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Classroom iftar

The kitchen is abuzz, the tables are getting laid for an iftar at NHI

Our Correspondent

Amid a spread of hot and cold mezze, salads and grills, a batch of hospitality students of the National Hospitality Institute at Wadi Kabir hope to pick up a few valuable lessons, that will help them in shaping fulfilling careers for themselves, on May 31.

A 'classroom iftar' at the institute will provide people in Muscat a unique iftar-cum-dinner option while enabling the students draw hands-on experience from it. Over the past few weeks, the students have been learning new skills and brushing up their etiquette to make this event a fruitful exercise during Ramadan.

"The main purpose of the 'classroom iftar' is for our students to underpin what they've learnt. We charge people to come and dine here, so obviously the expectations are high. However, the difference between the bi-monthly dinner and this iftar is that the bi-monthly dinner is a four course gourmet dinner targeted at high-end diners while the iftar is an open buffet for everyone," said Freddy Hines, an instructor at NHI, who has been training around 20 students to manage the iftar all by themselves.

He further explained that the concept of the classroom iftar, which was launched last year, comes from the fact that the institute wanted people in the city to know that they are not just a school but also have some involvement in the community. Those participating in the iftar include students from different courses and at different levels of study, he said.

Chef Shabu John, another instructor in charge of Gulf Chef's School at NHI, will be creating the menu for the iftar with a team of students who will take up every task in the kitchen for preparation as well as service. Many students have also given their own inputs to incorporate traditional techniques and recipes for some dishes on the menu, he said.

"The menu will include a hot and cold mezze comprising popular Arabic salads and starters, soups and a main course comprising a mixed grill of meat, chicken and fish, vegetarian/rice dishes and desserts including Arabic sweets like *luhoosat luqaimat, kunafa*, etc. The highlight of the meal will be the lamb *qabooli* which is a traditional dish with the lamb laid over a bed of flavoured rice," Chef Shabu said adding that the menu is akin to that of the 'Omani Night' held earlier and that a charge of RO5 has been fixed only to cover costs.

The students who are getting ready for the iftar are all excited about the event. Yunus al Gafri said what mattered most was working effectively as a team while Noora al Qutaiti said she was looking forward to putting her traditional cooking skills to use. The chief coordinator of the kitchen, Haroon al Rahshi said all tasks have been distributed to the team members as per their own abilities but the common directive is to serve and manage a quality buffet in real time.

Others like Ayoub al Senani and his team mates were seen practising napkin folding techniques as their task would be to lay the tables.

Expatriate students from other courses, like Christoph and Kevin, who are studying hospitality management, also said they would be present to oversee the entire event, from managing inventories to ensuring that guests are well taken care of.

With already around 50-60 bookings and a target to cater for around 75 guests, the students are hopeful of presenting a classroom iftar to remember.

And as their principal Robert McLean sums up, "Who says Omanis don't love to cook and serve? I'm surrounded by budding chefs everyday. Come and see how they do it - with dedication and a desire to excel."

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FREDDY HINES