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Welcome to the first Food Guide of 2016. Like in our earlier editions, top chefs from Qatar’s leading hotels share their favourite recipes, which you can try at home.

Brunch is a very popular meal during weekend in Qatar. The brunch spread at most hotels are huge and everyone tends to overeat and indulge in it. Later it leads to guilty trips to the gym or skipping meals on weekdays. This issue we have tried to provide few tips on how to handle the brunch without overeating.

Learn how to make Congee. A fresh, flavorful way to eat rice any time of day. This is ideal even as a breakfast option — if you have the time.

We also have the regular section of Q&A where experts have tried answering some kitchen queries.

In this edition of Food Guide, you can find tips on storage option - glass vs plastic. And we have tackled one of the most asked about problems - how to grocery shop for ONE person.

We value your comments and want to incorporate your suggestions in future editions of Food Guide. So keep sending feedback.

Bon Appetite
PANORAMA goes Seafood
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SATURDAY
Tempura & Sushi Night
(6:00pm - 11:00pm)

OPENING HOURS
Wed - Thu 6:00pm - 11:00pm
Fri - Sat 2:00pm - 11:00pm
Sun - Tue Open for private group booking
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The combination of friends, family, and good food can often lead to overindulging. Just because you step out for Friday brunch does not need to mean kissing your sensible eating plan goodbye. It’s possible to enjoy a good meal while observing moderation.

Watch for Hidden Calories

Calories lurk in many places, where you might not always expect them. Watch portions to ensure that you don’t overload yourself with extra-large beverages, high-fat condiments, and foods prepared in unhealthy ways such as deep frying. Minimize the toppings you add to pancakes and waffles, because these calories can really add up.

Focus on Vegetables

Instead of filling up on calorie-dense French toast, pancakes, and hash browns, fill your plate with a wide variety of vegetables. A tossed salad, steamed asparagus or green beans, oven-roasted tomatoes, and mushrooms, or sautéed squash would be delicious and healthful options that minimize any negative repercussions from the meal.

Fill Up on Low-Calorie Beverages

It’s tempting to add high-calorie beverages to a Sunday brunch. Some people might prefer hot or iced coffee beverages topped with whipped cream and infused with milk. As enjoyable as these drinks are, they tend to add many calories to a meal. Instead, sip sparkling water before, during, and after the dinner. Plain coffee and tea are other options.

Check the Remaining Meals of the Day

If you eat a little more than you intended to at the brunch, you can minimize the damage by watching what you eat for the rest of the day. Skip snacks in the afternoon and evening and eat a light dinner that night. Allow your stomach to recover from the mid-morning meal by foregoing typical meal times. You probably won’t need to eat a regular lunch a short time after finishing Sunday brunch. The trick is to listen to your stomach and not eat until you truly feel hungry again.

Increase Your Activity Level

Work exercise into the rest of your day to pick up the pace a little. Take a long walk in the afternoon. Make a date to play tennis with a friend. Hit the gym for a cardio class, or spend some time with the weight machines. Your body will thank you by humming along a little faster because the exercise can help boost your metabolism. Exercising after a large meal can help your body use those extra nutrients more readily, instead of simply allowing them to turn into fat.

Set a Slow Pace

Focus on the other enjoyable aspects of sharing a meal with people you love. Concentrate on the conversations instead of the food. Make a point to notice the delightful smells and sights around you in the restaurant. Eat slowly and savor the foods you have on your plate. As you dine at a slower pace, you will be more able to realize when you are satisfied. When you reach this point, stop and be done eating.

Sunday brunch need not ruin a successful diet as long as you adjust your focus away from the food.
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Want a delicious new way to eat rice? As in, a way that doesn’t involve eating it from a little white takeout box?

Let’s talk congee. Though known by different names across China, congee generally is understood to be a rice porridge that can be served at almost any meal. The base is a soupy rice, but that’s hardly all there is to it. Often, chicken pieces or even a whole chicken are braised in the liquid along with the rice. The meat then is shredded and returned to the pot, which is delicious.

Some member of the onion family usually is involved, too. In my recipe, I went with garlic and scallops, which provide nice colour as well as flavour. I also wanted to head in a vegetarian direction with this recipe, so it features chewy and meaty shiitake mushrooms, with the classic Chinese seasonings of fresh ginger and a bit of soy sauce.

The porridge itself is mild, with the toppings providing the flavour. Sometimes, congee is topped with the additional ingredients, and sometimes they are stirred right in. Either way works beautifully. You can pass extra soy sauce at the table, but the real pleasure of this porridge is that it is a gentle comfort food, so enjoy the simplicity of the slowly cooked rice. Having said that, a drizzle of sesame oil at the end is lovely.

Just remember: You are not looking for the consistency of regular rice, but rather something similar to a fairly loose oatmeal. The description may not make your mouth water, but you will love it once you try it.

### Congee (Chinese rice porridge)

**Start to finish:** 45 minutes  
**Servings:** 2

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2/3 cup short grain white rice
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons vegetable or canola oil
- 1 teaspoon finely minced garlic
- 7 ounces stemmed and sliced shiitake mushrooms (about 2 cups)
- 1/4 cup chopped scallions, white and green parts
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar

**Method:**

In a large, heavy pot over medium-high, combine the rice, 1 cup of water, 1 cup of the broth and the salt. Bring to a simmer, then lower the heat and cook, covered, for 10 minutes. Add another cup of the broth, then stir, cover and cook for another 10 minutes. Add the final cup of broth, then stir, cover and cook for another 10 minutes. Check the rice. It should be tender and soupy (but will thicken as it cools).

Meanwhile, in a medium skillet over medium-high, heat the oil. Add the garlic and mushrooms and sauté for 8 minutes, or until the mushrooms are soft and beginning to brown. Add the scallions, ginger, soy sauce and sugar, then sauté for another 2 minutes, or until everything is fragrant and tender.

Scoop the rice into bowls and top with the mushroom mixture. Serve hot.

**Nutrition information per serving:** 370 calories; 130 calories from fat (35 percent of total calories); 14 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 800 mg sodium; 50 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 9 g protein.
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By Marine Laouchez

Chuao, Baracoa, Hacienda Rio Peripa: when it comes to cocoa beans, it turns out there are vintages, says Belgian chocolate maker Benoit Nihant.

In a country where chocolate is a source of national pride, Nihant is one of around a dozen “bean-to-bar” makers who go direct to the source in Africa, the Americas and Asia to get the best possible taste.

And it is the Chuao plantation on Venezuela’s Caribbean coast, where the beans dry beneath the sun in the village square before a blue and yellow church, that produces the finest chocolate in the world, experts say.

The select group including Nihant and his fellow Belgian Pierre Marcolini are now trying to transform the often traditional world of chocolate making by mastering the process from the bean harvest to the creation of elaborate confections.

“It took us three or four years to really master, to understand the impact of the work on the plantations on the chocolate itself,” says the 41-year-old Nihant at his shop in Awans, near Liege in southern Belgium.

After starting out as an iron and steel engineer in the Belgian rustbelt, Nihant says he had a revelation just before he turned 30.

“I suddenly realised that I hadn’t chosen my career, my destiny,” he says. “I really wanted to create something, and to live my passion on a daily basis.”
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Auto Cook Menu
Furthermore, changing the settings as per the type of dish that is being cooked is quite a complexity which most of the times leads to the dish being either under-cooked or over-cooked thus taking away the excitement of cooking in a microwave oven. To make it further easier for the consumers Onida brings forth an Auto Cook Menu feature. This feature has over 100 auto-cook menus of Indian, Chinese and Continental dishes. The consumer has to just select the ingredients as mentioned in the cook-book provided along-with the microwave oven. Then select the program corresponding to the dish from the auto-cook menu and just press ‘Start’. The feature automatically selects the program as per the dish to give you a properly cooked dish.

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* Microwave Oven models with calorie meter to be launched in near future.
"Chocolate is made with love"

That passion was chocolate, accounting for the attention to detail that now informs his work.

"Good chocolate is made with love. Good chocolate is made with beans which come from a small plantation, which have been chosen and not mixed with the harvest from a neighbouring plantation," he explains.

"It's chocolate where the grower is aware of what the chocolatier wants and respects all the steps of fermentation and drying without taking shortcuts."

Most of the world's major chocolate makers buy their chocolate ready-made from a small group of multinational firms which mix beans from different sources for a more consistent taste.

But for his chocolate, Nihant has hand-picked nine plantations after a series of journeys, in Venezuela, Ecuador, Cuba, Madagascar and Bali in Indonesia. Soon he hopes to source beans from Peru, where he recently bought land.

He imports 25 tonnes of beans a year in a country that produces a massive 650,000 tonnes of chocolate a year, mostly by big brands including Godiva, Leonidas and Neuhaus.

Going direct to the source does not come cheap, though. He buys his beans for between six and 12 euros ($6.50 to $13) per kilogramme, whereas ready-made chocolate is sold to manufacturers for 3.50 euros per kilo.

Chocolate fans pay the price in the end for their pleasure: a 50-gramme (nearly 2-ounce) Benoit Nihant bar costs between 4.20 euros and 7.20 euros.

Changing tradition

It’s not just the cocoa beans that have been taken back to their roots.

Behind a big window in his workshop, watched by curious customers, are two huge machines.

One dates from the 1950s and was rescued from an abandoned chocolate factory in Asia. The other, for grinding, has two huge granite wheels which turn the roasted and crushed beans into chocolate liquor, the base for all recipes.

The machine dates from the 19th-century and was being used as a decoration in a factory in Greece, but was restored thanks to the know-how of Belgian workers.

"These are the techniques which give you flavour," Nihant says.

It is the operator’s job to determine when the cooking process is finished, a crucial yet precise step which extracts the taste from the cocoa.

It’s this process that allows Nihant to make a 70 percent dark chocolate that has strong taste without the bitterness.

The chocolatier has made his own expertise the centrepiece of his Christmas window display: five stars representing each of the “grand cru” or major “vintages” of chocolates that he makes.

The one in the middle is stuffed with praline made with lightly salted pecans.

Nihant started off his business in the garage of his parents-in-law and in 10 years he has expanded three times.

Today, he has four shops in Belgium while his chocolate is also sold in around a dozen shops in Japan and is in talks to open in China and the United States, as well as a tie-in with the famed Harrods department store in London.

"We are a generation which is turning tradition and the old way of doing things on its head. We’re doing our bit for the Belgian tradition," he says.

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How to grocery shop for one person

By Gabi Moskowitz

A few months ago, my friend Lev asked me for a basic grocery list he could refer to when he made his weekly or biweekly trip to his neighbourhood store. “How can I shop and cook for one, healthfully, cheaply and well?” he wanted to know.

As Lev had discovered, grocery shopping for one person is not as easy as shopping for, say, a family of four. You buy too much or your plans to cook change, and you end up with a lot of wasted food. According to the National Resources Defense Council in US, the average American throws away between $28 and $43 worth of uneaten food each month. That’s a lot of money - enough for a meal out. The solution? A little forethought, organization and smart shopping.

This list below is the one I refer to before my supermarket trips. I take inventory of my refrigerator and pantry, note what I need and make sure I hit each section of the list. When I get to the grocery store, I start my shopping on the perimeter aisles (typically produce, dairy/eggs, meat/fish). These fresh ingredients are the staples of healthy home cooking, and are the things I tend to run out of each week. The inside aisles (oils, pastas, breads, beans, grains, packaged goods) are the shelf-stable pantry goods I typically need to replenish less frequently.

Speaking of shelf-stable non-perishables, I buy them in the bulk section whenever I can. The extra 20 seconds spent looking for the product code and writing it on a twist-tie is well worth the money I save since I’m not paying for packaging. Flours, grains, pastas, coffee, tea, snack mix, even some cookies and candies can all be purchased in the bulk section. Not only is the bulk section good for when you want a lot of something (such as beans or grains), it’s also great for when you only want a little of something (such as those dangerously delicious raspberry-flavored bars at my local Whole Foods).

Okay, grab your reusable bags and let’s get shopping.

**Produce**

Greens you can eat cooked or raw Baby spinach or kale (go for dark green lacinato/dinosaur kale as opposed to the lighter green curly variety) are my picks.

Use to make salads or saute in a bit of olive oil.

Baby carrots, mini cucumbers, mini bell peppers, or any other crunchy, easy to eat raw vegetable

For healthy snacking, but can also be used in cooking.

1 or 2 medium onions

I usually buy yellow (which I find have the most flavour), but white or red are okay too. Look for what’s on sale.

1 head of garlic

You’ll use it in just about everything. The pre-peeled kind is okay, if you know you’ll be using it quickly (otherwise it oxidizes and becomes rancid). Do not buy the chopped, jarred variety; it doesn’t taste as good, and it’s more expensive than fresh.

Fresh herbs

Using fresh herbs is the quickest way to take your cooking from average to great with very little effort. My weekly buys are cilantro for Asian/Latin dishes and flat-leaf parsley for Italian/Mediterranean. Mint and basil are semi-regulars. Buy the full bunch as opposed to those small plastic containers with single servings of herbs - it’s cheaper and there’s less waste.

1 or 2 lemons

Good for flavouring water and squeezing over cooked vegetables or salads.
Apples, oranges, bananas, or another in-season, easy to eat fruit
If it’s easy to eat and requires little to no prep beyond washing, you are more likely to eat it. Which is the idea.

1 or 2 avocados
If you think you’ll eat two in a week, buy one that is ripe and one that is still a little hard (it’ll be ripe by the time you’re ready to use it).

Grapes
Rinse and put them in the freezer so you have a healthy dessert option around when late-night cravings for sweets hit.

Eggs and Dairy

1 dozen eggs
Great for breakfast on a toasted English muffin, but also just an excellent source of high-quality protein. You can do so much with one carton of eggs. Hard or soft boil a few and keep them around as a nutritious snack, or chop them up and put them over salad greens.

Half-and-half
Half-and-half is for more than just coffee. You can use it to thicken creamy soups, sauces and curries, but it also can be diluted with water - use equal parts half-and-half and water - to make milk. (I know it seems weird, but it totally works.) I don’t drink straight milk, so I keep half-and-half around for when I need it for cereal or a recipe calling for milk.

Cheese
Choose something with mild flavour that can be used for a variety of things, including snacking on. Low-moisture mozzarella, mild or medium cheddar, or jack are all good options. Use it in sandwiches, shredded over scrambled eggs, cubed in salad or stirred into pasta.

Butter
My favourite kind is Kerrygold. Good for spreading on toast and cooking, and the foil wrapper keeps it tasting fresh for a long time.

Meat/Fish/Tofu

I alternate between sausages (which are usually cheapest if you get them at the deli counter as opposed to pre-packaged; simply pan-fry or grill for a quick dinner), chicken thighs, tilapia (sustainable and easy to cook) and sprouted extra-firm tofu.

Non-Perishables

Pantry basics
These are shelf-stable and last a long time. You’ll need to replenish them less frequently than the rest of the things on this list: extra-virgin olive oil (for salads and sauteing), at least one vinegar (apple cider, balsamic and rice vinegars are my staples), salt (either sea salt in a grinder or kosher salt) and pepper (either whole peppercorns you put in a grinder, or a disposable grinder with peppercorns in it already).

Coffee or tea
If you drink coffee, buy beans in bulk and, if you don’t have a grinder at home, use the in-store grinder to grind them yourself. That’s much cheaper than buying pre-ground coffee in bags. Consider getting a reusable filter; I like this one. If you prefer tea, look for basics like Earl Grey or English Breakfast in bulk (either bagged or loose-leaf). If you like mint tea, try brewing it with fresh mint leaves instead.

Pasta
I like to buy strand pasta that can be used in Italian or Asian dishes, depending on my mood. Fettuccine, linguine, and spaghetti are all good picks.

Canned tomatoes (chopped or crushed)
Buy the fire-roasted variety from Muir Glen: The tomatoes are slightly sweet, a little bit smoky and so delicious. Make the best quick tomato sauce ever by sauteing half a can of tomatoes with a couple of cloves of garlic and a tablespoon or two of extra virgin olive oil.

Canned beans
Pinto, black, or cannellini (Italian white) beans. Rinse them before using. Use pinto and black beans in tacos, quesadillas, and burritos. Toss the white beans with cooked pasta, olive oil, garlic and parsley. They’re a great source of protein and fiber.

Nut butter
Eat it with apples or spread it on an English muffin. Mix it with soy sauce, honey, and chopped garlic to make a quick sauce to toss noodles in.

THE WASHINGTON POST
Surf and Turf

Chathura Weerasekara, Specialty Chef of Torch Hotel, shares one of his top recipes.

**Ingredients**
- 110g of Canadian lobster
- 120g prime fillet steak
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 15g butter
- 15ml Balsamic vinegar
- 5g Sugar
- 3g Agar-agar

**For the sauce**
- 1 vine tomato, halved
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- 15g Chanterelle mushroom
- 5g Slices of fresh truffles
- 35g Homemade brioche
- 2g Oyster mushroom

**Method**
Crack the lobster and extract the meat in one whole piece. Cut the tail in half lengthways, lift the meat out, and keep shell aside for garnish.

Preheat the oven to 180°C

For the steak, rub the oil into the meat and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Heat a flame grill pan until hot and griddle the steak for 2-4 minutes on both sides (for medium) or longer for medium well/well done. Add a little of the butter and fry the steak on each side to baste. Meanwhile heat some of the olive oil in another pan and warm the lobster until color turns pink or meat cooks through.

For the tomato, drizzle the cut sides of the tomato with the oil, place on a baking tray and roast in the oven for 10-12 minutes or until tender.

Stir in the chanterelle mushroom, fresh truffles, homemade brioche and add veal jus with seasoning.

Garnish with Shiso (mixed herbs granules) mix and serve.
Tuna tataki with pistachio crust, poached oysters, soya sauce jelly and orange wedges

**Ingredients**

**1 portion**
- Tuna: 70g
- Olive oil: 3ml
- Sushi ginger: 1g
- Garlic: 1g
- Coriander: 0.5g
- Pistachio: 5g
- Oysters: 1pcs
- Lemon juice: 5ml
- Kikkoman: 10ml
- Gelatin: 1g
- Orange: 100g

Asparagus: 2pcs
- Mango: 100g
- Sakura: decoration
- Keta caviar: 1g
- Salt: 1g

**METHOD:**

**Tuna**
- Clean tuna and put into a mixture of sushi ginger, olive oil, chopped ginger and soy sauce for 2 hours. Then roast tuna on all sides, so that inside remained as the most raw. We then wrap it in a pistachio crust we've created by mixing pistachios to a fine powder.

**Oyster**
- Open the oyster, scallop thoroughly rinse in water then dry and prepare for serving. Meat from oyster stew by boiling water with salt and lemon juice. Pour the water on the meat for about 45 seconds the serve immediately.

**Soya Sauce Jelly**
- Put the gelatin in cold water for 20 minutes then stir into soy sauce Kikkoman and heat for approx 40C. Then pour into a form and let it became tick jelly.

**Decoration**
- For decoration fo all dish use the food segment of oranges, sakura leaves, diced mango and keta caviar.

A modern and mouth-watering recipe from Oryx Rotana Chef Patrik Havlicek, Specialty Outlet Chef, Choices, which is also very pleasing to the eye.
**Pan Fried Scallops in Saffron Sauce with Green Asparagus and Micro Herbs**

**Ingredients**
- Good for 4 people
- 20 Scallops Medium Size
- 100 ml Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 10 ml Cider Vinegar
- 5 ml Lemon Juice
- 10 mg English Mustard
- 1 Clove of Garlic
- 12 Green Asparagus Tips Blanched
- 100 gm Freeze Lettuce
- 100 gm Micro Herbs
- 100 gm Salmon Row

**For The Sauce**
- 500 ml Fish Stock
- 100 ml Cream
- 1 mg Saffron

**Method**
- Reheat in a large sautéed the olive oil with the garlic clove
- Place the scallop in the pan and pan-fried until the color is golden-brown
- Once the scallops are cooked place a side under a heating lamp or in an oven
- In a pot add the fish stock with the cream and the saffron and reduce until the right consistency to be used for the scallops
- In a separate container mix the mustard with the lemon, the vinegar and the olive oil until you reach the right consistency of a vinaigrette. Seasoning accordingly
- At this stage place the scallop in the plate with the asparagus and the freeze lettuce and the micro herbs, drizzled the salad with the vinaigrette and the scallops with the sauce
- Place the Salmon caviar on the top of the scallops.

An interesting take of scallops by Executive Chef Oliver Weber of Doha Marriott Hotel.
Sous Vide Guinea fowl and quinoa risotto

Chef Jean Luc Morcellet, Executive Chef of The St. Regis Doha, shares one of his favourite recipes with our readers.

For the Guinea fowl
- Guinea fowl: 2 whole piece
- Salt: To taste
- Pepper: To taste
- Thyme: Few sprigs

For the Quinoa risotto
- Quinoa: 150g
- Shallot: 50g
- Vegetable stock
- Olive oil: 20ml
- Salt: To taste
- Pepper: To taste
- Butter: 30g
- Cream: 50ml
- Parmesan cheese: 50g

For the Mushroom foam
- Button mushrooms: 250g
- Brown onion: 1no
- Vegetable stock: 500ml
- Cooking cream: 250ml
- Milk: 250 ml
- Olive oil: 20 ml

For the Mushroom
- Chanterelle: 50g
- Oyster mushrooms: 50g
- Butter: 15g
- Salt: To taste
- Pepper: To taste
- Chopped chives: 1 tbsp

For Guinea fowl sauce
- Guinea fowl carcass: 4 no
- Mira poix: 100g
- Salt: To taste
- Pepper: To taste

Remove the breast from the crown keeping the bone.
Season with salt and pepper. Put few sprigs of thyme on the flesh side, vacuum pack. In a sous vide, 63 degree cook about 40 minutes.

Sweat the shallot in bit of olive oil. Add quinoa and stir until absorbed all the oil in to quinoa. Cook quinoa as how we cook normal risotto by adding stock little by little until it cook al dente. To serve, reheat the quinoa with cooking cream and finish with parmesan and cold butter. Season well with salt and pepper. In a thick bottom pan, add olive oil. Then add sliced brown onion. Cook very gently until become caramelized golden colour. Add sliced button mushrooms and keep cooking until mushroom has been brown and caramelized. Add vegetable stock. Cook further 5 minutes. Add cooking cream and milk. Cook another 5 minutes and strain. Season well with salt and pepper.

Roast the guinea fowl carcass in the oven until nicely golden colour. Sauté the Mira poix in the pot until brown and caramelized. Deglaze with bit of balsamic vinegar. Add roasted carcass and cover with cold chicken stock or guinea fowl stock. Cook very slowly about 2 hours. Skim when necessary. Strain and reduce until nice glaze and monte with butter when serve.

Serve as shown in the picture with baby carrot, baby beetroot and freshly sliced truffle.
Moghadam Najari is not a magician; he is the head chef of Parisa restaurant at Sharq Village & Spa, but like a magician he transforms the normal into sublime.

Just taste the Gardan Gosfand Ba Javaher Polow (lamb neck with tomato sauce Persian jewelled rice), to understand the magic he puts into cooking. The lamb neck is cooked to absolute perfection in tomato sauce that it just melts in your mouth. The flavours burst through every bite and don’t forget the accompanying Persian rice, it tastes as good as it gets.

The dish is priced at QR140, a little steep, but the amount of work and time involved in marinating and slow cooking it makes it worth the money.

The soft-spoken Chef Najari has been specialising in Persian cooking for many years. He is from a family of chefs and all his five siblings are chefs. He has mastered the art by working in many traditional kitchens in Tehran and at Parisa he brings in something from all over Iran, not just Tehran.

They had recently relaunched their menu and Gardan Gosfand is a must try along with appetisers like Nono Panir (Filo pastry with three kinds of cheese). They have retained their crowd favourites like Mast-O Khir (whipped yoghurt combined with freshly roasted crushed walnut, raisins and crispy cucumber dusted with dried mint) and Kashk-O Bademjan (layers of fried eggplant topped with traditional sundried yoghurt and garnished with zesty mint). The fried eggplant is delicious and pairs well with the Persian bread (the thinner one).

The interiors, decorated with Persian artefacts and ornaments, and the soft, traditional music create a lovely atmosphere for an elaborate lunch or dinner. When the weather is good, it’s better to opt for the outdoor terrace, which offers panoramic views of Doha Bay. Book in advance if you are planning a dinner under moonlight as they have only a few tables out in the open.

The service is top-notch and the bread they offer in the beginning sets the mood. Don’t binge on the bread as you need a lot of space to tuck in the yummy appetisers and main dish.

Parisa offers set menus for lunch and dinner. They also have an a la carte menu, but it’s better to stick with one of the set menus, especially if you are not used to Persian food, as they includes most of their signature dishes or you can tweak them to your preference – they accommodate most customer requests.

And don’t forget to try desserts such as Falude-Ye Shirazi (frozen vermicelli sorbet with rose water) or Shole Zard (saffron rice pudding with pistachio and almonds).

Parisa is open for lunch from 12 noon to 3.30 pm and for dinner from 6.30 to 11pm.

THE PENINSULA
What is a good vegetarian entree or side dish to take to a . . . party?

For a potluck, I think you can't go wrong with a whole roasted cauliflower - so beautiful, and fun for a party because, rather than cutting wedges, you can leave the sauce on the side for dipping and let people pull off the florets themselves.

My friend taught me to cook rice, and he said to always wash it until the water runs clear. There's a chalky coating on the rice. I have been unquestioningly washing my jasmine rice for 30 years, but now I'm asking: Is it necessary to wash the coating off? Have I been wasting time that could have been wasted elsewhere?

Yes, traditionally jasmine rice is washed to get rid of the extra starch so that it's fluffy, not sticky, and also to get rid of any of the powder that might have been used to process it.

I have plenty of overripe bananas, so I want to double my banana bread recipe. It has the usual ingredients: butter and sugar creamed; eggs; flour and dry ingredients; sour cream; bananas. Are there any risks to doubling the recipe? If yes, what are they?

Also, the recipe calls for adding dry ingredients and then adding sour cream and mashed bananas. Though I've made it that way countless times, I wonder if it would be better to add the sour cream and bananas before the dry ingredients.

You can double a standard banana bread recipe, as long as you bake the batter in two same-size loaf pans, or one after the other. (You didn't specify any extract, but if it uses almond, I wouldn’t double that; it’s pretty potent stuff.) I know some folks who increase the amount of banana when they double the recipe; it’s a personal preference, I guess.

I think adding bananas at the end is good for maintaining some kind of mashed-banana texture, which I tend to like. As for the sour cream, it’s a heavy ingredient, so I think you’d also want to add that at the end and just barely incorporate it, so you don’t have to beat the batter any longer than necessary.

Can you recommend a slow-cooker recipe book, preferably one with a wide variety of flavor profiles and ethnic entries? Looks like Diane Phillips’s “Slow Cooker: The Best Cookbook Ever With More Than 400 Easy-to-Make Recipes” would work for you.

I've always put my baseball-hard avocados into a paper bag to help ripen them. Would it be better to put them in a plastic bag? My impression is that the purpose is to trap the other gases that enable the ripening. With a paper bag, it’s a little porous, right?

You want the porous. In the plastic bag, too much moisture may develop, and the gases can concentrate so much that the avocados start to rot rather than ripen.

You know you can always put a banana or apple in there to help, right?

I love onions, but I cry — tears running down my face — when chopping or slicing them. Do you have any tips to make this chore easier on my eyes?

There are a million tricks, including wearing swim goggles. It depends on the eyes and the onions. You can try holding a silver spoon in your mouth — it is supposed to help — or chilling the onion before you slice it.

Make sure your knife is as sharp as can be: That makes a difference. Another thing that works: wetting your cutting board. Just be careful, because it’s slippery that way, of course!

Can you use the thick green stalks coming out of the onions at farmers markets, or are they too fibrous? Could they replace raw scallions in a salad?

If the thick green onion stalks are fresh and juicy, you can use them. If they are dry and tired, they won’t have much flavor.

My Shiro plum tree is coming in hard, and I’m buried in yellow plums. Any good ideas for them? I’m not a big fan of jams and jelly-type things, so, if possible, stay away from that part of the cookbook/menu.

Try a plum tart thickened with sugar and tapioca. Plum ice cream is delicious, too: Just make a creme anglaise and stir in chunks of lightly stewed plums. Then, there are simple stewed plums: Pit them and cook with some brown sugar and a vanilla bean.
Some of my most treasured travel memories involve food. Like the time my husband and I went to what was billed as New Delhi’s best rumali roti stall, where we turned the hood of a car into a table so that the extravagantly thin and succulent flatbread could be wolfed down before it cooled. Or the time I introduced my in-laws to a Johannesburg street vendor’s vetkoeks, slightly sweet, slightly sour dollops of fried dough.

So when we were planning a trip to Japan and my husband heard about EatWith.com, we knew we had to try it.

EatWith links travelers to chefs and talented home cooks around the world to share a meal. It’s one of several sites, including EatFeastly, VizEat and PlateCulture, offering opportunities to dine informally with locals. The price is set by the chef, typically comparable to a mid-range restaurant meal.

We used EatWith to book a date with Shino Fukuyama, a marketing manager who loves to share her country’s cuisine and culture. I, my husband, our tween daughter, my father-in-law and his wife experienced what felt like a home-stay for an evening.

Fukuyama’s father was a foreign correspondent and their family lived in Mexico and South
Korea. In 2002, her husband’s job took them to New York. They devoted much of their spare time to exploring restaurants with a Zagat guide. But it was a Thanksgiving dinner in the suburbs with the family of her husband’s co-worker that gave her a taste for sharing worlds over a meal in someone’s home. She studied how to teach sushi-making in 2010, and opened her home to visitors after Japan’s tourism industry began to revive following the 2011 tsunami.

We scheduled our visit with Fukuyama toward the end of our stay in Japan’s capital. That gave us a few days to get to know our way around the city a bit before venturing by subway from the sleek Roppongi embassy-and-nightclub district where our hotel was located to her more down-to-earth Meguro neighborhood in central Tokyo.

Fukuyama and her friend Akiko Yamauchi, an auction company art buyer, met us as we emerged from the subway station. They first ushered us to a nearby supermarket, where they answered questions about meats, vegetables and fruits we had until then only seen on restaurant menus. Fukuyama agreed to add whale bacon, spotted in the prepared meat case by my husband, to our menu. We would come to see how gracious that was when we realized just how meticulously she had planned the evening. Fukuyama told me later she usually spends two days preparing for her guests.

The supermarket was a five-minute stroll to Fukuyama’s home, a modern concrete box that was a fitting setting for her traditional touches — tatami mats, paper sliding screens, minimal decor. Along the way, Fukuyama pointed out local landmarks. The Shinto shrine. The shop that’s been in the same family for three generations. The kimono consignment shop where we bought a delicately woven, lightly used kimono. The textures, patterns and stories of fabric make it, like food, one of our family obsessions. It turned out Fukuyama is a kimono connoisseur. She and Yamauchi met in a kimono club, where people who like to look at and talk about the traditional clothing gather. That night, she wore a chic dress cut from an old kimono that she had ordered off the Internet.

Once we got to Fukuyama’s house, we learned how to roll sushi using fish she had bought ahead of time. We also learned to set a Japanese table, with pottery handed down in Fukuyama’s family. Chopsticks are placed horizontally in front of diners, with the narrow ends that touch the food pointing left.

Dinner stretched from our sushi, mine inexpertly rolled, to fruit cut into the rabbit shapes that doting Japanese moms put in their kids’ bento boxes. We had plum pickled by Yamauchi’s mother-in-law. Fukuyama’s husband was out socializing with workmates, but he left us a vegetable dish he had prepared the night before. The whale bacon, more a textural experience than anything else, didn’t clash with Fukuyama’s carefully curated menu. (I’ve never eaten a rubber ducky, but I imagine it tastes like the whale bacon did.) After dinner, Fukuyama dressed my 11-year-old daughter in a kimono, delighting her grandfather.

Fukuyama said such moments when she can surprise and charm her guests, along with those when she learns something about another culture are among “the joys of my life.”

AP
Until we all started taking our own reusable bags to the grocery store, there was the inevitable question at the checkout lane: paper or plastic?

Now there’s still at least one material question to consider once we get that food home and start cooking, eating and storing it: glass or plastic? If you’re like me, at least one of your kitchen cabinets is overflowing with an assortment of containers intended for storing leftovers. A lot of them come via takeout food or goodies my mom has sent home with me. Occasionally I’m tempted to cull the herd and pick up a few new workhorses that aren’t stained, cloudy or missing lids.

But where to start? Because the number of options can be overwhelming, employees at the Container Store are trained to ask customers a series of questions, says Kim Kimbriel, a buyer for the national chain.

Think about who’s going to be using the containers and what they’ll be using them for, Kimbriel says. Kids taking lunch to school? Plastic. Mom storing food in the freezer for oven-ready meals? Glass. “There’s a trend that we see that people are really loving glass as an option,” she says.

“Generally, glass is the most airtight,” says Sharon Franke, kitchen appliances and technology director for the Good Housekeeping Institute in New York.

Good Housekeeping recently
published its “best of the best” on food storage, with Frieling’s Emsa Clip & Close containers coming out on top. They kept air out for 14 days, which Franke and her team tested in a hot and humid climatology lab using silica gel beads that change from blue to pink when exposed to moisture. (For the record, even inexpensive disposable plastic containers performed respectably for about a week.)

Franke says containers with silicone gaskets and lids that snap on all four sides are especially effective at keeping food fresh.

There have been other user-friendly developments in food storage. Many manufacturers no longer make plastics with bisphenol-A (BPA), the controversial chemical that has been linked to possible health risks, even though the U.S. Food and Drug Administration considers it safe. And in light of the ongoing conversation about food waste, companies are exploring new ways to help consumers hold onto their produce longer. Oxo’s GreenSaver products, for example, feature activated carbon filters, “floating” baskets and adjustable vents that are designed to, respectively, trap ethylene gas (which causes some produce to decay), promote airflow and control humidity. Kimbriel says container materials also have expanded beyond glass and plastic to include stainless steel and silicone. The Container Store sells a line of silicone containers that are microwave- and oven-safe.

Some silicone containers collapse for easy storage. Another organizing solution: sets with nesting containers and lids, such as Joseph Joseph’s Nest Food Storage collection. Other brands feature lids that snap onto the bottom of containers, such as Snapware Airtight, which Cook’s Illustrated highly recommended in its rigorous testing of plastic food storage containers in 2010. No more mismatched sets or cascades of tumbling plastic.

The shape of the container is another factor to consider. Most people gravitate toward rectangular pieces, Kimbriel says, as they’re easier to store and optimize available space. The depth of the containers is important as well. Cook’s Illustrated noted that low, flat versions make it easy to stack items above or below them. The magazine added that shallower containers also facilitate quick cooling, to get food out of the temperature danger zone where bacteria can thrive (40 to 140 degrees), as well as heating, which means dinner can get on the table that much faster.

Whatever you end up buying, follow the manufacturer’s care instructions. Most plastics belong on the top rack of your dishwasher, if you put them there at all. “I’m an advocate of hand-washing things,” Kimbriel says.

Sometimes you might not need to bother with a container. Franke says food companies have worked on packaging that keeps their food fresher. A good clip might be all you need to close a bag of coffee or chips, she says.

Glass and plastic containers: What to use when

| Oven-safe | Glass |
| Kid-friendly | Plastic |
| Lightweight | Plastic |
| Goes from freezer to microwave | Both |
| Lids have gaskets and clamps | Both |
| Keeps food fresh | Both |
| BPA-free | Both (Plastic, some) |
| Dishwasher-safe | Both (Plastic, generally top rack) |
| Stain-resistant | Both (Plastic, varies) |
| Odor-resistant | Both (Plastic, varies) |

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