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Description	Arabic Cuisine; Egyptian traditional dish "Molokhya" or "Molokhia". This meal considered as one of the most famous Egyptian meals. Top view with close up
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Keywords	"african, arab, arab food, arabian, arabic, background, cooking, cuisine, delicious, diet, dish, egyptian, egypt, egyptian, egyptian food, food, fresh, green, healthy, herb, mallow, meal, middle east, middle eastern, molokhya, molohiya, molokheyia, molokhia, molokhiya, molokhiya, mulukhiya, mulukhiyah, mulukhiyi, mulukhya, oriental, tasty, traditional, vegetarian, veggie, wooden"

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Image ID	2156380631
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Description	ful medames and aish baladi , Egyptian breakfast
Copyright	bonchan/Shutterstock
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Keywords	"aish, baladi, bread, breakfast, cooking, crushed, cucumber, cuisine, cumin, diet, dip, dipping, dish, dried, egg, egypt, egyptian eish, fava bean, flat, food, foul, foule, ful, green onion, healthy, homemade, lemon, meal, medames, medammes, meze, middle eastern, mudammas, national dish, olive oil, paste, pickles, scoop, sesame, stew, street, tahina, tahini, tomato, torshi, traditional, vegan, vegetable, vegetarian"

Source	Shutterstock
Image ID	2115211217
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Description	"Um Ali" or "Umm Ali" a traditional dessert, Baked puff pastry, combined, milk double cream, vanilla, cinnamon coconut topped with mixed nuts Cuisine: African, North African, Egyptian
Copyright	Jero Jumaa/Shutterstock
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Keywords	"african cuisine, cuisine, delicious, dish, egyptian cuisine, food, middle eastern dessert, middle eastern pastry, north african cuisine, puff pastry, tasty, traditional, traditional dessert, um ali, umm ali"

Source	Shutterstock
Image ID	2260302765
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Description	Arabic Cuisine; Egyptian traditional stuffed pigeon or "Hamam Mahshi" dish, Egyptian food,;
Copyright	hussein farar/Shutterstock
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Keywords	"arab food, arabian, arabic cuisine, baby, background, cairo, cairo egypt, chicken, closeup, cooked, cooking, cuisine, delicious, dinner, egypt, egyptian, egyptian cuisine, egyptian food, egyptian foods, freekeh, fried, garlic, garnishes, hamam mahshi, hamam mahshi, holiday, homemade, iftar, ramadan, lunch, meal, meat, menu, mini, pigeon, pigeon food, ramadan, ramadan food, ramadan kareem, restaurant, restaurant menu, rice, roasted, rustic, soup, stuffed, stuffed pigeon, styling, tasty, traditional, vegetables"



THE GASTRONOMY OF EGYPT

According to an Egyptian proverb, one bite made with love is enough for a hundred people. Essay by Lama Obeid

EGYPT SPANS OVER 1 million sq km, from coastal cities to oases and farms, and the gastronomy of the country is as vast as its topography. From quick-bite street foods such as kushari and liver sandwiches to full-blown meals including stuffed pigeon, mahshi and molokhiyya, Egypt has something to satisfy the taste buds of most visitors.

A Dish Fit for Kings

Molokhiyya, a green leafy plant cooked into a soup, is one of Egypt's most renowned dishes. There are many stories about how the dish came to be, but its first

mention in history dates from the 15th dynasty (around 1638 BCE), when the Hyksos ruled the northern part of Egypt. Before the Hyksos' reign, locals stayed away from the plant known as *khiya* that grew on the banks of the Nile as they believed it to be poisonous. The Hyksos forced the locals to eat the plant as a form of torture, telling them '*kolo khiya*' (eat *khiya*). The locals were surprised by how good it tasted, and after they realised the plant wasn't poisonous it became a favourite food.

Other stories say the plant's health benefits were discovered under the Fatimid Caliphate. The caliph Al Hakim bi Amr Al-

lah spread the false narrative among the working class that the plant was poisonous and banned them from eating it so that he could have it to himself. Another story goes that when the caliph Al Mu'izz li Din Allah became ill with severe stomach pain a doctor suggested he eat the plant as a cure. After the caliph became aware of the plant's curative benefits he banned it for the masses and allowed it only for himself and his entourage. He called the plant *molokhiyya*, which derives from the Arabic word for kings (*molok*), signalling that it was a dish for royals only.

The traditions of *tasha* and *shahqa* have grown up around *molokhiyya* in modern-day Egypt. *Tasha* (minced garlic, coriander and cumin pan-fried in vegetable oil) adds flavour to *molokhiyya*. When it's still searing hot, *tasha* is poured onto the *molokhiyya*, making a sizzling sound, hence its onomatopoeic name. As the *tasha* is poured, it's traditional to take a *shahqa* (a deep, quick gasp), which most Egyptians still do. Some people swear that *molokhiyya* doesn't taste the same without the *shahqa* and others do it simply to keep the tradition alive.

Molokhiya bil aranib is *molokhiyya* cooked with rabbit, and the Nubian dish *kuskuti bil jakut* is *molokhiyya* made with eggs scrambled into the soup. In Siwa Oasis the Bedouin make *molokhiyya* using dried leaves, which gives it a distinctive taste. Despite the disputes about the dish's origin and how it should be prepared, most Egyptians agree that it's delicious.

Street Food

At the other end of the spectrum from food for royalty, Egypt's street-food culture is buzzing with cheap, flavourful eats. Many of these foods were originally sold in wooden push carts, and you can still find these carts scattered across local neighbourhoods. Some vendors have used the popularity of their cart to grow their business into small eateries and even restaurants.

Fuul wa ta'miyyah is a popular Egyptian equivalent to the hummus and falafel of the Levantine. *Fuul* is fava beans slow-cooked down to a soft paste. It's served on a plate to eat with Egyptian *baladi* bread or as a sandwich with *ta'miyyah*, which

is also made from a fava-bean base and is deep-fried into a crispy treat.

On the coast of the Mediterranean, Alexandria is known for its *kebda iskandarani*. This spicy liver is served in soft *fino* bread with sliced Meyer lemons for squeezing over. It's a go-to meal that locals eat at any time of the day. In streets where these sandwiches are sold there are usually small convenience stalls selling potato chips. Alexandrians crush and scatter the chips into their sandwiches to give the soft textures some crunch.

Delicacies

In Egypt food is used as a means of hospitality and a way of warmly welcoming guests. Making sure that your guests are well fed (and sometimes overfed) with the best of foods is central to Egyptian culture. On special occasions that bring people together, dishes that take a lot of time to prepare, such as *mahshi* (stuffed foods), are served to show respect to guests.

Dining tables are adorned with several platters and an array of side dishes. Roast duck is typically served as the main course, and sometimes it's stuffed with seasoned short-grain rice as well. The head of the duck is a delicacy in itself, and if it is served the hosts will offer it to their guests as a gesture of hospitality. Another dish that is often served as a main course is *hammam mahshi* (roast pigeon stuffed with rice).

Stuffed vegetable dishes are also popular. The pulp or seeds of vegetables such as eggplants, zucchini and sweet peppers are removed and the vegetable cases are stuffed to the brim with a mixture of seasoned rice and dill. Other variations are *mahshi krumb* (rolled and stuffed cabbage leaves) and *mahshi wara innab* (rolled and stuffed grapevine leaves).

Sweets

Sweets are also an integral part of the cuisine in Egypt, with milk the base ingredient in many recipes. A few desserts are quite simple, such as *roz bi laban* (rice pudding). *Umm Ali* is a kind of bread pudding. It has a base of milk and cream on crumbled *fino* bread and it's topped with chopped nuts and raisins.