

CELEBRATE Moroccan Eid al-Adha

Marking the end of the Hajj, Eid al-Adha is one of the most important celebrations for Muslims around the world. We join the M'Souli family after their morning Eid prayers, with family, friends and a feast of fragrant Moroccan dishes.

"Come, welcome," says Mariem M'Souli, as she ushers her guests into her three-bedroom unit in Sydney's Bass Hill, where the aroma of spices fill the air. Inside, slanted rays of sunlight slice through the lace curtains and onto the kitchen bench, where a tomato and onion shlada (salad) is being prepared for today's Eid al-Adha feast.

Mariem, who hails from Morocco, says Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of Sacrifice, is one of the most significant celebrations on the Islamic calendar. "A day like today reminds me about the importance of being part of a family. Yes, Eid al-Adha is about the food, the intricate flavours and special dishes, but it is also about the simple act of spending time together preparing the food with your family," says Mariem, who arrived in Sydney in 1996. "Eid al-Adha is a religious day for Muslims. It's a happy, peaceful day. It's part of Islamic lore and is a very big moment for all Muslims, not just Moroccans, as the celebrations coincide with the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj," says Mariem.

The clatter and clang of pots and pans started the day before, as preparations for the feast began. Today, soft murmurs emanate from the kitchen as Mariem and her sister Kabira, who is visiting from Morocco, and her friend Fatiha El Biyed intuitively weave around each other in their flowing kaftans, chopping herbs, skewering cubes of meat and peering into the couscoussier pot.

Early this morning, the women rose with the sun, joining thousands of Muslims at Sydney Olympic Park, which morphed into an outdoor mosque for the event.

Back at Bass Hill, Mariem's brother Semo M'Souli stoops over a charcoal fire in the small courtyard, grilling lamb and liver skewers. Semo, a chef at Semo's Modern Moroccan Cuisine in Mooloolaba, is joined by his Sri Lankan-born wife, Jawan, and their children, Ayesha and Tariq. "Today is a big day for us and the food is a big part of that," says Semo, who arrived in Australia in 1991. "I love the togetherness of the event and being part of a ceremonial occasion like this with my family is very important to me."



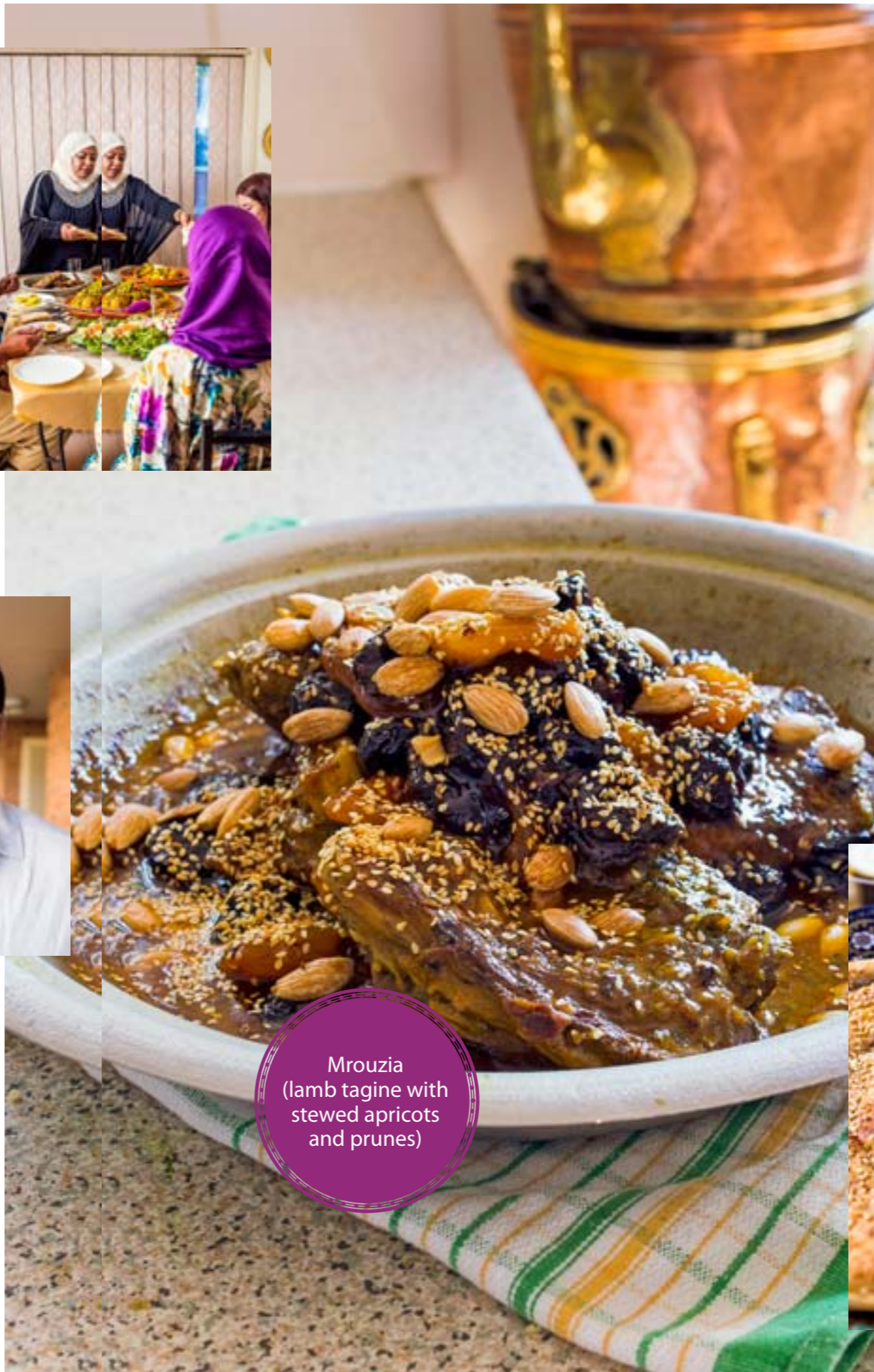
Lakbra M'Souli. Left: Semo M'Souli tends to the grilled meats. Opposite page: the Eid al-Adha feast.

As the day rolls on, Hassan, the oldest brother of the M'Souli clan, arrives. The cookbook author and executive chef at Manly's celebrated Out of Africa restaurant migrated to Australia in 1985. He says it made him happy when one of his four sisters and his brother made the move from Casablanca, on the Atlantic Coast. "In our culture, food comes first. It comes before the clothes, before the language, and is like a history lesson on a plate," says Hassan, whose book *Make It Moroccan* was awarded the Best in the World – African Cuisine Category at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in Paris in 2010.

"Today is a day to be humble. As well as honouring ancient customs, it's a time for families to be soft to each other," says Hassan, who received a letter from the King of Morocco that said he had made his country proud. "The migration of Moroccans to Australia has been like grains of sand, slowly forming a mountainous dune. Celebrating Eid al-Adha brings back memories of Morocco," he says.

As the table becomes crowded with platters and tagines of varying sizes, a circle of fresh-baked bread is passed around, and, after the blessing – Bismillah! (In the name of Allah) – the room hums with conversation.

Mariem's daughter, Sarah El Ghazi, fills her plate with slow-braised lamb, saffron-stained couscous, sweet and salty mrouzia (lamb tagine with stewed fruits) and the garlic-spiked shlada. "Mum, can you pass the tomato sauce?" asks Sarah. Mariem rolls her eyes and laughs at this intertwining of cultures. "She has tomato sauce with everything!"



Mrouzia (lamb tagine with stewed apricots and prunes)



Mhancha (Moroccan almond pastry), recipe page 106

~ THE MENU ~

Mrouzia (lamb tagine with stewed apricots and prunes)

Couscous bidaoui belghanmi (lamb stew with couscous)

Tajini bedjaj (chicken tagine)

Mhancha (Moroccan almond pastry)

MROUZIA LAMB TAGINE WITH STEWED APRICOTS AND PRUNES

Serves 4 • Prep 15 mins, plus 10 mins marinating • Cooking 2 hrs 10 mins

- 1 tbs ras el hanout*
- 1 tsp saffron threads
- 1 tsp ghee
- 125ml (½ cup) olive oil
- 6 x 225g lamb neck chops
- 4 onions, halved, thinly sliced
- 100g (¼ cup) raisins, soaked in a bowl of cold water for 2 minutes, drained
- 1 tbs honey
- 2 tbs caster sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- Roasted blanched almonds and toasted white sesame seeds, to serve

- Stewed apricots and prunes
- 200g (1 ½ cup) dried apricots
- 200g prunes, pitted
- 125ml (½ cup) orange juice

1 Combine ras el hanout, saffron threads, ghee, oil and 1 tsp salt in a large bowl. Add lamb, mix to coat and set aside to marinate for 10 minutes.

2 Heat a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add lamb and cook, turning, for 4 minutes or until browned all over. Cover lamb with 1L (4 cups) water and simmer over low heat, covered, for 1½ hours or until lamb is tender.

3 Meanwhile, to make stewed fruit, combine all ingredients in a saucepan with 180ml (¾ cup) water over low heat and bring to a simmer. Cover and cook for 12 minutes or until fruit is plump. Set aside until needed.

4 Remove lamb from pan and set aside. Add onion to same pan and cook for 5 minutes or until it starts to soften. Reduce heat to low, add raisins and cook for 15 minutes. Add honey and sugar and cook for 5 minutes or until sauce is reduced by one-third. Return lamb to pan and cook for a further 10 minutes or until tender and warmed through. Stir through cinnamon and remove from heat.

5 To serve, transfer lamb to a large serving plate, cover with sauce, spoon over stewed fruit and sprinkle almonds and sesame seeds on top.

* Ras el hanout is a Moroccan blend of spices from specialist food shops.

Clockwise from top left: Jawan M'Souli and her son, Tariq, grill flat bread on the barbecue; Lakbra M'Souli pours Moroccan mint tea; the family and friends sit down for the feast; Hassan M'Souli.

THE HAJJ AND EID AL-ADHA

Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice (also known as the Festival of Sacrifice), comes at the end of the Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. The pilgrimage is one of the largest single gatherings on the planet and according to the M'Soulis' family friend Ramadan Dkhil, it is about sacrificing "what we love for God's sake". The Hajj is more than an act of faith, it's a religious duty and every able-bodied Muslim who is financially capable is required to perform the Hajj at least once in their lifetime. Once pilgrims have completed the Hajj – which can only be performed during the last month of the Islamic year (Dhu al-Hijja) – they then join in the global festival of Eid Al-Adha. Ramadan says although the day is primarily a religious celebration, it is also eagerly anticipated as a social event. "It's important to remember the origins of this tradition. As the story goes, God tested Abraham, directing him to sacrifice Ishmael, his first-born son. At the very last moment, God stepped in and allowed Abraham to sacrifice a lamb instead," he says. "It is customary for families to invite friends into their home on this day. It's a great honour to be invited to share this feast and for all of us to feel connected to the Muslims who are making the pilgrimage to Mecca," says Ramadan, who migrated to Australia in 1989.



Couscous bidaoui belghanmi (lamb stew with couscous) recipe page 106



Tajini bedjaj (chicken tagine), recipe page 106



Jawan holds a traditional Moroccan tea pot.

TAJINI BEDJAJ CHICKEN TAGINE

Serves 4 • Prep ½ hr, plus ½ hr resting and overnight marinating • Cooking 1 hr 15 mins

1.2kg whole chicken
80ml (⅓ cup) peanut oil
½ tsp saffron threads
½ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp ground ginger
4 garlic cloves, crushed
2 onions, halved, finely sliced
1 cinnamon quill
2 tomatoes, peeled, seeded, chopped
½ bunch flat-leaf parsley, chopped
½ bunch coriander, chopped
2 large potatoes, peeled, cut into wedges
150g green olives
6 preserved lemon quarters*, flesh discarded
Chopped coriander leaves, hard-boiled egg quarters, and couscous, to serve

Chermoula

1 tbs dried chilli flakes
1 tbs ground sweet paprika
1 tbs ground cumin
2 tbs chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 tsp chopped ginger
2 tbs chopped coriander
½ tsp saffron threads
2 onions, finely diced
3 bay leaves
2 preserved lemon quarters*,
flesh discarded, thinly sliced
125ml (½ cup) olive oil
½ lemon, juiced

- 1 To make chermoula, place all ingredients in a food processor and process to a coarse paste. Place in a sterilised container (see Cooking Notes) and set aside for 30 minutes. Makes about 3 cups, leftover chermoula will keep refrigerated for up to a week.
- 2 Rinse chicken under cold, running water and pat dry with paper towel. Place chicken in a bowl or container, rub all over with 1 cup chermoula, cover and refrigerate overnight.
- 3 Preheat oven to 180C. In a large, heavy-based casserole pan with a lid, heat peanut oil over medium-high heat, then add chicken and cook, turning occasionally, for 6 minutes or until golden. Remove chicken and transfer to a plate. Add saffron, cumin, ginger, garlic, onion, cinnamon, ½ tsp salt, ½ tsp pepper and remaining chermoula to pan and cook, stirring occasionally, for 6 minutes or

until onion is tender. Add tomato, parsley, coriander, potatoes and 750ml (3 cups) water and bring to the boil. Remove from heat.

4 Return chicken to pan, breast-side up, and cover with a lid. Place in oven and cook for 45 minutes or until chicken is almost cooked through. Remove lid and cook for a further 15 minutes or until sauce has thickened and chicken is golden and cooked through.

5 Remove chicken and place on a serving dish with olives and preserved lemon. Cover with sauce and potatoes, then top with coriander and egg. Serve with couscous.

* Preserved lemons are lemons that have been salt-preserved. They are from delis, greengrocers and specialist food shops.

COUSCOUS BIDAOUI BELGHANMI LAMB STEW WITH COUSCOUS

Serves 6 • Prep 20 mins, plus 4 hrs marinating • Cooking 2 hrs 40 mins

Traditionally, Hassan cooks his couscous in a couscoussier, a traditional Moroccan two-level pot that cooks the lamb and steams the couscous at the same time.

6 x 300g lamb shanks
1 cup chermoula (see recipe, left)
80ml (⅓ cup) olive oil
1 onion, halved, finely sliced
3 ripe tomatoes, roughly chopped
1 carrot, cut into quarters lengthwise
1 zucchini, cut into quarters lengthwise
1 parsnip, cut into quarters lengthwise
200g butternut pumpkin, cut into thin wedges
250g couscous
½ tsp saffron threads, soaked in hot water
200g unpodded broad beans
400g can chickpeas, drained

- 1 Place lamb in a bowl or container and rub with chermoula. Cover and refrigerate for 4 hours, or overnight if possible.
- 2 Heat 40ml olive oil in a large casserole or saucepan over high heat. Season lamb with salt and cook, turning, for 6 minutes or until golden brown. Cover with 1.5L (6 cups) water and gently bring to the boil. Reduce heat to low and add onion, tomatoes and carrot and cook for 1 hour or until carrot is very soft. Add zucchini, parsnip and pumpkin and cook for 1½ hours or until lamb is very tender.
- 3 Place couscous in a bowl and cover with cold water. Add saffron threads and season with salt. Soak for 10 minutes. Drain and cook according to packet instructions. Keep warm.

4 Blanch broad beans in boiling, salted water for 30 seconds or until bright green, then drain and refresh under cold water. Drain, then pod beans from shells and add to lamb with chickpeas. Stir to combine.

5 Place shanks on a serving platter with couscous and top with vegetables and stew.

MHANCHA MOROCCAN ALMOND PASTRY

Serves 8 • Prep 25 mins • Cooking 25 mins
Traditionally, a thin pastry called warka is used for this dish, but you can substitute filo.

16 sheets filo pastry
1 egg yolk, lightly whisked with 1 tbs cold water
80g unsalted butter, melted
150g honey, warmed
Icing sugar, ground cinnamon and white sesame seeds, to sprinkle

Almond filling
500g blanched almonds
150g caster sugar
2 tbs orange-blossom water*
150g unsalted butter, softened
1 egg yolk
1 tsp ground cinnamon

- 1 Preheat oven to 200C. To make almond filling, place almonds and sugar in a food processor and blend to a paste, add orange-blossom water and process until combined.
 - 2 Place butter and almond paste in a saucepan over medium heat and cook, stirring frequently, for 5 minutes or until slightly darker in colour. Remove from heat and cool completely. Add egg yolk and cinnamon and mix to a firm paste.
 - 3 Shape almond filling into 8 x 33cm-long, 3cm-thick logs. Working with one sheet of pastry at a time and, keeping the others covered with a lightly dampened tea towel, brush lightly with egg yolk mixture and top with another sheet. Place 1 almond log in the centre and roll pastry around to enclose. Continue process with remaining pastry and logs.
 - 4 Working with one log at a time, shape into a tight spiral on an oven tray, then continue with remaining logs, pressing ends together, to make one large spiral. Brush evenly with melted butter and bake for 20 minutes or until golden. Brush with honey. Cool completely then dust with icing sugar and cinnamon and sprinkle with sesame seeds.
- * Orange-blossom water is from specialist and Middle Eastern food shops. 🍯