

Travel and food is an unbeatable combo, right? With more and more travellers turning discerning diners, restaurants and hotels across the world are pulling out all the stops to offer not just food, but enchanting culinary experiences. Here are my top dining experiences of 2018 across the world:

Morimoto Doha, Qatar

If there is time for only one meal in Qatar's glazing capital city, let it be at Morimoto Doha. Iconic Japanese Chef Masaharu Morimoto's first outpost in the Middle East melds ostentation with sheer awesomeness. Inspired by ancient Japan, the capacious eatery flaunts



artworks by Japanese painter Hiroshi Senju, a 16-seat sushi bar, a main dining space peppered with rose-gold studded columns and a private dining area that proffers exclusive diners behind hidden mirror doors.

Sticking to the template that has earned the brand critical acclaim, Chef Masaharu Morimoto serves his signature omakase along with the finest sushi and Japanese Wagyu beef. Our meal is flagged off with whitefish carpaccio with yuzu, ginger and chilli oil. The fish – slim and supple – melts in the mouth. Up next is the rock shrimp tempura. I dip these crunchy morsels into wasabi aioli and spicy Kochujan sauce and voila, the plate is soon licked clean!

The 'Chef's Selection' sashimi is a must-try, especially the rose-spiralled tuna Maguro. The hirame, saba and kampachi tease my taste buds with their subtle taste. The Mizuhiki salad is presented in a transparent scroll and tied up with a silk ribbon. We 'ooh' and 'aah' as the scroll is dramatically opened to reveal jewel-like pieces of steamed lobster on heirloom carrots, daikon and asparagus. Drama and decadence in one fell swoop!

Burj Al Hamam, Crowne Plaza Resort Dead Sea, Jordan

A sprawling property with eight bars and

restaurants, Crowne Plaza Resort Dead Sea's signature restaurant – Burj Al Hamam – features among Jordan's top tables for its rendition of authentic Lebanese cuisine. Vibrant music, good service and a breathtaking location – overlooking Dead Sea – further enhance the dining experience.

On a recent family vacation, we make a meal of a smorgasbord of hot and cold mezzes at the eatery. The beautiful dishes keep arriving

Top tables around the world



From Jordan to Switzerland, NEETA LAL relives four fabulous gastronomic experiences

and overwhelm us with their sheer variety and diversity. The moutabal (baba ghanoush) crafted from eggplant and tahini, and topped with olive oil, onions, tomatoes is finger-licking good. The Warak Enab or wine leaves stuffed with rice, tomato, parsley, and minced meat that are light and flavourful. The sambosek reminds us of the Indian samosa except that instead of potatoes, the crunchy savoury pie is filled with meats.

We next sample kibbeh – deep-fried, meat-

balls made of minced beef, bulgur, onion and pine nuts – with hummus dip and freshly baked pita bread. However, our favourite turns out to be soujouk (an Armenian-Turkish dish), a mildly spiced sausage made with beef. We smear it with tomato chutney and kashkaval cheese and pop it in our mouths as tiny flavour bombs explode on our palates. The last dish we try is a simple chicken liver fried to a gossamer gold. The excellent food is washed down with a mint-infused lemon



More À La Carte Restaurant, Calista Luxury Resort, Antalya, Turkey

With an enviable location – overlooking an aquamarine Mediterranean Sea – this five-star property in scenic Antalya, is a regular haunt of Hollywood A-listers and Arab royalty.

Named after Greek Goddess Calista, a young woman of rare beauty the resort's culinary offerings are equally divine. From among a multitude of F&B outlets, we zero in on the resort's feted seafood restaurant – More – that offers an ocean-centric menu in a delightful garden setting. As we walk over the eatery's dimly-lit, cobblestoned pathways set against the backdrop of olive trees and a swimming pool, we're thoroughly mesmerized. We begin our culinary odyssey with a shrimps salad that bursts with flavours of light prawns, tomato, pumpkin seeds, corn, pomegranate and orange. Mains comprise grilled sea bass, the fish so fresh that had it been a wee bit fresher it would have slithered off our plate! The meal ends with a traditional Turkish dessert Shobiyet. It amalgamates filo pastry, sugar, butter, walnuts and tahini in one stylishly presented and scrumptious dish.

Roots, Les Roche Global Hospitality Education, Switzerland

Bluche, a tiny Alpine village, a short funicular ride from the renowned ski resort of Crans-Montana in Montreux is famous for its scenic beauty. Think traditional wooden houses with red geraniums in window boxes. Alps hunker ing deep into blue skies, pine-scented air...

My choice for a meal here is Roots restaurant at Les Roche Global Hospitality Education, one of the world's top five hospitality schools located in the heart of the Swiss Alps. The school's students-run eatery manifests its sustainable tourism philosophy brilliantly by serving local, seasonal and ecological meals. My beautiful farm to table lunch has products sourced from farms within 100km. The best part? It's all cooked by students, some as young as 17, under the supervision of kitchen instructors. There's smoked trout, crunchy veggies, and sour cream with herbs. The mushrooms fricasse and oyster – is offset with a smoked bacon emulsion. The piece de resistance is the Lutschberg perch paired with fired potatoes and green juice that leaves me asking for more.

(Neeta Lal, a New Delhi-based editor and journalist has travelled to 62 countries)