PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK | 2026

# From Heritage to Plate: The Emirati Cuisine Competition 2026

Your opportunity to showcase the culinary heritage of the Emirates

## Participant Handbook: Guidelines and Frequently Asked Questions

Develop your culinary skills and share your interpretation of Emirati cuisine through **From Heritage to Plate — The Emirati Cuisine Competition 2026**.

Winners will receive an internship and training opportunity at the **two MICHELIN-starred Row on 45 at Grosvenor House, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Dubai**, along with the opportunity to showcase their culinary creations at **Sikka Art & Design Festival 2027**.

Registration and submission deadline: **30 November 2026**

## THE CHALLENGE

Create and present an Appetiser, Main Course, and Dessert, to demonstrate your knowledge, skill, and creativity in presenting Emirati cuisine; whether traditional or modern in style.

At its heart, the competition is a celebration of Emirati culinary identity, honouring the diversity, depth, and evolution of local UAE cuisine, and recognizing the talent shaping its future.

Organized by Dubai Tourism (DET), in collaboration with the International Centre for Culinary Arts (ICCA Dubai) and powered by Foodverse, this competition offers Emirati chefs a platform to express mastery of Emirati flavours, ingredients, and cultural storytelling.

This edition is presented under the theme:

***"Dubai My Home"***

This year's theme celebrates Emirati cuisine and culture through the perspectives of aspiring Emirati chefs, culinary students and junior chefs .

Participants are encouraged to draw inspiration from family recipes, local ingredients, and personal memories to create a menu that reflects their connection to Dubai and the UAE. Traditional and modern interpretations are welcome, provided the dishes retain a clear Emirati identity.

## YOUR GUIDE TO EMIRATI CUISINE

**Looking for inspiration for your menu?**
Explore this guide to learn more about Emirati ingredients, flavours and culinary traditions.

**Explore the Emirati Cuisine Guide**

## THE COMPETITION VENUE

**International Centre for Culinary Arts (ICCA Dubai)**, Block 9, Dubai Knowledge Park, Dubai

The live final will be broadcast via ICCA Live.

## PARTICIPATION AND ELIGIBILITY

- The competition is open exclusively to Emirati nationals who are currently pursuing or have completed culinary education or formal culinary training and are at the beginning of their culinary careers.
- Students, recent graduates, trainees, and junior chefs are welcome to apply.
- Entries must be submitted individually.
- Team entries will not be accepted.
- Registration and participation are free of charge.

## THE COMPETITION REGISTRATION PROCESS

### Step 1: Sign Up on Foodverse

Register on Foodverse app (available on Play Store and iOS) and create your participant profile.

Your profile will serve as your gateway to the competition and enable you to connect with the organisers throughout the selection process.

### Step 2: Submit Your Entry

Submit a complete three-course Emirati-inspired menu comprising:

- An appetiser.
- The main course.
- A dessert.

Your submission must include:

- Clear, high-quality images of all three dishes.
- A recipe for each dish, including the complete ingredient list and step-by-step preparation method.
- A short story of no more than 100 words explaining the inspiration behind your menu, its connection to the theme and what it means to you.

The submitted menu must be suitable for cooking and presentation within 180 minutes during the live final.

**Looking for inspiration for your menu?**
Explore this guide to learn more about Emirati ingredients, flavours and culinary traditions.
**Explore the Emirati Cuisine Guide**

### Step 3: Make Your Entry Stand Out

Your images, recipes, and story are central to the selection process. Ensure that your submission demonstrates creativity, authenticity, cultural relevance, and attention to presentation.

Show how your menu expresses your understanding of Emirati cuisine and your personal connection to Dubai and the UAE as home.

## THE COMPETITION PROCESS

### Round 1: Online Submission and Selection

Participants submit their entries through Foodverse. Entries will be reviewed based on creativity, authenticity, Emirati inspiration, cultural relevance and presentation quality.

Eight finalists will be selected directly from the online submissions and invited to ICCA Dubai for a competition briefing and preparation session.

### Finalist Briefing and Preparation

The eight finalists will attend a session at ICCA Dubai to understand the competition format and prepare for the live final.

The session will cover:

- A competition briefing and facility orientation at ICCA Dubai.
- Mentorship and menu refinement sessions with professional chefs.
- Professional tips on preparation and execution.
- The competition structure, rules, timing and flow.
- Competition-style plating and presentation.
- Interviews and promotional features introducing the finalists and their culinary stories.

### Round 2: The Live Final

The eight finalists will compete in a live cook-off at ICCA Dubai. Each finalist will have 180 minutes to prepare and present an appetiser, main course and dessert to the judging panel.

The final will be broadcast via ICCA Live and followed by the winner announcement and awards ceremony.

## THE COMPETITION TIMELINE

All dates below are tentative and subject to confirmation by the organisers.

| Milestone | Date |
|---|---|
| **Campaign Launch and Online Registration** | 1st November 2026 |
| **Online Submission Deadline** | 30 November 2026 |
| **Finalists Announcement** | 5 December 2026 |
| **Finalist Briefing** | 7 December 2026 |
| **Live Competition Final** | Sunday, 13 December 2026 |

Briefing times and the final day schedule will be communicated by the organisers. Any changes to the dates above will be communicated separately.

## THE COMPETITION GUIDELINES

### Meal Structure

Participants must prepare a three-course Emirati-inspired menu consisting of an appetiser, main course and dessert.

The menu should demonstrate a thoughtful combination of flavour, texture and presentation, with a clear connection to Emirati cuisine and the theme, Dubai My Home.

### Portion Requirements

For the live final, participants must prepare two complete sets of the menu:

- One set for tasting the judging panel.
- One set for food photography and presentation.

The final tasting portions will be communicated during the competition briefing.

### Theme Adherence

The menu should reflect Emirati culinary identity and the participant's connection to the UAE.

Participants may draw on family recipes, local food traditions and ingredients associated with Emirati cuisine, including fragrant rice, aromatic spices, dried limes, saffron and dates.

Creative interpretations are encouraged while preserving recognisable Emirati flavours and cultural relevance.

### Taste and Flavour

Each dish should demonstrate balanced seasoning and complementary flavours.

Components should work together to create a cohesive eating experience, with no individual element overpowering the dish.

### Texture and Cooking Technique

Participants should demonstrate appropriate cooking techniques and control over the texture of each component.

Contrasts such as crisp and soft, smooth and crunchy, or creamy and firm should support the overall dish.

### Presentation

Dishes should be visually appealing, carefully plated and connected to the menu's Emirati inspiration.

Where appropriate, presentation elements or props may support the cultural story behind the dishes.

### Timing

Participants will have 180 minutes to complete and present their full menu during the live final.

The cooking order and start times will be communicated during the competition briefing.

### Hygiene and Food Safety

Participants must maintain proper personal and kitchen hygiene throughout the competition.

Ingredients must be handled, stored, and prepared safely. Workstations, utensils, and equipment should remain clean and organised.

### Waste Management

Participants should use ingredients efficiently and minimise unnecessary food waste. Careful preparation, portion planning, and responsible use of ingredients will form part of the assessment.

## PANTRY AND INGREDIENT GUIDELINES

A common pantry will be available for the live competition. Participants should confirm the final ingredient list with the organisers before the event.

The pantry outline includes:

| Category | Includes |
|---|---|
| **Dates and Sweeteners** | Dates, date syrup, and honey. |
| **Spices and Seasonings** | Cardamom, cinnamon, cumin and other commonly used seasonings. |
| **Aromatics and Flavour Ingredients** | Rose water, tamarind, harissa and tomato paste. |
| **Grains, Flours and Legumes** | Rice varieties, flours and legumes. |
| **Dairy, Nuts and Fresh Produce** | Dairy products, nuts, fresh vegetables, and herbs. |
| **Ingredients Participants Must Bring** | Participants must bring their own chicken, meat, or seafood. |

A fully vegetarian menu is permitted, provided it meets the Emirati cuisine requirements and competition theme.

Any specialist ingredients required for the menu should be discussed with the organisers in advance.

## THE JUDGING CRITERIA

The live final will be assessed out of 100 marks.

**1. Taste, Texture and Flavour Balance: 50 Marks**

Judges will assess:

- Balance and compatibility of flavours.
- Appropriate texture and cooking of ingredients.
- Seasoning and technical skill.
- The overall eating experience.

**2. Presentation and Plating: 20 Marks**

Judges will assess:

- Visual appeal and appetising presentation.
- Balance of colours and components.
- Attention to detail.
- How the presentation reflects Emirati culinary identity.

**3. Originality and Creativity: 20 Marks**

Judges will assess:

- Thoughtful and distinctive use of Emirati ingredients.
- Creativity in cooking and presentation.
- Interpretation of traditional flavours and techniques.
- The menu's cultural relevance and individual character.

**4. Time, Hygiene and Waste Management: 10 Marks**

Judges will assess:

- Completion and presentation within 180 minutes.
- Personal and kitchen hygiene.
- Safe handling of ingredients.
- Efficient use of ingredients and minimal waste.

## WINNER REWARDS & OPPORTUNITIES

- Winners will receive an internship and training opportunity at the two MICHELIN-starred Row on 45 at Grosvenor House, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Dubai, giving them the chance to learn in a professional restaurant environment and further develop their culinary skills.
- Winners will also have the opportunity to showcase their culinary creations at Sikka Art & Design Festival 2027, sharing their interpretation of Emirati cuisine with a wider audience.

The organisers will communicate the duration, schedule and arrangements for these opportunities. No cash prizes are offered this year.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. Who can apply?**

The competition is open exclusively to Emirati nationals who are currently pursuing or have completed culinary education or formal culinary training and are at the beginning of their culinary careers. Students, recent graduates, trainees, and junior chefs are welcome to apply.

Entries must be submitted individually. Team entries will not be accepted. Registration and participation are free of charge.

**2. Do I need to be Emirati?**

Yes. Participation is restricted to Emirati nationals.

**3. Can I participate as part of a team?**

No. This is an individual competition. Each participant must submit their own entry and compete individually.

**4. Does my menu have to be Emirati?**

Yes. Your appetiser, main course and dessert must form an Emirati-inspired menu. Traditional and modern interpretations are welcome, provided the menu retains a clear connection to Emirati flavours, ingredients and culinary culture.

**5. How should I interpret Dubai My Home?**

Your menu should express your connection to Dubai and the UAE through Emirati cuisine.

You may draw inspiration from family recipes, local ingredients, food traditions and personal memories that reflect Dubai and the UAE as home.

**6. Is there a fee to participate?**

No. Registration and participation are free of charge.

**7. What do I need to submit online?**

You must submit high-quality images of all three dishes, complete recipes and a short menu inspiration story of no more than 100 words.

Your story should explain the inspiration behind your menu and its connection to the theme.

**8. How will the eight finalists be selected?**

Online entries will first be reviewed and shortlisted. Eight finalists will be selected for the live final at ICCA Dubai.

**9. When will the finalists be announced?**

The finalists announcement is scheduled for 5 December 2026, subject to organiser confirmation. The notification process will be communicated separately.

**10. Will there be a briefing before the final?**

Yes. Finalists will attend a competition briefing and facility orientation at ICCA Dubai.

This will also include mentorship and menu refinement sessions with professional chefs. Dates and timings will be communicated separately.

**11. What happens during the live final?**

The eight finalists will cook and present their three-course menu at ICCA Dubai within 180 minutes.

A panel of celebrity chefs and culinary experts will evaluate the dishes using the judging criteria in this handbook.

**12. When is the live final?**

The proposed date is Sunday, 13 December 2026, subject to organiser confirmation. Arrival times and the final-day schedule will be communicated separately.

**13. How many sets of my menu must I prepare?**

For the live final, prepare two complete sets: one for judging-panel tasting and one for photography and presentation.

**14. Do I need to bring ingredients?**

Yes. Bring your own chicken, meat or seafood.

A common pantry will provide a selection of other ingredients. Confirm availability and discuss any specialist ingredients with the organisers before the competition.

**15. Can I prepare a vegetarian menu?**

Yes. A fully vegetarian menu is permitted, provided it meets the Emirati cuisine requirements and competition theme.

**16. Will cooking equipment be provided?**

Equipment arrangements and any requirements for specialist tools will be communicated during the competition briefing.

**17. Who will judge the competition?**

The live final will be judged by celebrity chefs and culinary experts. The judging panel will be announced by the organisers.

**18. What will the winners receive?**

The main prize is a restaurant internship and training opportunity. No cash prizes are offered this year. Winners will receive an internship opportunity at Grosvenor House, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Dubai, and Row on 45, a two MICHELIN-starred restaurant. Further details will be announced by the organisers.

**19. Will the competition be filmed?**

Yes. The final will be broadcast via ICCA Live. Competition coverage will also include photographs, interviews and social media content.

**20. Who can I contact for assistance?**

| | |
|---|---|
| **WhatsApp** | +971 55 406 9452 |
| **Email** | karun@iccadubai.ae |

## ABOUT THE ORGANISERS

### Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism

Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) supports Dubai's position as a destination for tourism, business and investment, while contributing to the city's quality of life and economic development.

**Website:** www.dubaidet.gov.ae

### International Centre for Culinary Arts

The International Centre for Culinary Arts (ICCA Dubai) provides culinary education for aspiring chefs, food artisans and entrepreneurs.

ICCA Dubai will host the finalist preparation briefing and live competition.

**Website:** www.iccadubai.ae

### Foodverse

Foodverse is a digital ecosystem connecting chefs, culinary professionals and food enthusiasts through learning, networking and opportunities.

Foodverse powers the competition's registration and management process.

**Website:** www.foodverse.io