

Forever Beirut: Recipes and Stories from the Heart of Lebanon

Barbara Abdeni Massad

José Andrés, Contributor

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As chef and philanthropist José Andrés notes in his heartfelt introduction: Barbara Abdeni Massad's cookbook *Forever Beirut* captures the dynamic, cosmopolitan spirit of the Middle Eastern city, all with the hope that someday its young people "will no longer need to be resilient, day in, day out."

Beirut, Lebanon's diverse capital city, has been battered by decades of political and economic turmoil, as well as by a horrific port explosion. Thus, this cookbook serves dual purposes: both raising funds for Lebanese food banks and reminding the world of Beirut's tremendous culinary heritage. Each recipe is introduced with affectionate memories of cooks, food vendors, and producers, and with absorbing stories about its unique ingredients, corresponding festivals, and cooking techniques.

The book's emphasis is on seasonal and fresh ingredients and scratch cooking: here, the nightly family dinner is a serious topic. Some dishes are familiar, including baklava, hummus, and tabbouleh; others reflect more regional flavors and foods. Kishk, a powder of fermented dried bulgur and yogurt, flavors soups and flatbreads; elsewhere, mezze plates feature items like minced lamb tartare, frog's legs, and snails.

A memorable chapter on Beirut's array of shaped breads and savory pastries results in a taste of some of the beloved street foods of the city's various ethnic and religious communities. Rich, sugar-soaked, turmeric-bright sweets are showcased later on, with emphasis on the delicacies that are reserved for special occasions, religious holidays, gift-giving, or to break Ramadan fasting.

The plentiful color photographs focus on food and its makers, though there are also Beirut streetscapes, both picturesque and not (barbed wire, protest graffiti). *Forever Beirut* is a warm introduction to Lebanese cuisine and its multicultural heritage that looks forward to better days.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2022)

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