

From the blog, “For the Love of Falafel: A Lucky Kid Chasing Food,” by Ryan Youra, Hillel Onward Israel Participant and Social Media Fellow 14’

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# HAIFA: NORA’S KITCHEN

Last week, I went with my program to Haifa to get a better picture of Israel’s multiculturalism. It’s a strange idea: multiculturalism in a country ostensibly made for one culture. After all, it is called the Jewish State of Israel. And yet, it’s impossible to ignore other communities here, even if some groups try.

In my last post, I talked about the Ethiopian community here, but they share the official state religion. What about differences that cut at least as deep if not deeper? In Haifa, there are a lot of Jews, a large Arab Muslim population, a Druze community, and a Bahai center. That’s a lot of religions, with different traditions, beliefs, and histories. That’s a lot of potential for issues.

And they’re attempting to work through the differences. We visited the Museum without Walls, a collaborative art center in the streets, which works with artists to depict their differences, their similarities, and their thoughts. The modern works of art bring up many questions, but they bring them to the streets, to the fore of society. A country can’t grapple with hidden issues.

So how does this relate to food?

Well, I’m glad you asked! Israeli food is really a mixture of other cultures’ foods. It’s Middle Eastern, with some small differences. There aren’t too many delis with pastrami like you’d expect from Brooklyn. So when we went to Nora’s Kitchen in Daliat El Carmel to sample Druze food (or stuff ourselves), it wasn’t surprising that the usual grape leaves, olives, and hummus were on the table. There were kabobs in a

white sauce, made out of something other than cream, and a stew of roasted vegetables, including okra, in a tomato base. But there was also an interesting bread, thinner than a tortilla and not as soft, but it ripped very easily. And there was shredded chicken and rice and a rice dish that tasted like rice-a-roni.



Everything was delicious on its own, but it was better mixed together. I put the bread on the bottom of the plate and piled food on top so that towards the end of my meal, I could make a wrap of kebob, stewed vegetables, rice, and hummus. It was incredible. I went for seconds and even thirds.



And then came dessert: fried dough pockets with a cinnamon nut mixture inside. They had a sticky syrup on the inside that oozed out with each bite. It tasted like a warm cinnamon pie inside a thin doughnut. Amazing.



As I sat back in my uncomfortably full stupor, I realized that what's even more amazing is that on that table, Israeli and Druze foods coexisted (and were often better when mixed together). Maybe that mixture provides a hope for the future. Maybe Israeli food is telling us something. Maybe that mixture, like hummus and kebobs, like olives and okra, is possible.

After all, everyone has a dish to share.