

An Evening in Israel

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When you think of a trip to Israel, chances are your mind envisions a tour of Jerusalem including a visit to the city market where you pass vendors selling touristy “evil eye” jewelry, wooden goblets from Bethlehem, and aromas of spices in a mélange of foods—some recognizable, some not. Like listening to a difficult piece of classical music after studying its composer, learning about the history, traditions, and foods of Israel prepares the palate for an explosion of tastes and textures.

Such was the experience of Atlanta Dames during the chapter’s Global Culinary Initiative program featuring the heritage of Israel. It was held February 17 at the home of Ambassador Judith Varnai Shorer, Consul General of Israel to the Southeast. The guest chef for an Israeli dinner during the event was award-winning Restaurateur-Chef Michael Solomonov who was in Atlanta February 16 to showcase his documentary, “In Search of Israeli Cuisine,” during closing night of the annual Jewish Film Festival.

Atlanta Dames were an integral part of the dinner, including the authentic preparation of Chef Solomonov’s recipes by **Sandra Bank**, owner of Added Touch Catering, and Chef **Ashley Mitchell**, also from Added Touch. **Susana Braner** and her team from Divine Event catering set the mood with elaborate table settings, each table topped with fresh flower arrangements created by **Marie-Laure Coste Dujols**, owner of Le Jardin Français.

During the dessert course, Eileen Mason of The Israel Tour Company gave a brief presentation on Israel as the ultimate culinary destination.

Dames who attended the film the evening before as well as the LDEI dinner were primed for the guest presenter Chef Solomonov, who provided the heritage and tradition that goes into preparing authentic food from Israel. After dinner, he autographed copies of his new cookbook *Zahav, A World of Israeli Cooking*, which recently won the 2016 James Beard Foundation’s Book of the Year award as well as for Best International Cookbook.

Our dinner really started the previous evening on closing night of the Jewish Film Festival. In fact, one of the films shown during this festival was “Breakfast at Ina’s,” an award-winning documentary about Chicago Dame **Ina Pinkney**.

Grand Dame **Joan Nathan** gave a presentation about Israeli cuisine, which preceded the premiere of Chef Solomonov’s documentary.

After watching the film, any preconception of foods of Israel only consisting of menus from Passover dinner was obliterated by several events that proceeded the evening of Israeli food, heritage, and tradition. Several hundred attended this sold-out event, held in Atlanta’s Symphony Hall on the campus of the Woodruff Art Center. Famished after watching the documentary—like a starving herd of cattle—everyone hurried to the lobby to enjoy some of the delicious foods featured in the film.

With over 2,000 years of history, Israel’s food heritage is a melting pot of cuisine from early settlers from Palestine, Yemen, Eastern Europe, and the Mid-East who settled throughout Israel. Religion played a key component in the ceremonies and rituals revolve around food. Therefore, foods from Israel come from ancient recipes handed down from generations and evolved into the food revolution enjoyed today. Agribusiness, including Israeli wine, has now become a culinary focus for tourists.

Some of today’s Israeli food combinations are shared in Chef Solomonov’s cookbook, *Zahav*. Perhaps the food culture and tradition is best summed in his commentary: “We mark time sitting at the table. Year after year, on holidays and birthdays and even at funerals, we sit and eat and take note of what is the same and what has changed. We take stock of where we are and where we want to be. And food is the tonic that makes it all easier to swallow. A few glasses of wine don’t hurt either.”

