

THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

Discover the city's culinary secrets with Dine Around Dubai

Stepping out for a gourmet evening meal with no idea where you'll actually be dining might seem something of a risk to some, but when you're in the capable hands of one of the UAE's top food experts, it's a rare privilege. Samantha Wood, founder of food review site foodiva.net and creator of the Dine Around Dubai concept, is a veritable mine of information when it comes to the city's dining scene and puts her skills to good use carefully curating each of the special evenings. The innovative idea sees 12 guests come together, from all backgrounds and walks of life, to join in a secret gastronomic journey to some of the city's finest restaurants. At its heart, Dine Around Dubai is social dining at its best, allowing guests to come together and enjoy fantastic food, good conversation and learn something new along the way.

"It's an intimate and secret dining experience, tasting handpicked dishes from four of Dubai's best high-end restaurants, all in one night with me as the guide," says Wood. "Each restaurant serves up a different course and cuisine. We start the evening with Champagne at our first mystery location. The evening then progresses at each of the restaurants where signature dishes are presented by the chefs and paired with a selection of fine wines. It's ultimately about injecting fun into fine dining."

Wood launched the concept last year after receiving requests from both visitors and residents

for tailor-made dining experiences. Since then, the monthly evenings have gone from strength to strength, attracting a variety of guests.

"We host a real mix of diners; across all nationalities, demographics and age groups – but what brings everyone together is a passion for good food and good company. The response from the hotels and restaurants has also been very positive. When I approach restaurants, they are very keen to be included. We have reached a stage where restaurants want to be involved, and are even offering to pay a fee," says Wood.

Incorporating a good mix of new restaurants and established favourites, Wood carefully plans each itinerary to ensure a smooth evening that is also informative and fun. As guests tuck into each course, the chef takes the time to come out of the kitchen and talk through the dishes, while Wood is also happy to pass on her insider knowledge on the menus and venues, which are all chosen for their high calibre.

For gourmands, the evenings are a real treat with some of the city's most exciting culinary concepts offered. From Michelin-starred chefs to world-class ingredients, the menus are outstanding. Imaginative dishes to look forward to on one of the evenings includes a divine starter of crispy cannolo with sea bass for an interesting take on the classic Italian dish, a main of buttery Wagyu

Kobe beef cooked to perfection, and a selection of desserts that includes a delicious apple tarte tatin served with Madagascan vanilla ice cream.

Wood says: "I identify districts where there are top-end restaurants, so currently we have two 'slices' of Dubai as I like to call them. Our first experience covers Wafi, Downtown and Business Bay, and our second is on Palm Jumeirah and Dubai Marina. I then select four or five restaurants representing best-in-class across different cuisines, and based on location and courses, I develop the itinerary spending 45 minutes in each restaurant, with a little longer at the first venue for a Champagne apéritif. I then test it out with a dry run and fine tune the timings.

"We don't disclose anything else in advance. We will advise guests of the first restaurant, which is the meeting point, a couple of days in advance, but other than that the evening ahead is a mystery which of course adds to the excitement.

"I hope to be able to grow the idea in the future, and plan to expand into Abu Dhabi as well as expand upon the experiences I offer, from private celebrations to team-building events."

In a city fast emerging as one of the world's most dynamic gastronomic destinations, Dine Around Dubai is a novel way to get to the heart of its culinary experience. To book, visit myco.ae/foodiva



The next experience is on December 14, priced from AED1,050 per person. Go to myconcierge.com to book, visit myco.ae/foodiva



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