

Middle-Eastern Journey

I visited the Middle East for the first time in 2005, in Egypt. I arrived in the country a little naively, dreaming of pyramids and Cleopatra. I knew very little about their culture. But I quickly fell in love!

To taste the Middle East is to taste dishes with comforting flavors, but it is also to experience generosity at its best.





The Middle East has many facets. It is the nucleus of three monotheistic religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is the junction of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. It is surrounded by three seas: Mediterranean, Red and Black.

It is also an area of geopolitical tension which has attracted many civilizations and which have built architectural wonders, many of which are classified as UNESCO World Heritage.

The city of Petra, Jerusalem, Istanbul are just a few examples of wonderful places to visit.





The Middle East, it is also diverse landscapes. White sand beaches, deserts, mountains, beautiful beaches and even snow. It is a cultural, artistic and gastronomic wealth that the locals will know how to make you appreciate.

The people there are not all Arabs. There are Turks, Israelis, Iranians and Kurds. Population growth is quite high there, increasing by 2% per year, with an average of 3.4 children per family. The average age of 50% of the population is under 25, making it a totally vibrant region.



Traveling in the Middle East is living a unique adventure, sharing a shisha with strangers, drinking tea all day long and discovering unbeatable hospitality.





In the Middle East, Jordan is an exceptional cultural melting pot. Commercial crossroads, biblical land and strategic passage for invaders from everywhere, this country has kept impressive traces of its history. Petra, capital of the ancient Nabataean kingdom, is the most famous example. The ancient city, carved out of the mountains of the South, is an essential stopover in this country. Petra is much more than Indiana Jones. Travel for miles to be dazzled by its treasures and come into contact with the Bedouins. Take the opportunity to order yourself a good fresh pomegranate juice.

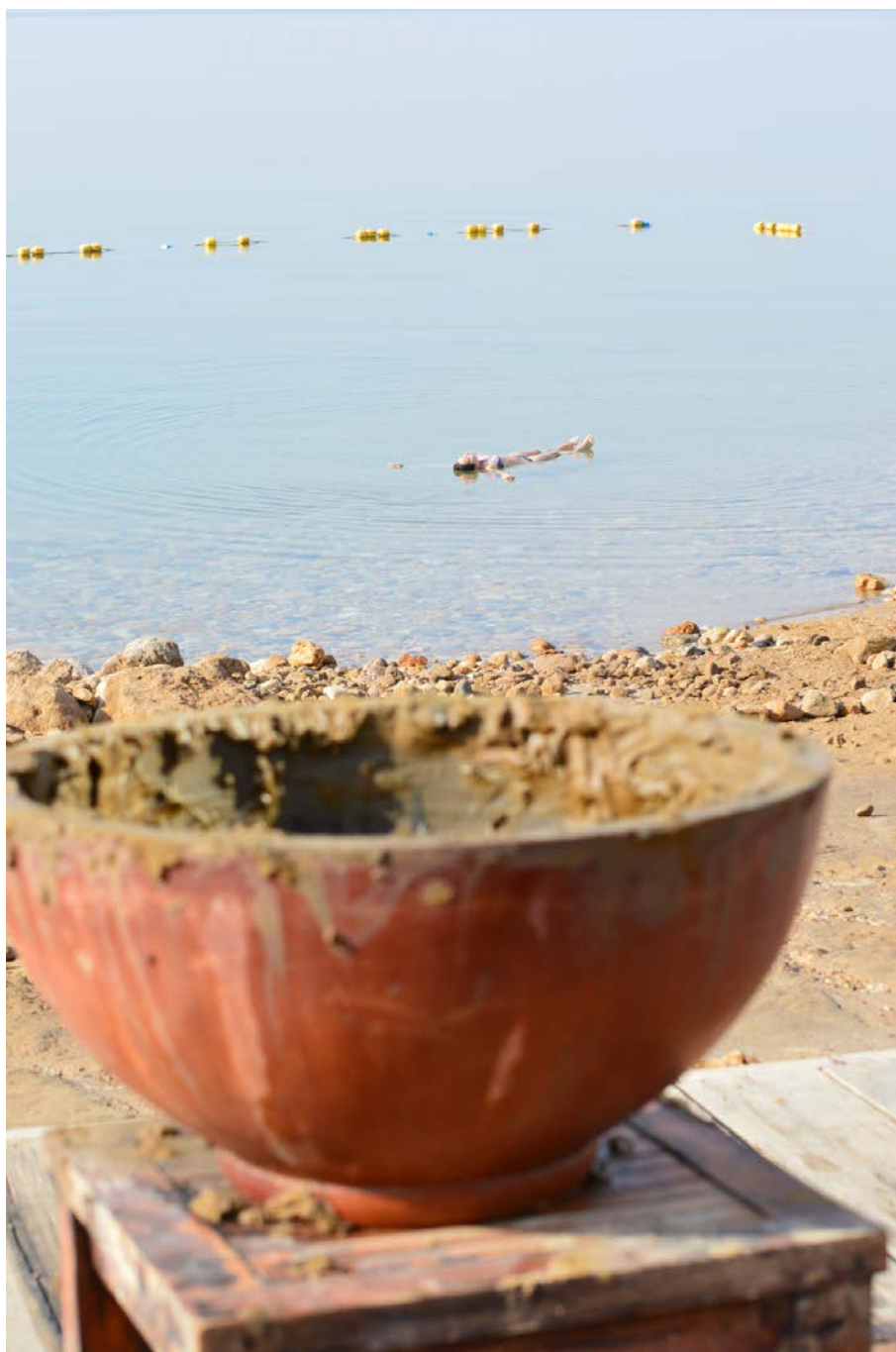


In Jordan, you can easily follow in the footsteps of the Greco-Roman Empire by heading north, such as Jerash, or Amman, the capital. Right in the heart of the city, you can visit the ancient Roman theater. It is said to have been built in the year 150 and is the largest in Jordan with 6,000 seats. Even today, it is used for shows.

While visiting Jordan, or any other country in the Middle East during olive season, you will certainly have the chance to visit one of the many processing factories. The olives harvested by the families, directly from the olive trees in the garden, are brought to the factory to be transformed into oil. Families have their olive oil from the garden for the whole year. At home, the women take the opportunity to make their olive marinades and each of them are very proud of their delicious secret recipe.



Whether in Jordan or Israel, you can cross exceptional landscapes perfectly preserved to offer yourself a moment of relaxation at the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth, just over 400 meters below sea level. With a salinity of around 28%, its waters have nothing to compare with the sea water, which has only 3% salt.



A swim in the Dead Sea preceded by a mud bath is an extraordinary natural exfoliant and a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Unfortunately, this sea is in danger of disappearing as it loses about 1 meter in height each year.



Whoever says Middle East says desert, and this is where the magic of the Arabian Nights takes place. In the desert, time stands still. We enjoy life, the sun, and at night, the stars. The dearest desert to my heart is the desert of Wadi Rum, in Jordan. With its large rocks and red sand, it is frankly impressive. It's not for nothing that they have been shooting several films there! Every time I go there, I have the chance to have unique experiences cooking with my families. One of the most popular dishes is sajieh, sautéed lamb meat with onions and peppers, seasoned with pomegranate molasses.



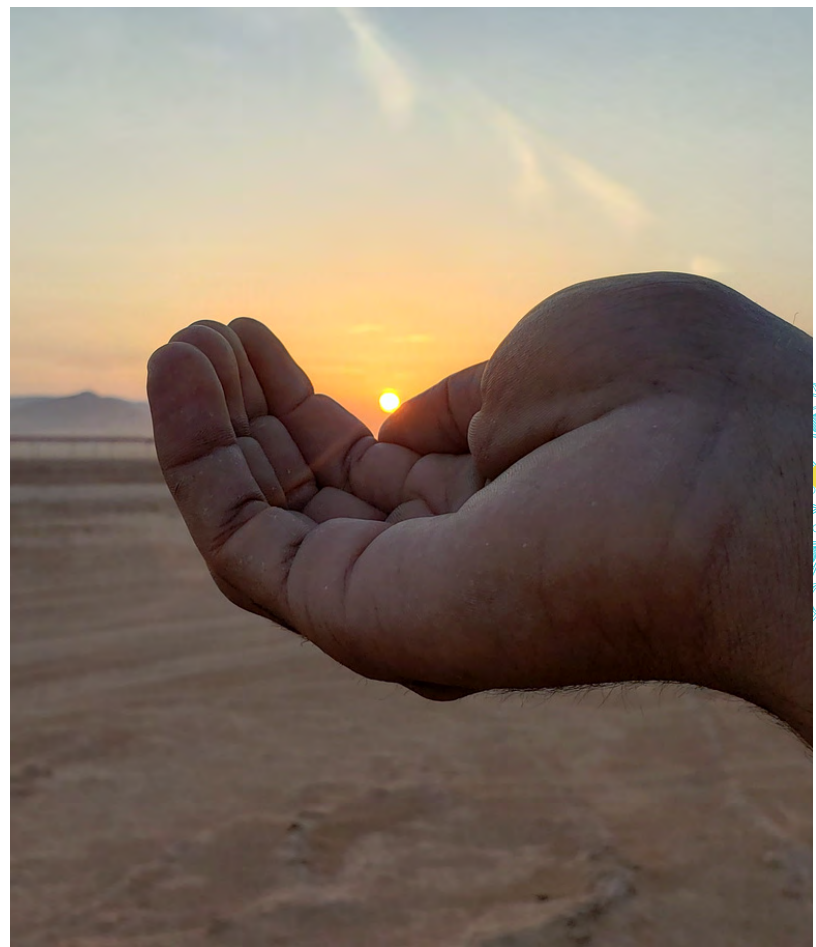
Another tradition of the Bedouin, these nomads of the desert, is to bake bread directly in the embers.







I was lucky enough to attend the camel races which take place only a few times a year at sunrise. It is a big event that brings together participants from several neighboring countries. It's a magical moment where you can feel a lot of excitement in the air! By the way, camels can reach speeds of 70 km/h!



In the Middle East, I have experienced culinary wonders all over the place, and hospitality has come to me like nowhere else.

In the morning, waking up with mezze, these delectable flavored appetizers, is a real treat. Hummus, baba ghanoush, olives, zaatar and above all, the best falafels!

It was in his falafels restaurant that Mohammed welcomed me to show me how to make them, and serve me the best falafels sandwich in the world!



And speaking of sandwiches, it's such a pleasure to arrive in the wee hours of the morning from the airport after a long trip from Canada and to be served each time a famous shawarma, mutton meat cooked on a spit and accompanied of condiments such as pickled vegetables.

Another pleasure of the Middle East is walking around the markets, watching the life that goes on there and chatting with people as they proudly present their products to me.

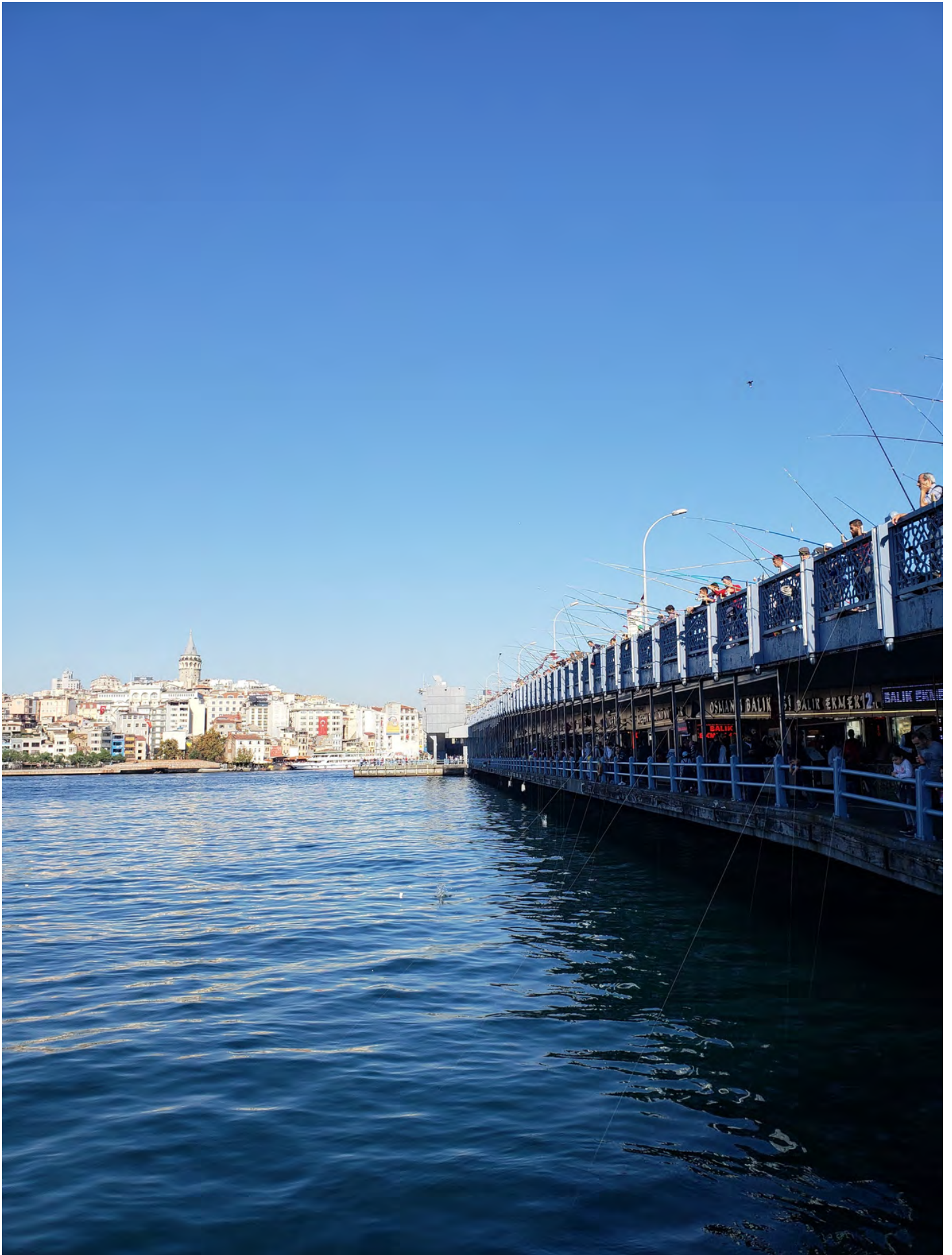




The street food is exceptional there, as in Istanbul, where they serve a sandwich of fresh fish cooked directly on the boat.



I was impressed with the amount of pizza experts I met in the Middle East, especially in Turkey. The pides are long pizzas that are eaten very well for breakfast, often served with an egg on top. So delicious!



The Middle East, it is also unique pastries, such as blaklava, filo pastry sheets filled with crushed nuts and coated with honey, kenafa, this famous cheese dessert, or Turkish delights, these little jelly candies.



In the Middle East, family meals are spent sitting on the floor, all in a circle, around the dishes. Everything is simple, no plate or cutlery, but the welcome is very warm.



A trip to the Middle East means drinking tea all day long. It is also discovering dishes with comforting flavors that taste love. It is enjoying the wonders of nature and admiring unique landscapes. It's meeting outgoing, caring and welcoming people who will treat you like family. They will teach you about their sense of humor and the importance of being together.

Eating well, stopping time and connecting spiritually through the prayers you hear five times a day (even if you don't understand a thing!). You can experience it all in the Middle East.

Thank you to all the wonderful people who welcomed me like family and allowed me to share these wonderful moments with them... Ameena, Salem, Lama, Mohanad, Sana, Abdasalam, Mohammed, Alhasaf, Moad, Manal, Suad, Heyam, Ahmad, Nael, Reem, Heyam, Ismail, Rashed, Necati, Duaa, Maher, ...

