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Sep. 30, 2017 | 12:08 AM

# All aboard for second Beirut Restaurants Festival



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Maghie Ghali | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Taking over Trainstation in Mar Mikhael for the second year running, Beirut Restaurants Festival aims to bring together the best of the capital's eateries and bars for a fun-filled foodie weekend, which kicked off Friday night. In partnership with Hospitality Services and sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism, this year's edition hosts about 60 participants, ranging from comfort food favorites to innovative startups that have made an impact in the industry.

"It all started when Beirut was named [Travel & Leisure's Best



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International City for Food 2016]. This festival is a celebration for restaurateurs to celebrate the various achievements, the creativity, and the success in Lebanon and [beyond],” Maya Noun, treasurer of the Syndicate of Owners of Restaurants, told The Daily Star. “It is also a platform for restaurants to showcase their new ideas and for restaurant owners to get together and celebrate a weekend of fun with their customers and colleagues.”

Lebanese restaurateur success internationally was also celebrated in the awarding of “Outstanding Contribution to The Culinary Scene in Lebanon” to Chef Youssef Akiki of Burgundy restaurant for his venue being named amongst the top 50 restaurants worldwide this year.

Also on the menu is a daily live-music and entertainment lineup, which the managing director of Hospitality Services Joumana Dammous-Salame said will have something for all tastes.

“Bands will be on stage to perform a selection of pop rock, salsa, jazz and oriental tracks, and DJs from Iris Beirut will also be spinning cool tunes late into the night,” she told The Daily Star. “It is also a family-friendly event, with a dedicated kids’ area providing arts and crafts activities and inflatable games.”

This year’s participants include Sushiritto by Soto, who were serving up Asian fusion food, and traditional Armenian-Lebanese restaurant Batchig, offering a special selection for the festival. The stalls were set out in little huts across the old train tracks, with the aging steam engines in the background.

“We decided to do something special and so we’re serving BBQ pork, an Armenian style burger and a whole hog roast,” Aline Kamakian, Batchig’s managing director said.

At Sushiritto, salmon poke bowls and sushi-burritos were on offer. Just a few stalls over Al-Falamanki had set up a shisha lounge and Le Petit Gris was mixing fruity cocktails.

Wishing to be socially responsible, the festival intends to donate any leftover food at the end of each day to the Lebanese Food Bank, who will distribute it to underprivileged families.

The festival also benefits the eateries involved, offering a chance to connect with their customers and attract new fans.

“The participants gain a lot exposure, as the festival attracts a lot of visitors who go out to restaurants, so these are potential clients,” explained Noun. “They will gain new followers and they will remind existing clientele that they are still there and offering the best food items. By selling small portions, the participants are ensuring that as many visitors as possible are trying the food and will follow them after the festival ends.”

The first edition of the festival in 2016 gathered 40 participants, and the organizers hope expand every year to present the best Lebanon has to offer in the food industry.

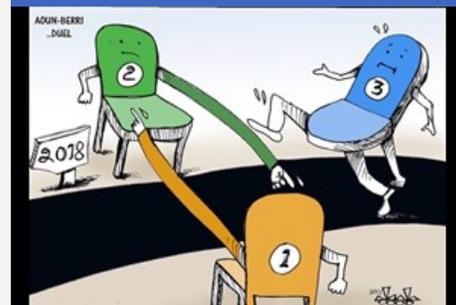


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“On the back of last year’s success we’ve attracted a greater selection of restaurants, bars, pastry shops and kids’ food options,” Dammous-Salame said.

Beirut Restaurants Festival is open Sept. 30 (5 p.m. to 1 a.m.) and Oct. 1 (noon to 11 p.m.) at Trainstation, Mar Mikhael.

A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Daily Star on September 30, 2017, on page 3.

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