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Issue 105 | April - May 2016 hospitalitynewsmag.com

MIDDLE EAST

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BARCELONA'S MIDDLE EAST CONNECTION



In light of the launch of the Mediterranean Hotel and Restaurant Association (MHRA) in Barcelona, **Chadi Chidiac**, managing partner of PROTOCOL hospitality management consultancy, takes on the city

The Barcelona metropolitan area comprises over 66 percent of the people in one of the richest regions in Europe – Catalonia; with a GDP per capita amounting to EUR 28,400 (approx. USD 32,000), surpassing the EU average by 165 percentage points. Barcelona, as an internationally renowned tourist destination, has numerous recreational areas, one of the best beaches in the world north and south of Barcelona, mild and warm climate, historical monuments, including eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, many good-quality hotels, and a highly developed tourist infrastructure.

According to a market survey and feasibility study conducted by PROTOCOL in partnership with Trutmann consulting firm, a leader in the hospitality consulting business based in Catalonia, Barcelona boasts an eclectic group of high-end restaurants – many of them Michelin-starred with a majority of market supply

servicing local cuisine, notching around 28 percent of the total 6,859 concepts and around 20 percent in terms of seating supply, yielding around 164,000 seats out of the 810,000 seats currently available in the market.

Daring investments and trends

Traditional Catalan food tends to be earthy rustic fare, but thanks to a culinary revolution in recent years, modern Catalan cuisine is considered some of the best in the world, with chefs like Ferran Adria blazing a trail, a three-Michelin star chef running elBulli restaurant described by food critics as "the most imaginative generator of haute cuisine on the planet." The restaurant was also associated with molecular gastronomy. The restaurant had a limited season: the 2010 season, for example, ran from June 15 to December 20. Bookings for the next year were taken on a single day after the closing of the current season. It accommodated only 8,000 diners a season, but received


Chef Albert Adrià


more than two million requests. The average cost of a meal was EUR 250 (USD 283) while the restaurant itself operated at a loss since 2000, with operating profit coming from elBulli-related books and lectures by Adrià bearing in mind that as of April 2008, the restaurant employed 42 fine chefs. The restaurant closed on July 30, 2011 and was reopened as a creativity center in 2014. In addition to the legendary elBulli, Ferran Adrià announced two Barcelona projects in 2010 — the tapas bar Tickets (1 Michelin star since November 2013) and the cocktail-focused 41° Experience (1 Michelin star since November 2013) — PROTOCOL spoke to the younger

The purest version of Albert Adrià's vision, 5.0 consists of five restaurants, five completely new culinary concepts, five partners, and one creative chef with one clear objective: to develop the first culinary amusement park in the world, located in the center of Barcelona.

Adrià, Albert, a superstar chef as well, who loves a challenge and quickly branched out, turning one section of the city into what he called a "culinary amusement park." In the following years, the ambitious project, which the Adriàs have dubbed the 5.0 Project, the purest version of Albert Adrià's vision, 5.0 consists of five restaurants, five completely new culinary concepts, five partners, and one creative chef with one clear objective: to develop the first culinary amusement park in the world, located in the center of Barcelona. Along with the three owners of the legendary marisqueria (seafood restaurant) Rías de Galicia — Juan Carlos, Borja and Pedro Iglesias — this amusement park strategy added additional restaurant concepts in the form of Pakta, Hoja Santa, Niño Viejo, and Bodega 1900. Together, these five concepts will form a map of the 'must-visit' places in Barcelona for food lovers and elBulli nostalgics. Also, by the beginning of next year, Adrià will be ready to go on to some very special and exclusive international projects: the Dominican Republic and Ibiza are on his agenda for the next few years. Still to come is a revamp of the original 41° Experience: Enigma, an immersive, dreamlike maze that Albert Adrià promises will "reinvent the way we go to restaurants...Inside Enigma, people sitting down at 41° will be able to enjoy a really special tasting menu, in which they will feel closer than ever to the

Supply by Concept

Total		6,859.00
Vietnamese	11	
Vegan	81	
Thai	25	
Sushi	125	
Steakhouse	37	
Spanish		1,932
South American	169	
Seafood	139	
Pub	327	
Pizza	362	
Middle Eastern	41	
Mediterranean		1,242
Japanese	266	
Italian	442	
Irish	11	
International	188	
Indian	72	
Greek	70	
German	15	
French	186	
European	152	
Eastern European	7	
Chinese	127	
Delicatessen	168	
Creole	21	
Café	246	
British	21	
BBQ	69	
Asian	150	
American	150	
African	7	

One of the most common tapas in Spain is called Pinchos Morunos (Moorish bites), which are essentially spicy pieces of meat on a skewer – very similar to shish kebab.

already-closed elBulli." There will be 19 staff members for 16 guests at EUR 200 (USD 226) each - an once in a lifetime experience.

Scaling and calibration

To scale market supply, PROTOCOL categorized Barcelona's restaurants into five main categories according to a number of specs, one of them being the most objective and scientifically-proven scheme; the GCA ratio. To calibrate supply, price tags were weighted based on menu prices and average check per guest showed that 40 percent of the restaurants have an average ticket lower than EUR 10 (USD 11) followed by medium-low establishments with 22 percent. At third place come medium scaled outlets with 19 percent, followed by medium high and high with 15 percent and 4 percent respectively. Revealed figures show Catalan's market is a tourist-friendly destination, especially for inbound visitors coming from other EU member states. According to the same PROTOCOL study, an average expenditure per trip was around EUR 587 (USD 664), bearing in that the average guest-night for EU inbound tourism is seven nights, the average per-night-expenditure is around EUR 82 (USD 93), leaving little chance for restaurants with high price tags to receive visitors. Considering that this EUR 82 is not disposable, since the amount is distributed between different activities such as transportation, souvenirs, site entrance fees, etc. it would leave around 25 to 35 percent share of disposable Euros to be spent in F&B outlets.

Lebanese stars

Due to Barcelona's large expat culture and incredibly diverse nature, when it comes to choosing a restaurant there is always something for all 'gustos'. Middle Eastern and Lebanese food are no exception.

Barcelona's Middle Eastern and Lebanese restaurants are known for serving quality food at reasonable prices. You may know that at one stage, Spain was ruled by the Arabs for more than 700 years. They definitely left their mark on the culture and architecture of Spain, as can be seen mostly in the southern parts of the country in cities like Granada and Cordoba. Another great legacy that the Arabs left behind was their influence on cuisine. For example, one of the most common tapas in Spain is called Pinchos Morunos (Moorish bites), which are essentially spicy pieces of meat on a skewer – very similar to shish kebab.

Barcelona definitely has a lot to offer in terms of authentic Middle Eastern cuisine, with 41 restaurant concepts offering delicious meals from Syria, Palestine and Lebanon. Abou Khalil has been around since 1983 and is renowned for its authentic Lebanese dishes. Abou Khalil is ideal for those looking for a warm and homey atmosphere and a genuine taste of Lebanese food. Al-Waha serves delicious food, with an elaborate presentation. This is a great option for vegetarians as well, as their dishes are diverse with plenty of options for non-meat lovers. Not far from Al-Waha, on Gran de Gracia, is Habibi. Situated in a cafe like setting, Habibi has an incredibly large menu including, fresh meat shawarma, baba ghanouj and char-grilled chicken. Ugarit is probably the most popular option for Lebanese food in Barcelona, although some experts might argue that their menu is Lebanese and Syrian. They have seven outlets across the city. Ugarit offers a wide variety of dishes for both meat lovers and vegetarians. Their hummus is always freshly prepared, as is the falafel and salad. If you enjoy chicken, try the shish tawuk, served with a red pepper or hummus paste. Volubilis is a mix of Moroccan and Lebanese cuisine, located in Eixample district. Their specialties are tajines, couscous, harira soup, pasteleta (a crust cake with chicken, onion, eggs and almonds), salads, kebabs, shawarmas and moussaka. Equinox is another Lebanese restaurant located in the heart of Barcelona. It is not a falafel, kebab and fast-food restaurant; here you can have a magnificent Lebanese meal served on a plate - one of the best Lebanese restaurants in the city.

Consensus

In brief, the high-end gastronomy formula doesn't work at present, at least in

Barcelona Restaurants' Price Bracket



Barcelona. For lunch, people feel guilty if they spend three hours or more eating in a restaurant. However they feel much more comfortable paying the same amount of money in a more casual restaurant in which the menu is part of the fun. There are many formulas that can work, but you have to have a clear idea of what you want and you can offer. If you want to offer a tasting menu which was the trend in Barcelona for more than 10 years now, you have to do it really well because it is not only about the money, you are asking your guests to spend a long time in your restaurant. You are forced to make it an unforgettable experience. You need a great culinary background to make your proposal worth it.

The consensus is for operators to try to offer good and fast reasonably priced cuisine and an accessible average check, to capture the tourist and the professional Catalan, who always seeks the best value, in order to spend wisely.

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Assiyana
Because We Care

Lebanon Branch
Tel/Fax: 961 1 200472
Mobile: 961 3 976667
info@assiyana.com
Qatar Branch
Tel: + 974 44322088
Mobile: +974 77846466
infoqatar@assiyana.com

