

GLOBAL CULINARY INITIATIVE
Yemeni Coffee Traditions and Family Dinners
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Although Yemen produces one of the finest coffees in the world, most of it is exported. After preparing coffee for shipment, Yemenis gather the hulls and cherry skins for making *Qishr*. Nothing goes to waste in Yemen's coffee process. Hulls and cherry skins are sold to local markets to make *Qishr*, which could be referred to as Yemen's national beverage. Boiled into a "tea," the beverage contains a hefty amount of sugar with the addition of spices such as ginger, cardamom, and cinnamon.

You could call it "Qishr Chai." The taste is similar to an herbal spice tea, and if you like a sweet beverage as I do, it tastes better than you can imagine. Like coffee and tea, *Qishr* is served as a gesture of hospitality usually after a meal when guests and family gather for conversation and relaxation in the *din*, which is like the living room. Along with a cup of *Qishr*, the host may pass around a fragrance oil to cleanse the palate from a hearty meal.

Being a guest in the home of a Sheikh and his family that lived high in the Haraz Mountains where coffee is grown, I experienced an adventure in cultural protocol.

In Yemen, the custom is to eat only with your right hand while sitting on the floor. Have you ever tried scooping a mouthful of rice from your plate to your mouth without spilling a grain? Realizing my lack of agility, my hosts felt sorry for me and laid a stack of napkins at my place setting.

Meals consist of fresh vegetables, grown from the family garden, and usually goat from their small farms. My favorite goat preparation was a stew over rice. Homemade, unleavened bread was also made fresh and served at every meal. Called *Malawah*, the bread is a mixture of flour, butter, salt, and butter mixed, flattened, rolled out, and baked on a flat stone. Spicy, hot sauces made with fenugreek, chilies, and other herbs provided delicious condiments for dipping hot freshly baked bread.

Family and guests are seated in a circle with a large aluminum tray, like a "lazy Susan" placed in the center with dishes of vegetables, rice, salad, and meat, served in 8-inch aluminum pans arranged around the tray.

My favorite dessert was honey cake, which was served at every meal. Premium, raw Sidr Yemeni honey comes from Sidr trees that grow wild in the desert areas of Yemen. Thick with an exquisite rich taste, Sidr honey is one of the most expensive in the world. It is also known for its many medicinal benefits such as relief from arthritis. Since Sidr trees are prevalent throughout Yemen, many families maintain bees for producing honey. Its honeycomb produces an elegant sweetness that is the perfect finale to a fine meal.

Being able to experience the culture, tradition, food and coffee from Yemen while sharing conversation over a meal brought our Global Culinary Tradition to life!

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