

LICENSED

JLT and Dubai Marina

- **Bistro des Arts** – this locally developed concept on Dubai Marina Mall's promenade transports you back in time to a quintessential Parisian bistro offering a genuine taste of simple and authentic French cuisine.
- **Fumé** – New York meets Dubai in this retro eatery and smokehouse in Pier 7. A no reservations policy ensures it's constantly rammed like sardines.
- **Marina Social** – chef-cum-restaurateur **Jason Atherton**'s first restaurant in Dubai (if you ignore his stint at Gordon Ramsay's Verre over a decade ago) has stunning terrace views at the Intercontinental Dubai Marina. A British-Mediterranean menu marries a traditional cooking style with playful presentation – desserts from the dedicated dessert bar and a candy trolley are highlights.
- **Mythos** – a slice of Santorini in Dubai behind the Armada Bluebay hotel in JLT impresses with its no-frills simplicity and charm across both food and decor.
- **Sicilia** – this Italian trattoria at Movenpick Ibn Battuta has a loyal Italian following – always a good sign. The food here spans dishes from all of **Italy's 20 regions** not just Sicily.

Palm Jumeirah

- **Bushman's** – head here to taste the Australian bush in Dubai, kangaroo and emu included. You must end with the deconstructed pavlova made at the table. Live music makes for a vibrant atmosphere.
- **Social by Heinz Beck** – another 'Social' but this restaurant's consultant chef is Heinz Beck, of three-Michelin star La Pergola in Rome. It's not as casual or as buzzy as Marina Social, but the food is highly creative yet full of flavour.
- **Sun&** – ignore the annoying spelling and Sun& may just become your favourite new haunt too. With sunset views from Palm Jumeirah, this relaxed restaurant and lounge terrace entices for weekend breakfasts, sunset brunches and barbecues – in addition to an a la carte Mediterranean lunch and dinner menu.
- **The Rib Room** – I am referring to the Jumeirah Zabeel Saray outpost whose menu focuses on British cuts of beef. What I love about this restaurant is the bar seating where you can eat, whilst chit chatting to the bartenders.

Jumeirah

- **Coya** – it may be an imported Peruvian concept, but this restaurant at the Four Seasons oozes exquisite albeit pricy food, authoritative service and bundles of atmosphere in a vintage Latino venue.
- **D&A** – an excellent gastro-pub in Jumeirah Beach Hotel with a deck overlooking the Burj Al Arab.

Downtown, Business Bay and Sheikh Zayed

- **La Serre** – I was sceptical when La Serre first opened at Vida Downtown that it would be a cookie-cutter version of La Petite Maison, but despite the similar French-Mediterranean menu, the service, ambience and interior are on a par, if not better. And it's home-grown.
- **Okku** – the location in the H Hotel may not be the best, but Okku is my go-to restaurant for modern Japanese food in a vibrant setting.
- **Prime68** – steak cuts from around the world in the only restaurant with both Burj Khalifa and Burj Al Arab views from atop the JW Marriott Marquis.
- **Rivington Grill** – bring visitors here for an excellent British meal overlooking Dubai's magical dancing fountains. Rumours abound that it will close next year (as will the **Ivy**) which is a damn shame, so get there soonest.

Wafi district

- **Q'bara** – if you have one night only in Dubai, then this restaurant is a must-try – and ultimately my favourite restaurant in this emirate. A majestic Arabesque restaurant in the Wafi district embraces Arabian culture with a creative spin on traditional Middle Eastern fare – reflected in the name with the phonetic spelling for 'Arabic' back-to-front.
- **Solo** – an Italian restaurant loved by Italians...and me has a Sardinian chef patron who adds a creative flair to dishes inspired by different regions. The sea urchin spaghetti and the wood-fired pizzas are must-orders.
- **Tomo** – authentic Japanese food by the godfather of Japanese chefs in Dubai, chef Takahashi, at Raffles – so much so that even **Nobu** dines here. Stunning Burj Khalifa views from the tatami terrace.
- **Wox** – there aren't many five-star hotels that can pull off an unassuming joint tucked in a corner serving delicious street food hawker-style, but Grand Hyatt does with Cambodian, Vietnamese, Singaporean and Chinese fare tossed in the wok right in front of you.

Bur Dubai

- **Elia** – the location in the drab Majestic hotel in Bur Dubai is in stark contrast to the charming Greek restaurant hidden inside, where the food marries traditional with contemporary dishes.

Festival City

- **Reflets** – Chef **Pierre Gagnaire**'s Dubai outpost at the Intercontinental Dubai Festival City is a slick operation serving cutting-edge, haute cuisine.

CAFES AND EATERIES

JLT, Dubai Marina and Internet City

- **Baker & Spice** – the formidable woman who brought **shakshouka** to Dubai making Baker & Spice at Dubai Marina one of my favourite breakfast hangouts. In addition to the original slow-cooked tomato version, there's a green marrow dish too – with ingredients mostly sourced locally.
- **Eat Greek Kouzina** – the beach strip at JBR is littered with mostly mediocre restaurants and cafes, but Eat Greek stands out for its excellent modern spin on Greek dishes in a refreshing setting.
- **Marta's Workshop** – a tiny weekday lunch-only restaurant in JLT run by lawyer-turned-chef Marta whose San Sebastian upbringing has influenced her Spanish cooking style.
- **Nais Italian Kitchen** – owned and operated by Marianna, an Italian national from the northern Piedmont region of Italy, Nais in JLT named after her mother, serves a mix of traditional dishes, with more creative fare.
- **Rossovivo** – without a doubt Dubai's best and most authentic Neapolitan pizza at Internet City (and Business Bay).

Barsha

- **Almaz by Momo** – a slice of Marrakech in, of all places, Harvey Nichols at Mall of the Emirates makes for a welcoming and serene respite from shopping.

Jumeirah

- **Bu'qtair** – no longer a hidden gem but Dubai's only seafood shack is still worth seeking out. Beat the queues by arriving at 6pm for a 6.30pm opening.
- **Bystro** – the only café on this strip in Al Manara worth dining in for brekkie, lunch or dinner – the huevos rancheros in particular.
- **Kaftan** – Dubai boasts many Turkish restaurants, but not many that manage to elevate Turkish cuisine to a finer, exquisite level in a converted Jumeirah villa.
- **Kif Kif** – this tiny, quirky café on Jumeirah's beach road serves superb urban Moroccan 'fast food'.
- **Seaview** – as the name suggests the setting is all about the quaint fishing harbour view in Umm Suqeim. Run by fishermen, the seafood is always freshly caught and served with an Indian-influenced cooking style.

Downtown and Wafi

- **Entrecote Café de Paris** – the sublime secret steak sauce has me returning time and time again to this Dubai Mall eatery.
- **Khan Murjan** – the Aladdin's cave of Arabic restaurants is set in a bustling courtyard hidden in the depths of Wafi mall with a menu focused on Lebanese, Egyptian, Iranian and Moroccan cuisine.
- **Omnia by Silvena** – chef Silvena Rowe's flagship restaurant in Downtown Dubai houses a two-storey, glass-walled kitchen; calligraphiti adorns one wall; with a suspended diamond prism for the chef's table. Her cuisine leans towards a modern Middle Eastern brasserie, with a nod to Emirati flavours, whilst many dishes feature locally sourced produce.