**Local Dishes**The range and scope of Emirati food was traditionally very limited since produce was scarce in this extremely arid environment. Bedouin survived on camel milk and dates on long treks through the desert. Fish was plentiful on the coast and any excess was salted and dried, finding its way inland to the desert and oases. Here, date palms flourished, some fruits, vegetables and cereals were grown, and sheep and goats were raised.

Despite the fact that ingredients were few, Emirati cooks were inventive, concocting a variety of dishes from very little. Foreign influences also shaped the local cuisine: the dhows that carried pearls to India and elsewhere came back laden with spices and later rice. And so today, Emirati food is characterised by a unique spice mix bezr and usually features rice. Cumin seeds, cinnamon sticks, coriander seeds, black peppercorns and chilies are the basic ingredients, but each family has its own 'secret' recipe. Traditionally the bezr that was mixed inland was milder than that used on the coast.

Considering the lack of ingredients, a surprisingly wide variety of breads were made, ranging from the pancake-like chebab to crispy, wafer-thin regag and leavenedkhmeer. This was the standard carbohydrate before rice became popular. In many cases yeast was not available so dates were fermented in the sun to act as a raising agent. Bread was often eaten with butter, cream cheese made from goat's milk, or honey. (Visit the Dubai café[Mama Tan](http://www.mamatani.com/)i to try some of these breads for yourself).

Arabic coffee (gahwa) flavoured with cardamom epitomised the hospitality of the desert where even your enemy was served at least one cup. An expansive hospitality was also evident on festive occasions where food was prepared in large quantities for guests. *Khuzi*(a stuffed whole roast lamb or goat, on a bed of spiced rice) would have been served at themansaf (traditional bedouin feast). This would have been the centrepiece of a selection of food which would have been placed on a mat surrounded by guests.

Today, dishes *such as machboos* (a delicious casserole of lamb or chicken with rice) is a particular favourite in the UAE. So too are diyai mashwi (grilled marinated chicken), *hareis*(slow-cooked wheat and lamb) and baryani(meat or fish cooked with Indian-style spiced rice). Dates, of course, are a standard staple and dibs (date syrup) is used to flavour both savoury and sweet dishes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSKiZjM6sT4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VDNwtI7L4g>