industrial-chic interiors and an achingly-cool vibe at this hipster hangout.

Khobar, www.densitycoffee.com, (+966 50 280 9940)

Parrilla de Brazil

While dedicated steak lovers might already know about home-grown Jeddah spot Parrilla de Brazil, there's a chance that this relatively new eatery at Atelier La Vie may have slipped under the radar for others. Latin American-inspired flair is the way they roll here: glistening skewers of grilled meat are presented in traditional churrasco style, Brazilian art adorns the walls and a lively, interactive atmosphere ensures a fun time is had by all.

Jeddah, www.parrilla.vercel.app, (+966 53 056 6222)

Raftaar

Another Khobar hotspot, Indian restaurant Raftaar

adds trade route spice and a sprinkling of culinary might to the city's dining scene. Cleverly mixing the traditional with the cutting-edge, serving up flavour-packed food that has its roots in authenticity but is presented with plenty of contemporary finesse. We love the lamb bhuna sliders and avocado papdi chaat, the signature mains are all worthy of attention, and the desserts here are seriously special. *Khobar, www.raftaar-sa.com, (+966 54 206 3390)*

Shubbak 4

A relative newbie to Jeddah's ice cream scene, we very much predict that Shubbak 4's towering swirls of smooth and creamy soft serve are here to stay.

There's a rainbow-selection of flavours for visitors to work their way through, including fresh and fruity sherbet-pink watermelon, heady yellow saffron and a pina colada number with all the holiday feels. That said, a mix of salted caramel and vanilla is the combo that those-in-the-know talk about most.

Jeddah, @shubbak4, (+966 55 084 0404)

Sum + Things

Achingly cool concept store Sum + Things is already well known amongst Riyadh's most discerning shoppers, but the recent news that they're expanding their food offering and will be opening a standalone restaurant in the much-anticipated Bujairi Terrace at Diriyah Gate is set to jettison this cool brand into the mainstream. If the food at the existing in-house spot is anything to go by, diners can

look forward to an array of internationally-inspired café favourites: eggs of all kinds, French toast, pasta, pizza, salads and more.

Riyadh, @sumplusthings, (+966 11 445 5223)

Takya

Traditional Saudi dishes undergo a modern-day transformation to stunning effect here. Takya is all about bringing Saudi cuisine up-to-date and into the fine dining spectrum, while still maintaining a sense of authenticity. If you've haven't lent Takya your support by paying them a visit, now is the time to do so - the beautifully presented dishes are guaranteed to delight.

Riyadh, @takya_sa, (+966 55 040 2000)

Une Meringue

If there's one chef that we think will be truly making their mark on the Saudi food scene in the next few years, it's Afnan Aljaadi.

The pastry chef and founder of high-end bakery Une Meringue is the talented creative behind some of the most impressive, handcrafted cakes we've ever seen: from beautifully iced, exquisitely flavoured wedding cakes to bakes so intricate they resemble art installations, and gorgeous treats for children guaranteed to make a birthday memorable.

At the moment Une Meringue operates as an online only business but plans to open a standalone shop will hopefully come to fruition soon.

Jeddah, @unemeringue, (+966 54 050 2075)

FIVE FAVE SAUDI FOOD BRANDS

The cult products that no kitchen in Saudi is without



Indomie Mi Goreng noodles

brand of choice for instant noodles in Saudi. Delivering warming, salty sustenance on a winter's night since 1986, a kitchen cupboard without a stash of Indomie Mi Goreng noodles is a kitchen cupboard bereft. The brand is something of a pop-culture favourite, with fans proudly sporting the logo on all kinds of merch – T-shirts, stickers, bags and hoodies included.

Crystal Hot Sauce

Whether we're talking about potato chips or fried chicken, scrambled eggs or kabsa, is there a savoury dish that's flavour isn't improved once anointed with a few drops of reddish-orange Crystal Hot Sauce? Many a Saudi would argue not. The born in Louisiana three-ingredient sauce (red cayenne peppers, vinegar and salt) has a place on many home dining tables, but those-in-the-know will tell you that the compact bottles are the ideal size for popping in your bag, ready to remedy any lacklustre meal while out and about.

Nutella

Smear on toast, slathered in a sandwich, eaten straight from the jar – there's a whole lot of love for Nutella in Saudi. Peruse any dessert menu and the lusciously thick

From condiments that many would argue complete a meal to ice creams that taste like childhood, iconic drinks and more, these are some of the best loved food brands to discover in Saudi.

Saudia Ice Cream Sandwich

Sure, you'll find gourmet ice cream parlours, small batch soft serve joints and inventive

ices all over Saudi these days, but the affordable and ever reliable Saudia Ice Cream Sandwich is the one loved by Saudis of all ages. With its simple, undemanding combination of vanilla ice cream and chocolate biscuit, this classic delivers all the nostalgic feels in frozen form.

Indomie

Indomie is quite simply the



Nutella pancakes



A Vimto-flavoured cake

chocolate-hazelnut spread is sure to make an appearance, with ice cream, waffles, crepes and cakes all getting the Nutella treatment. For the ultimate in confectionary combinations, look out for Nutella and Lotus Biscoff hybrids.

Vimto

Invented in the United Kingdom in 1908 where it was originally marketed as a medicinal tonic, this beloved purple-hued, sweet-smelling berry cordial is consumed in Saudi all year-round, but never with such enthusiasm

as during the Holy Month of Ramadan. An undisputed iftar favourite, adored for its sweetness and thirst-quenching properties, spin off products - Vimto ice lollies, sweets, popping candy, cakes and desserts are hugely popular, too.

COFFEE CULTURE

From the international names beloved the world-over
to the home-grown concepts making their mark,
coffee continues to have its moment in Saudi



CAFÉ SOCIETY

An integral part of every day life for centuries, the art of brewing coffee is honoured in cafes and restaurants across Saudi

In a move that goes some way towards illustrating just how important coffee is in Saudi, the Ministry of Culture declared that 2022 would officially be known as the 'Year of Coffee'.

With this announcement came the news that the country would put on a 12-month long series of events focused on celebrating the much-loved drink and drawing attention to its ongoing significance, beginning by officially changing the name from Arabic coffee to Saudi coffee.

In addition, the Ministry of Culture hopes that the initiative will draw Khalwani coffee cultivation to international attention, and as a result to see it listed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List (a collection of buildings, monuments, artefacts, ingredients and customs that are recognised as forming an integral part of a country's heritage).

The act (and indeed art) of preparing and drinking coffee is a much-loved, ritualistic one that has been performed with care and attention to detail for hundreds of years, and is firmly ingrained in Saudi's rich history and heritage.

It's believed that coffee beans were first brewed and roasted in southern Arabia in

“The act of preparing coffee is a much-loved, ritualistic one that's been performed with care for hundreds of years.”

the 15th century and mentions of the drink can be found in numerous traditional songs, scriptures and poems.

Long recognised as a signifier of generosity, hospitality and togetherness, beautifully aromatic qahwa tends to be made from finely ground, roasted beans (often sourced from the verdant Jizan region, which is home to some 54,000 coffee trees) which are mixed with cardamon and boiling water and left to infuse. The drink is served from a pot known as a dallah and is poured into diminutive, ornately decorated cups called finjan,

so that the liquid just covers the base.

The strength, aroma and spices used to make the coffee itself varies from region to region and reflects the sheer diversity of the country and its unique place within the world. Those spices often include cardamon, cinnamon saffron and cloves and, as a general rule, the further north you are the stronger and darker the drink will be. Plump, sticky dates or candied fruits are served alongside Saudi coffee as a matter of course and provide the ideal sweet foil to the slight bitterness of the drink.

While there will always be a place for traditionally prepared coffee in the hearts and homes of every Saudi, in recent years the contemporary craft coffee scene has taken off with unprecedented enthusiasm. Saudi is now filled with fabulous coffee shops from the international players to home-grown brands (many of them uber cool and Instagram-friendly) the country's community of artisan roasters and baristas who take their beans seriously is ever-growing. This is a very exciting time to be a coffee lover in Saudi, so take the time to explore.

10 MUST-TRY COFFEE SPOTS IN RIYADH

All the best places to get your caffeine fix in the capital

From trendy, independent coffee bars to high-end brands from abroad, family-run cafes that have been around for years and places that have only popped up recently, Riyadh's coffee shop culture is stepping up like never before.

The capital is sprinkled with an absolute abundance of brilliant places to enjoy a top-tier cup of coffee – here are some of our favourites.

Million

Million is the result of a partnership between two Saudi businessmen friends with a shared desire to bring

next level coffee to the capital city. Not only have they succeeded in making that dream a reality, they've gone one further opening up locations across Saudi with great success.

The Riyadh original remains our favourite though and thanks to the excellent coffee and serene vibe, is a go-to spot for everyone from solo coffee drinkers passing time, remote office workers, and for groups of friends to hang out together.

Prince Muhammad Bin Abdulaziz Rd, Al Olaya, www.halfm.sa, (+966 11 293 0451)

Al Masaa Café

All coffee needs are catered for at this sizable café in central Riyadh. When we say Al Masaa Café is spacious, we mean it; this is the world's largest coffee shop, capable of accommodating a cool 1,000 customers at a time. Quantity doesn't mean a compromise on quality though; both the Arabic and Turkish coffees come particularly highly recommended, as does the excellent cheesecake. While you're never likely to struggle to find a table here, the best seats in the house can be found on the outdoor terrace,



Al Masaa



%Arabica

where the views of Kingdom Tower are spectacular.
Al Wurud, Riyadh,
www.almasaacafe.com,
(+966 50 543 2606)

Capri Café

Capri Café might just be as close as Riyadh gets to a true Italian coffee experience. The high ceilings, light and airy feel and chic blue and white interiors offer a distinct nod to the upscale island after which this café is named, while the top-quality drinks would please even the most discerning of coffee connoisseurs, Italian or otherwise.

When it comes to food, there's plenty of choice

thanks to a mix of Middle Eastern and international favourites on the menu.
As Sahafah, Riyadh,
@capricafe_sa,
(+966 53 383 5568)

Chunk

For those that like their coffee accompanied by a side order of sensational cake, a visit to Chunk is a no-brainer.

All of the sweet and savoury bakes here are pretty epic, but it's the sticky-sweet signature Salted Caramel Cake that sets hearts a-fluttering and Insta' Stories alight. We're talking about coffee today though and happily this place does a fine line in caffeinated drinks:

frothy cappuccinos, silky iced lattes and on-trend cortados included. Granted, Chunk does get busy but any wait you have to endure will be well worth it.

Fiorenza Plaza Complex, Al-Muhammadiyah District, Riyadh,
www.hellochunk.com,
(+966 55 220 2042)

%Arabica

When this super-sleek, high-end Japanese coffee chain opened late last year the excitement amongst Riyadh coffee fiends was palpable and expectations were high.

With its trademark modern aesthetic showcasing an on-trend colour palette of gleaming whites, clean creams and splashes of beige and expertly executed drinks (including a gamechanger of a Spanish latte), it's fair to say that %Arabica hasn't disappointed.

The Zone, Al Mohammadiyah,
Riyadh, @arabica.saudiarabia

Elite Cup

Tiny but mighty is the best way to describe this speciality coffee shop. While seating is limited, the coffee here is so good you'll be more than satisfied with a grab-and-go option. So passionate are they about giving the people of Riyadh access to great coffee, Elite Cup also sells its own beans, and will grind them for you on-the-spot so you can drink their coffee at home. They also run workshops and classes on how to create cutesy latte art, or how to create the perfect barista-style brew in your kitchen.

Al Mursalat, Riyadh,
www.elitecuproasters.net,
(+966 50 785 5589)



Refill coffee

Elixir Bunn

Founded in 2014, Elixir Bunn prides itself on serving up specialist coffee that's brewed with care and attention by skilled baristas. Unlike many places, the coffee beans served at this Saudi-born café are roasted locally in small batches and you really can taste the difference.

Pay them a visit and while you may be tempted to stick to your usual go-to order, it's well worth branching out and

sampling one of the signature drinks or seasonal specials.

Al Mursalat, Riyadh,
www.elitecuproasters.net,
(+966 50 785 5589)

Inner Circle

Inspired by the staggering natural beauty of the geological wonder that is AIUla and founded on a desire to celebrate Saudi's rich coffee history, Inner Circle is no typical coffee joint - in fact, it's a stunner of

a naturally stylish spot, with a lovely zen feel to it.

The little bottles of cold-brew served here pack a real punch, the espressos are silky and the iced white mocha has made a name for itself for all the right reasons - what more could you ask for?

Takhassusi Street, An Nakheel, Riyadh,
[@innercircle.saudi](https://www.instagram.com/innercircle.saudi)

Refill Coffee

With its rustic-industrial décor - think exposed brick walls, statement stone counter, marble floor and hanging plants - Refill has a trendy but chilled out vibe.

Whether you're after a rocket-fuel cold brew, want to take your time sipping a carefully crafted flat white or just down a post-work espresso, the baristas here will be more than happy to prepare th goods.

Al Wahah, Riyadh,
[@refill.coffee](https://www.instagram.com/refill.coffee),
(+966 55 664 0505)

Pandemic Coffee

Riyadh's coffee shop of the moment is all about standing out from the crowd. From the booming techo music that plays almost non-stop to a decidedly obscure aesthetic (life size statues, glowing cherry blossom trees, staff sporting baggy black boiler suits), this place is like no other in the city.

For all the deliberate eccentricity they still take their coffee very seriously here; one sip of their iced pistachio latte proves that this isn't a case of zany style over substance. One for cool kids.

Prince Turki bin Abdulaziz Al Awwal Road, Riyadh,
[@pandemiccoffee](https://www.instagram.com/pandemiccoffee),
(+966 11 433 3433)



Pandemic coffee

10 MUST-TRY COFFEE PLACES ACROSS SAUDI

Top spots for bespoke brews in Saudi

From beautiful AIUla to bustling Khobar, Dammam, Mecca and more the coffee scene in Saudi is flourishing. These are some of the finest places to secure yourself a top-notch artisan brew.

8oz Coffee

The very fact that 8oz has multiple locations across Saudi - both permanent shops and pop-up trucks - is testament to the winning formula that the brand have worked hard to establish.

Put simply, while the locations may vary, the quality of the coffee and inviting ambience remains a brilliant constant. For any first-time visitors who are unsure of what to order, the ice oz latte is the drink to plump for.

Various locations including Dammam, Khobar, Taif, Mecca and Medina. @8ozcafe

AL3NAH

A winning combination of beautiful desserts and excellent brews ensures that AL3NAH in Al Hofuf's university district welcomes a steady stream of customers, many of whom arrive with their phones poised in anticipation of capturing the

perfect Snapchat moment.

Spend a little time here and you'll see exactly why that is: majestic-looking, multi-layered honey cake is finished with rivets of caramel sauce, gooey-in-the-centre cookie skillet are topped with quivering mounds of ice cream and the much-talked about crepes are almost too pretty to eat.

For all the focus on sweet treats, coffee connoisseurs certainly aren't forgotten about and the drinks are worthy of note too.

Al Houf, @a3.cafe, (+966 53 7777 393)

Bohemia Art Café

About as far from a cookie cutter coffee brand as can be, independent, community-minded Bohemia Arts Café in Khobar is all about embracing the arts and celebrating regional talent.

Works by local artists adorn the walls, they host regular open mic nights and games competitions, sell pre-loved records and brew great coffee, too. As a result, Bohemia is a meeting spot for both Khobar-based creatives and visitors to the city.

Al Bandariyah, Khobar, @bohmeia_artcafe

Density Café

Coffee making is approached in studied, scientific fashion at Density Café in Khobar. Meticulously sourced beans are carefully roasted on site and cutting-edge equipment and well-honed preparation techniques are employed as a matter of course.

The results speak for themselves: whether you opt for a pulled, brewed or filtered drink, you won't be disappointed. The pleasingly sleek surroundings meanwhile tie in perfectly with the overall contemporary mood.

Villaggio, King Saud Road and Roofz, Prince Turkey Street, Khobar, www.densitycoffee.com, (+966 50 280 9940)

Dokan Coffee

The first specialist coffee shop in Mecca is a beaut, filled with natural light, contemporary splashes and statement ornaments.

Since opening, Dokan Coffee has built a reputation for serving great coffee: from brews for those who know their way around a macchiato, to more zeitgeisty options of icy concoctions dripping with flavoured syrups.

Mecca, @dokancoffee, (+966 56 284 8295).

DOSE Café

Originating in Kuwait, DOSE Café made its way to Saudi in 2017 and hasn't looked back. With numerous locations across the country - Dammam, Khobar, Al-Hasa, Jeddah, Riyadh and Mecca included - the brand is known for serving great coffee at a reasonable price.

That includes everything from bespoke drinks made with specialist kits like Chemex filters and V60 drippers, as well as classic espressos, cappuccinos and Americanos. Saudi's favour the creative signature drinks, like the Iced Dose Nuts Latte with its abundance of homemade caramel sauce.

*Locations across Saudi,
www.dosecafeksa.com*



Moon Shell

Le Moulin Bakery

Flaky, handmade pastries, beautifully ornate bakes and delicious coffees (both hot and cold) are the primary focus at Le Moulin Bakery in AIUla's charming Old Town.

With its sophisticated Parisienne café feel and indoor and outdoor seating areas, whiling away a morning or afternoon here is a must when visiting the city that's so often referred to as The World's Masterpiece.

*AIUla Old Town,
@lemoulinbakery,
(+966 53 822 4499)*

Moon Shell

Not only do the vegan and vegetarian dishes on the menu at Moon Shell do you good - we're talking smoothie bowls resplendent with gleaming fruit, vibrant juices, nut-rich granolas and light and bright rice paper

rolls - they also look rather spectacular on the 'gram.

The coffee at these tranquil, beautifully designed cafés in AIUla, Jeddah and Riyadh is consistently good and makes Moon Shell a fantastic place to hangout whichever city you're in.
*AIUla, Jeddah, Riyadh,
@moonshell_sa.*

Pink Camel Pastry Boutique

Deliberately designed to blend into the desert landscape, home-grown brand Pink Camel sits happily amongst the swaying date palms and citrus trees in AIUla Oasis.

Those lucky enough to bag themselves a table on the outdoor terrace can not only enjoy very good coffee and delectable sweet treats but spectacular mountain views to boot. The picture-perfect macarons are not to be

missed: dainty, delicate, and served in a rainbow array of colours and flavours.

*AIUla Oasis, @pinkcamelksa,
(+966 59 040 0902)*

The Barking Lot

Calling all those that love their coffee and their canine friends in equal measure: this is the café for you.

When The Barking Lot opened up in Khobar in 2020 it was the first dog-friendly café in Saudi and so successful was the concept that a Riyadh location followed the next year.

While humans are well catered for, it's the added extras aimed at pooch pals (think grooming services, play areas and healthy snacks) that really make The Barking Lot special.

*Khobar and Riyadh,
@thebarkinglot.sa,
(+966 50 990 5018)*

8 MUST-TRY COFFEE PLACES IN JEDDAH

The coolest coffee venues in Saudi's Red Sea city

Whether you're after a traditionally prepared cup of qahwah, want to sup a super-strength espresso on the hoof, or wish to settle in for the long haul and savour an exceptional latte, Jeddah has a host of fantastic coffee shops in which to do so. Here's our guide to where to find the finest coffee around.



Bafarat

Proudly home-grown, Bafarat has been dominating Jeddah's artisan coffee scene since 1952, and now with such a following also has a location in London. Raw green coffee beans are roasted to perfection and bespoke coffee blends



are put together with absolute precision in this contemporary-cool coffee bar. The baristas are a super talented bunch too, and we highly recommend pulling up at the sleek and chic espresso bar to watch the experts work their magic while brewing you a specialist Saudi-style coffee.

*Al Rawdah, Jeddah,
www.bafaratcafe.com,
(+966 12 691 2433)*

Brew 92

Saudi-original Brew92 is a connoisseurs' dream. Founded by a team of coffee experts, artisan roasters and passionate baristas,

this place prioritises quality over quantity and serves up real bean-to-brew beauties, think gorgeously fruity filters, glossy espressos and perfect cold brews.

With super cool interiors of exposed brick walls, statement ceiling lights and a custom coffee bar it's a great place to take a load off.

Al-Khalidiyah and Al Rawdah, Jeddah, www.brew92.com

Caffeine Lab

As the name suggests, they approach their coffee prep with rigorous attention to detail at this ultra-trendy café in Tahila. Shelves filled with bags of cherry-picked beans and various coffee making gadgets and tools adorn the walls and the coffee is exceptionally well crafted.

The pastries are tempting too, as is the option to attend one of Caffeine Lab's regular workshops aimed specifically at amateur enthusiasts.

Prince Mohamed Bin Abdulaziz, Jeddah, www.caffeinelab.me, (+966 50 053 5030)

Café Magad

With its beautiful interiors inspired by Jeddah's heritage, and a drinks menu that seamlessly blends the modern with the traditional, Café Magad is a must-visit destination for any discerning coffee drinker.

For those tired out from exploring the historic Al Balad district it's an ideal place to refuel while learning more about the city's storied past by perusing the on-site library filled with history books.

Al Balad District, Jeddah, @Cafe_Maga, (+966 50 562 3039)

Cosmo Café

While Cosmo might be famed for its churros (and mighty fine those hot-out-the-fryer, sugar dusted pieces of dough are), the coffee here is also very good. The atmosphere is youthful and arty, the staff are friendly and the opportunities for in-store selfie taking are plentiful (churro in hand, of course). In short, when you're in need of both a caffeine fix and a sweet treat, Cosmo is the place to go.

Al Rawdah, Jeddah, www.cosmocafe.co, (+966 011 810 3218)

Cup & Couch

Ask any Jeddah dweller to recommend a coffee spot and Cup & Couch comes up time and time again. This family-run café serves excellent coffees, but for us (and many others) it's the cozy feel and unpretentious atmosphere that makes returning a must.

Descend on this place with a gaggle of friends and take advantage of the excellent stash of board games or alternatively visit solo and curl up with a good book and a cup of something calming.

Nahda, Jeddah, @cupandcouch, (+966 59 727 3474)

Dijon Café

Parisienne-feels abound at this French themed café. Thanks to the relaxed atmosphere and great beach views there are few better places to dip a golden, flaky croissant into a late night (or early morning) cup of coffee than at Dijon.

The desserts here are much-talked about and after careful consideration and some intensive taste testing



Cosmo Cafe, Jeddah

our pick of the bunch has to be the signature kunafa.

Northern Corniche, Jeddah, www.dijoncafe-sa.com, (+966 9200 33664)

Marmalade

Statement floor-to-ceiling windows, whitewashed walks and neutral hues lend Marmalade a lovely light and airy modern feel. This is the place to take your time over coffee. The all-day brunch menu here is excellent and features food that looks as pretty as the Insta-friendly interiors; trust us when we say that if you order the modern twist on a classic that is the Fusion Ful you won't be disappointed.

Al Murjan, Jeddah, @marmalade.sa, (+966 50 808 7744)

JUST DESSERTS

Known for a special love of desserts, Saudi's selection of patisseries, bakeries, cafes and fine dining restaurants serve some of the best in the world



SWEET SPOT

From the humble date, to the national love for milk cake, Saudi has a long history of love for something sweet

To say that Saudi is a nation of dessert lovers would be to underplay things slightly. Jammy, sticky-sweet rejuvenating dates have been consumed for thousands of years and together with figs, citrus fruits, honey and nuts (almonds, pistachios, pine nuts and walnuts in particular) form the very backbone of the country's sweet culinary traditions, and are an essential part of its culture.

These staple ingredients combine to delicious effect in a host of traditional desserts, cakes and sweets, the majority of which are synonymous with special occasions, celebrations and religious festivals, Ramadan and Eid in particular.

From buttery, crumbly ma'amoul cookies stuffed with ground nuts or dates, to fragrant, moist basbousa, hot and crisp luqaimat bathed in honey and syrup-soaked, cream, nut or cheese-filled qatayef, no meal is considered complete without a mouthful of something sweet to finish.

The reverence and appreciation shown for these desserts stretches far beyond their enticing taste and appearance though. Abundance, generosity and hospitality are key elements in Saudi culture, and the act of serving coffee and sweets to visiting guests and gathering

“Figures released in 2021 revealed that there are some 1,066 confectionary and chocolate factories across Saudi,”

together with friends and family to enjoy dessert, has long been recognised as the very embodiment of this.

Today, the nation's unparalleled enthusiasm for all things sweet is stronger than ever.

Figures released by the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources in 2021 revealed that there are some 1,066 confectionary and chocolate factories across Saudi, with outlets producing ma'amoul dominating the market, followed by chocolate and then cake factories.

That said, there is change afoot. While sweet treats have traditionally been consumed at home, in recent years and in line with the 2016 National Transformation Plan

the country has seen rapid lifestyle retail development, particularly in the major cities.

In increasingly cosmopolitan Riyadh, the food and beverage scene is thriving: since 2016 it's estimated that the city has welcomed some 288,000sqm of restaurant-led lifestyle retail developments, which include 273 new restaurants. A burgeoning café culture is a decidedly sweet consequence of this movement, with global property insight reports suggesting that 40 per cent of new outlets fall into this category.

From late-night cafes that embrace the nation's night owl tendencies to linger over qawah and traditional treats, to contemporary outlets that provide city slickers with a much-needed morning sugar hit, there's not a time of day when a craving for something sweet can't be satisfied.

Add to that an influx of ambitious, home-grown concepts that serve on-trend, deliberately over-the-top dishes designed to go down a storm on social media, as well as high-end restaurants (both local and international) boasting cutting-edge menus that ensure diners always save room for pudding and several dessert-only destinations - it's fair to say that there's something of a sweet revolution going on.

10 ON-TREND DESSERT DESTINATIONS IN RIYADH

Delicious places for all things sweet



Chunk Bakery & Café

You don't need us to tell you that Riyadh loves dessert. From classic bakes to game-changing, experimental takes on trending treats, the capital is home to an array of places serving up sweet dishes of the highest order. Here are some of our favourites treats.



Adore

The mini brûlées that first made Adore famous are more than worthy of all the hype: rich, smooth and luxurious with a crisp shell that shatters pleasingly as you bite into it. To add to the appeal, they just so happen to also come in an array tempting flavours (fragrant rose, nutty pistachio, sweet-tart mango and raspberry) each as tasty as the next.

Adore's swiss rolls have recently been making a name for themselves too and we can see why: featherlight sponge encases clouds of whipped cream and jam to create the perfect berry-topped spiral of cake. It's also worth noting that they sell a range of gluten-free desserts here, meaning that no one need miss out.

*Takhassusi Branch Road,
Al Mohammadiyah, Riyadh,
@adore__sa, (+966 53 069
2322)*

Chunk Bakery & Café

In the mood for warm, sugar-drenched waffles dripping with ice cream? Had a bad day and need a generous slice of cake to make things right again? Whatever the situations head to Chunk Bakery & Café where the impressive roster of desserts are sure to satisfy.

This Saudi-born brand has been around for five years and the salted caramel popcorn cake has secured its reputation as one of the best tasting bakes in the country (it's also quite the looker, too).
*Al-Damari Street, Oud Square Complex, Riyadh,
www.hellochunk.com,
(+966 55 220 2042)*

SWEET SPOT: MILK CAKE

Some foodie fads disappear from the culinary limelight as quickly as they appeared, but that's certainly not the case with enduringly popular milk cake.

The dish has been trending for some time now and every dessert menu worth its salt (or should we say sugar?) will feature a classic tres leches (three milk) version with the light-and-airy sponge soaked in the winning trio that is evaporated, condensed and whole milk, the bake takes brilliantly to reinvention too. New York stalwart Magnolia Bakery might be famed for its cupcakes and banana puddings, but when it debuted in Riyadh it was the specially-created-for-the-region, oh-so-pretty rose milk cake that really went down a storm.

Popular country-wide spots such as Criollo Café meanwhile pride themselves on giving the Latin American dish a local slant, with options including the karaka milk cake and a saffron-focused version served with pistachio biscuits. Taking milk cake adoration to the next level, the name of Milk Cake Bakery in Riyadh should give you some indication as to how much love they have for the dessert.

What can we say? Food trends may come and go, but this is one zeitgeisty dessert that is here to stay, and we couldn't be happier about it.

Diplomat

Established in 1987 and with branches across Riyadh, Diplomat is well known and loved for its traditional Arabic sweets and desserts, which are prepared according to time honoured recipes. Fans wax lyrical about the baklava with its golden filo pastry, rich ground nut mix and gloriously sticky-sweet, floral syrup.

The crunchy, ghee-soaked kunafas and perfectly crumbly ma'amoul are pretty fantastic too. If hunting for the perfect gift, a box of Diplomat's finest pastries is a winning choice.

*Various locations in Riyadh,
www.diplomatsweets.com,
(+966 11 214 8882)*

Doka Bakery House

From perfectly flaky pastries in multiple forms, to donuts plump with delicious fillings (eyes on you Nutella zaatar delight), beautiful handmade tarts glistening with fresh fruit, chocolate covered ice cream, crepes and Insta-friendly multi-layered cakes, Doka Bakery House serves some of the most wildly delicious desserts in the capital city. Make like a local and head there in the evening for post-dinner indulgence and some unexpectedly interesting people-watching.

*2284 Prince Turki Ibn Abdulaziz Al Awwal Rd, Riyadh,
@dokabakeryhouse,
(+966 59 404 1122)*

Dolce Ragusa

Forgive us, but Mamma Mia! the handmade desserts at Dolce Ragusa are nothing short of phenomenal. Anyone with a weakness for European-style sweets should make a visit to this Italian-inspired dessert shop an absolute priority: the tiramisu is pretty much perfect (sweet and creamy, with a pleasing coffee kick) and the light and crisp on the outside cannoli are filled with ribbons of flavoured ricotta and finished with all manner of different toppings – pistachios, honey-lemon syrup, dark chocolate, powdered sugar and more. *Anas Ibn Malik Rd, Al Malqa, Riyadh, www.dolceragusa.com, (+966 55 385 5604)*

Framboise and Olive

Sweet, creamy and next level dreamy: many Riyadh locals vow that the cheesecakes at Framboise and Olive are the city's best and we're inclined to agree. Akin to works of art over regular desserts, these fluffy baked beauties come in various delectable flavours and can be ordered as full cakes or in cute bite-size. *Abu Bakr Asisq Road, Riyadh, @framboise_and_olive, (+966 11 234 3989)*

Hanini

How do you like your hanini? If the answer to that one is topped with lashings of lotus syrup or abundance of Oreos, you're going to love this small but beautifully decorated place. Purists needn't fret either, Hanini also serves its namesake dessert the traditional way: studded with dates, gleaming with butter and finished with pecan nuts.



And while there's no denying that hanini is the star of the show here, the coffee is pretty decent and the salted caramel ice cream exceptional.

Prince Muhammad bin Saad bin Abdulaziz Road, Riyadh @hanini95

Ladurée

The well-established doyenne of the macaron world, you know you're in for an elegant treat when you pay the Riyadh branch of this iconic French patisserie a visit. However, pastel-hued macarons aren't the sole focus here, other fancy favourites jostling for your attention include sweet ice cream cups, a seriously impressive Dacquoise cake featuring layers of nutty meringue, praline and creamy custard combined in delicate, flaky millefeuille, and the perfect pretty fruit tarts. The sophisticated setting – all white linen tablecloths and gleaming silver cutlery – ensures that a visit here always feels special.

Centria Mall, Riyadh, @ladureeriyadh, (+966 011 2885 075)

Magalotti Gelato & Coffee

Prepare to be wowed by the incredible icy treats

at Magalotti's. It's no exaggeration to say that this authentic gelateria is home to some of the silkiest, smoothest, most sophisticated tasting (and looking) gelato in the region. Top fruity flavours include heady, aromatic mango, zippy lemon and sweet-tart strawberry, while those after something richer can opt for the crumb-topped cheesecake and velvety dark chocolate.

Should picking a favourite prove too difficult a task (we hear you), you can always mix and match your flavours as you please.

Al Rawdah, @magalotti.sa, (+966 50 1179 720)

Santa Nata

The artisan bakers here more than do justice to Portugal's signature confection, Pastéis de Nata. The pastry is always crisp, golden and flaky, while the egg-yellow custard is rich, creamy and quivering in the centre with a beautifully burnished surface. Order one or two to eat at the bakery itself (a cup of coffee is the perfect accompaniment), or treat yourself to a take away.

Anas Ibn Malik Rd, Al Malqa, Riyadh, @santanata.sa, (+966 55 488 0255)

8 MUST-TRY DESSERT PLACES IN JEDDAH

Destination spots for the sweet of tooth



Whether you're on a mission to taste the most sensational ice cream on the Red Sea coast, want to indulge a love for artisan chocolate, or are keen for decadent donuts, Jeddah has it all (and then some). Dessert fans, ready your spoons...

Criollo Café

A go-to for many when it comes to milk cake (the rose-infused version finished with pistachio sauce is divine), this popular café is well known for its giant cookie skillet.

A dreamboat of an oversized dessert, these

beauties are crunchy on the outside, chewy and gooey in the centre and come in a variety of flavours, all topped with ice cream just before serving. Accompany your order with a dallah of steaming hot Saudi coffee. *Various locations in Jeddah, www.criollocafe.com, (+966 55 576 7894)*

Dots

Glorious balls of deep-fried dough take centre stage here and wow, do they hit the spot. With its mouth-watering array of flavours, toppings and colours, Dots is undoubtedly one of Jeddah's best shouts for those who love nothing

more than a gourmet donut-based dessert.

The cream-filled, biscotti crumble-topped cheesecake Dottie is a fan favourite for good reason, and so too is the rainbow sprinkle birthday cake. For something slightly less indulgent, Bitties (mini donut bites) are just the thing. They are impossibly moreish and sold in pots of six.

Jeddah Boulevard, Ash Shati, Jeddah, @dots.sa

Cereal Protocol

Dessert for breakfast, breakfast for dessert: whichever way around, we're on board with this concept. Uber-cool Cereal Protocol at the oh-so hip The House Hotel Jeddah City Yard dishes up the sort of sweet indulgences from which childhood dreams were made.

From mixed cereal bowls guaranteed to send sugar levels soaring to utterly extra Instagrammable French toast, cereal-flavoured ice cream (think Honey Nut Cheerios, Reese's Puffs and Frosted Flakes) and cookies 'n' cream mixes, the must-try hits keep on coming.

The House Hotel Jeddah City Yard, Jeddah, @cerealprotocol, (+966 50 963 3555)



Helen's Bakery

This place is a true destination bakery. By that we mean that no matter which branch you visit (there are several across Jeddah), each one is well worth the travel time.

Owner Helen, who launched her eponymous bakery in 1993, lends her skills and expertise to a menu that reads like a treasure trove of edible delights and includes a regularly updated mix of fabulous cakes, brownies, muffins, cookies, cupcakes and pies, as well as a seasonal specials. Truly blissful stuff. *Various locations including Al Naseem Street, Jeddah, www.helensbakery.com, (+966 12 69777 29)*

Pass By

Ask any Jeddah-based ice cream fan for the inside scoop on where to find the finest frozen desserts in town and mention of Pass By's pretty ice cream truck won't be far from their lips.

Not only is the ice cream here super-fresh, the flavours are fabulous and cover the classics (strawberry, vanilla, chocolate and the like), as well as a few more

experimental options (think cotton candy, pineapple and watermelon). While a cone filled with swirls of signature soft serve is always going to be a sound option, the really sweet toothed amongst you will want to try one of Pass By's cake, brownie, cookie and ice cream combos.

Al Basateen, Jeddah, www.passbysa.com, (+966 55 889 8337)

Sucré de Nada

With a display menu that reads like a who's who of classic puddings and bakes - trifles, pies, puddings, pound cakes, tarts and more (yes, really), those that are visiting this lovely patisserie for the first time should prepare themselves to be well and truly spoiled for choice.

With each option as tasty and fabulous looking as the next, the only sensible thing to do (in our humble opinion at least), is to return to Sucré de Nada time and time again, working your way through the list one delicious offering at a time.

Darwish Kayyal, Jeddah, @sucredenada, (+966 12 261 1183)

Melted

Specialising in dense, fudgy chocolate-packed brownies, rich butterscotch-like blondies and perfectly squidgy cookies bars, this Saudi-born bakery is the result of a collaboration between two friends with a shared passion for sweets.

While this is an online shop, the signature bakes are so good that after tasting them you'll be reluctant to settle for anything less and therefore thrilled that they can be ordered to enjoy at home (arriving in reusable, pretty glass inscribed with your name, no less). While the original plain chocolate brownie is nothing short of dreamy, it's the Arabic coffee flavour that everyone's talking about at the moment.

www.meltdesa.com, @meltdesa.

Le Concheur

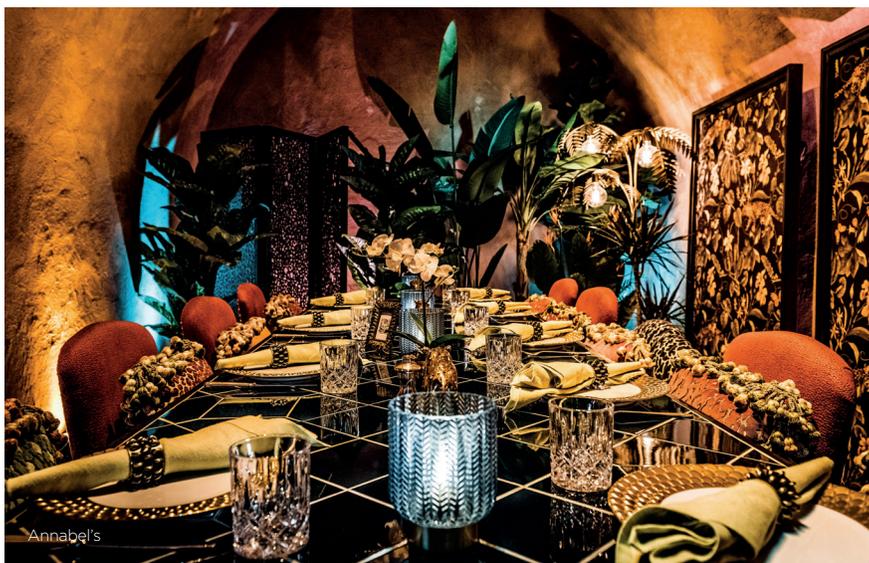
From the stylish interiors to the magnificent looking chocolates on display, this artisan confectionary shop certainly knows how to go big on visual appeal.

Here talented in-house chocolatiers take the finest Belgian cacao and infuse it with their own distinctly original twist to mesmerising effect, think gleaming slabs of pink-hued rose chocolate bark speckled with dried raspberries, premium dates shrouded in blankets of chocolate, marshmallow-biscuit cloud drops and nut and fruit topped 'mixed moon' bites. Pretty picture-perfect desserts that must be sampled.

Al Muhammadiyah, Jeddah, www.leconcheur.com, (+966 55 506 6677)

10 MUST-TRY DESSERT PLACES ACROSS SAUDI

Country-wide venues that hit the (sweet) spot



Whether you're seeking traditional sweets in AlUla, want to get in on the act and sample the trendiest desserts in Dammam, or are keen to make an afternoon or evening spent eating in Khobar truly memorable, these are the most delicious destinations in which to do so.

Annabel's AlUla

World-famous, London-born, celebrity favourite Annabel's

location in AlUla impresses for a number of reasons: the incredible location within the date palm dotted Jabal Ikmah farm, the eclectically decorated private dining rooms, the impeccable service, and stunning garden oasis makes it one-of-a-kind.

With pre-booking a must and a set menu on offer, the intensely rich dark chocolate cake matches the decadence of the surroundings.
Ikmah Farm, AlUla,
www.experiencealula.com

Bateel

No matter where you are in Saudi, a visit to one of Bateel's elegant boutique cafes always feels special. The brand is known for its premium quality Saudi dates and tasty as they are eaten on their own, it's the date-forward desserts on the menu here that are not to be missed.

The Bateel Date Pudding is so good it appears twice (in both regular form and a 2.0



OKTO

version), while the fabulous Kholas Pistachio pie features both date dhibs and fresh Kholas dates. The affogato (rich Bateel espresso poured over a scoop of artisan date ice cream) meanwhile delivers the ideal mix sweetness and caffeine kick.

Locations in Dammam, Khobar and Riyadh, www.bateel.com, (+966 800 111 0222)

Butlers Chocolate Cafe

Quite rightly described as a haven for all things chocolate, the Dammam incarnation of this famed Irish confectionary shop produces handcrafted chocolate truffles, caramels, bars and bark made from top-quality ingredients.

It almost goes without saying then that the desserts are sublime: immense ice cream sundaes, eye-popping waffle-based creations and brownie platters that are finished with melted chocolate sauce included. *Ash Shati Al Gharbi, Dammam, www.butlerschocolates.com, (+966 13 840 7084)*

Queen Taste

People travel for miles to sample the Arabic sweets, classic French pastries, homemade bakes, tortes, mini meringues and cheesecakes at Queen Taste. Unofficially known as the best place for dessert in all of Taif, this home-grown confectionary

shop excels when it comes to elaborately designed, special occasion cakes and edible gifts (we challenge you to visit and not purchase at least one take-home present).

Shehar, Taif, www.queenstaste.com, (+966 53 530 0382)

Merkaz Cafe

For a true taste of authentic Saudi food in captivating al fresco surrounds, a meal at Merkaz in AlUla's Old Town is an absolute must.

Surrounded by swaying palm trees and festooned with fairy lights, the outdoor terrace is a great place to sample some of the country's best loved dishes, and that of



course includes dessert. Must-try sweet dishes include the perfectly golden sesame and honey souled luqaimat and the sensational honey cake with its buttery, paper-thin layers of sponge and fresh whipped cream filling.

AlUla. @merkaz_ksa, (+920 025 003)

MUH Café

Taking decadent desserts to a whole new level (quite literally in the case of their much Instagrammed donut tower), MUH Cafés are a sugar aficionados dream.

The brand tagline is the 'House of Pudd' and they've certainly got that one right; thanks to the likes of s'mores cheesecakes, chocolate covered croissant puddings, churro waffles and donut towers, this place is loved by adults and children alike.

Locations in Dammam, Khobar and Riyadh, www.muhsa.com

Noch - The Chocolate Shop

The cronut craze is alive and well at this funky bakery found in Khobar.

At Noch the invented-in-New-

York global phenomenon that is the croissant-donut hybrid comes in a delectable array of flavours, from citrus custard to Ferrero Rocher, lotus to date crumble. The dessert choices don't end there though: the freshly baked cookies and brownie bites are excellent, as are the whirls of babka and stuffed croissants. Keto diet devotees can indulge in low-carb lemon bars, brownies and cheesecake pieces.

Bashar Ibn Barad St, Khobar, @noch.sa, (+966 50 655 4414)

OKTO

While the chicken gyro is very good indeed and the saganaki is pretty sensational, it's the desserts at upscale contemporary Greek restaurant OKTO that will leave a lasting imprint.

The menu here has been put together by renewed Greek chef Ntinos Fotinakis and it feels like he really unleashes his talent in the dessert department: the deconstructed black lemon meringue is complex looking and fabulous tasting, the light

and airy chocolate mousse comes topped with crispy praline feuillantine, and his riff on the classic Greek custard-based dessert galaktoboureko is nothing short of inspired.

Harrat Viewpoint, AlUla, @okto.sa, (+966 54 443 4147)

Pastel Café

We can't get enough of this incredibly pretty café in Khobar. Setting foot in here feels like stepping back in time, in the best way possible: comfy sofas are covered with floral prints, chandeliers dangle from the ceiling, drinks are served in fine china cups and the atmosphere is wonderfully peaceful. The elegant mood is also felt across the dessert menu and the delicate milk cakes, frothy trifles and fudge truffle bites are particularly special.

Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Road, Khobar, @paste_sa, (+966 13 869 4524)

Wallflower by Le Café

Wallflower by name, but certainly not by nature.

This whimsically designed café features a number of quirky touches - statement ornaments, hanging lights and foliage walls. The all-day dining menu is filled with people pleasers (pasta, pizzas, gourmet burgers), but it's the sweet dishes that really make an impact. Top picks include syrup-drenched French toast, waffles finished with coconut, bananas and maple syrup, gleaming apple tarts, whipped cream-topped saffron bakes and a variety of delicious cheesecakes.

Villaggio Al Andalus, Khobar, @love.wallflower, (+966 56 411 8765)



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