



AP Photo/Giovanna Dell'Orto

This June 2013 photo shows a camel being led across the sand dunes in Erg Chebbi, Morocco, at the edge of the Saharan desert. The route from Marrakech, Morocco, to the Saharan desert follows one of Africa's most mythic and historic trading routes: the road to Timbuktu, lined with centuries-old castles, oases and the occasional camel-crossing road warning.

Experience the treasures of the Moroccan desert

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO
Associated Press

ERG CHEBBI, Morocco (AP) — The bright black silhouettes of our three-camel caravan shone against a tall sand dune like a background drawing of the Three Kings in a Nativity scene.

While Georgie, as I had nicknamed my blonde dromedary camel, plodded through this remote corner of Morocco at the edge of the Saharan Desert, I was transfixed by our reflection — because it was well past sunset and there was no moon.

With the complete lack of artificial lights, the vault of stars was bright enough to cast shadows, but I was struck by how this desert constantly upends expectations.

Shadows without light, luxuriant bursts of palms among stretches of barren land where you'd swear you'll never see water again, canyon rock formations that turn out to be fortified villages — a three-day guided driving loop from Marrakech to the dunes of Erg Chebbi in early summer was one mirage-like surprise after another.

After all, I was following one of Africa's most mythic, and historic, trading routes: the road to Timbuktu, lined with centuries-old castles, oases and the occasional camel-crossing road warning.

DUNE-RIDING DROMEDARIES

While he liked to play pop hits and discuss U.S. immigration policies in fluent English, Said Ahnana, my driver and guide from the Desert Majesty tour company, had grown up in a nomadic family, herding camels among these dunes.

It took him a minute in a village sewing store to wrap 10 feet of turquoise fabric around my head into a sand-proof turban called a shesh,

getting me ready for leaving the road behind, stepping out into the dunes and onto the kneeling camel for a sunset ride.

Waveringly perched above Georgie, I watched the nomadic encampments disappear as we climbed nearly 500 feet up the dunes. I clambered up barefoot for the last leg into a sea of orange and pink sand.

On the way back, another guide, who was leading us on foot in his flowing blue robe, asked what sounded like an either-or question, of which I only understood the word *jamal*, camel in Arabic — so of course I picked that choice.

That's how a couple from London and I lucked into riding more than an extra hour in the brilliantly lit, eerily silent night to our camp of wide, round tents nestled in the lower dunes. It turns out I had declined car rides for the last few miles.

DESERT CANYONS

Not all my travels were by camel. With temperatures exceeding 118 F, the air-conditioned SUV came in handy as we traveled more than 620 miles over steep mountain passes and into pink canyons barely wide enough to traverse.

The roads climbing over the High Atlas Mountains to the 7,414-foot Col du Tichka, or weaving in and out of the Dades Gorge, are contorted enough for any Marrakech snake-charmer.

But I was too busy marveling at the unfolding landscape to feel the turns. Colorless flatness turned into a river lined by blooming pink oleanders in the Dades Gorge and into sheer cliffs tall enough to block the sun in the Todra Gorge.

SAND CASTLES AND CASBAHS

The most astonishing eye trick is to behold what nomadic and Berber civilizations over centuries



AP Photo/Giovanna Dell'Orto

This June 2013 photo shows camels resting in sand dunes on a sunset ride in Erg Chebbi, Morocco, at the edge of the Saharan desert.

have eked out of this desert.

Wherever there is water are bursting groves of date palms, olive and pomegranate trees. Just after the Skoura oasis, Said jumped out of the car and came back triumphantly holding a fragrant Damask rose — improbably, the area around Kela'a M'gouna is famous for its flowers.

Literally carved out of the sand and rock are scores of fortified villages, casbahs, and turreted castles, ksars, that served caravans for a thousand years along the Dades and Draa valleys.

From basic square houses to massive forts, they are made of a pressed mixture of clay and straw called pise and decorated with carved geometric patterns reminiscent of indigenous arts from New Mexico to Mali.

Perfectly preserved Ait Ben Haddou and Tammougalt looked like stage sets — Morocco's movie capital, Ourzazate, is nearby.

But in their narrow alleys, I came upon flapping laundry lines, a transport donkey parked outside a garden and a public hammam bath — the ancient routines of daily life.

I had meals of herb salads, lamb skewers and sweet mint tea in cool, clay courtyards that in other times sheltered traders and their camels.

As we drove away, I kept looking back until the earthen walls and unpaved streets melted into the shimmering desert, disappearing like another mirage.



AP Photo/Giovanna Dell'Orto

This June 2013 photo shows a detail of a tower at Ait Ben Haddou in Morocco's Ourzazate province. Ait Ben Haddou is a UNESCO World Heritage site, an example of the region's distinctive casbahs and ancient fortified villages built from a pressed mixture of clay and straw.

In the Super Bowl of pizza, this DIY beats take-out any day

By SARA MOULTON
Associated Press

Make pizza from scratch for a Super Bowl party? Come on! Why bother when you can snap your fingers and have it delivered to your door?

Here's why: Homemade pizza tastes better than anything you can buy and it takes much less time and effort than you would think. Making the dough takes just 10 minutes. Then, during the next hour while the yeast is working its magic, you have plenty of time to prepare whichever toppings you and your guests are hankering for — shredded cheeses, sliced meats, vegetables, whatever.

The trick is to mix and "knead" the dough in a food processor rather than by hand. It's quicker and cleaner that way. And as long as you measure the ingredients accurately (going by weight, not volume) and don't add very hot water, this dough is failure-proof.

This recipe makes enough dough for six 9- to 10-inch pizzas. You're welcome to invite more adventurous guests to roll out and top their own dough. Otherwise, roll out the dough ahead of time and pre-bake the crusts for them, which speeds up the final cooking time. Pre-baking the crusts also makes them even crispier than usual.

For years, I found stretching out pizza dough to be a pretty frustrating process. I'd roll it out in one direction and it would spring right back at me. I'd roll it in another direction and the same darn thing would happen. Then one day a Sicilian pal of mine passed along her mother's method; she rolled it out on a counter that was lightly oiled, but not dusted with any flour. Eureka! In this scenario, the dough doesn't roll back; it sticks to the counter. In just a few rolls, you're looking at a perfectly round, perfectly thin pizza shell.

One last note: Encourage your guests to avoid making Dagwood-style pizzas. Piling on too many toppings sogs up the crust. Stick to the amounts I've recommended and everyone will end up with his own excellent personal pizza. In fact, chances are the pizza will turn out better than the game.

HAVE-IT-YOUR-WAY PERSONAL PIZZAS

Start to finish: 1 1/2 hours (30 minutes active)

Servings: 6

For the dough:
• 3 cups (12 3/4 ounces) all-purpose flour

- 1/4-ounce package (2 1/4 teaspoons) quick-rising yeast
 - 1 teaspoon sugar
 - 1 teaspoon table salt
 - 1 cup lukewarm water (95 F to 105 F)
 - 1 1/2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra
 - 1 1/2 cups marinara sauce
 - 3 cups coarsely grated mozzarella, cheddar, Monterey Jack or other good melting cheese
- Optional toppings:**
- Mushrooms, sliced and sauteed in oil
 - Salami or prosciutto, cut into thin strips
 - Roasted red peppers, chopped
 - Green bell peppers, cut into thin strips
 - Red or yellow onion, thinly sliced
 - Loose Italian sausage, browned
 - Fresh tomatoes, chopped

To prepare the dough, in the bowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade, combine the flour, yeast, sugar and salt. Pulse once or twice. Add the water and oil, then process until a dough forms. It should be soft and slightly sticky. If it is too sticky, add flour. 1 tablespoon at a time. If it is too stiff, add water 1 tablespoon at a time.

Lightly oil a large bowl. Shape the dough into a ball and place in the oiled bowl, turning the dough to coat evenly with oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let rise in a warm place until double in bulk, about 1 hour.

Once the dough has risen, heat the oven to 500 F. Arrange a rack on the oven's lowest shelf. Line multiple baking sheets with kitchen parchment. You may need to work in



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

This Dec. 15 photo shows how to make your own personal pizzas in Concord, N.H. Homemade pizza tastes better than anything you can buy and it takes much less time and effort than you would think.

batches.

Divide the dough into 6 equal pieces. On a lightly oiled surface, one at a time roll out each piece of dough into a 9-inch circle. Transfer each piece of dough to a parchment-lined baking sheet. If working in batches, transfer, assemble and bake as many pizzas as you can, then repeat the process reusing the baking sheets.

Top each pizza with about 1/4 cup of marinara, spreading it evenly to within 1/2 inch of the edge of

the dough. Sprinkle with 1/2 cup of the cheese. Finish with 3/4 cup of optional toppings.

Bake the pizzas on the oven's lowest rack until the bottom is golden and the cheese is melted, about 7 minutes. For a crispier crust, roll out each piece of dough into a 9- to 10-inch circle, transfer it to a baking sheet and smooth it out. Bake it for 3 minutes. Remove the crust from the oven, add the toppings, then bake until the cheese is melted, about another 5 minutes.

Nutrition information per serving: 440 calories; 130 calories from fat (30 percent of total calories); 14 g fat (8 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 30 mg cholesterol; 54 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 22 g protein; 1110 mg sodium.

Sara Moulton was executive chef at *Gourmet* magazine for nearly 25 years, and spent a decade hosting several Food Network shows. She currently stars in public television's "Sara's Weeknight Meals."



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

This Dec. 15 photo shows the making of a have it your way personal pizzas in Concord, N.H.

Think beer, German wines when pairing with Chinese

By MICHELLE LOCKE
Associated Press

What wine pairs best with Chinese takeout? Short answer: beer.

The truth is, typical takeout, with its bold flavors of ginger, chili and soy sauce, is enough to stump even the savviest sommelier.

"Having a Chinese wife and spending holidays eating my mother-in-law's cooking has given me plenty of opportunities to experiment matching wines to Chinese food, and it's not so easy," says Alder Yarrow, San Francisco-based founder of the popular site Vinography.com and author of "The Essence of Wine."

But there's hope for those who want wine with their wontons: Think German.

"The stuff in takeout Chinese that really wreaks havoc with wine is the spicy stuff, in particular heavy ginger and chili paste," says Yarrow. "But all but the most extreme concentrations of these ingredients can still find a nice match in lightly sweet riesling and off-dry gewurztraminer (another German white wine), both of which are by far the best pairings with Chinese food around."

That is unless you're ordering General Tso's chicken, the sweet and spicy fried chicken dish that is an occasional guilty pleasure for Yarrow. "There's really no wine that can deal with the sweet, double-fried craziness of that dish."

But for the rest of the menu, here are some pairing suggestions from Yarrow and others.

RIESLING

The overall go-to wine for Chinese takeout. Yarrow likes his at the level of sweetness designated as "spatlese." You'll find this on the label. Ditto for Andy



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

This Jan. 5 photo shows pairing wine and Chinese takeout food in Concord, N.H. The bold flavors of Chinese takeout require an equally bold spirit to command wine pairings.

Myers, master sommelier and wine director of chef Jose Andres' ThinkFoodGroup in Washington, D.C., who admits to being "a bit of a lunatic" about spatlese riesling and the duck noodle soup from Chinatown Express, a D.C. Chinatown institution.

SPARKLING

Crisp and dry bubbly is another crowd-pleaser. Tamer Hamawi and Elise Rosenberg, principals and beverage directors of the Brooklyn restaurants Colonne and Gran Electrica, recommend sesame pancakes with Champagne and fortune cookies with moscato d'asti,

the Italian sparkler. And don't forget rosé sparkling wines.

MALBEC

Try this rich, red wine from Argentina with equally rich dishes, such as barbecued pork or spareribs, advises Yarrow.

MAI TAIS

Skye LaTorre, beverage director of New York's restaurant group The Meatball Shop, recommends pairing sesame chicken with a mai tai. "Dark rum and orange taps into the rich, toasty, nutty, sweetness of the chicken glaze while the citrus brightens the dish with

acid."

And for more along the cocktail line, Kevin Denton, who oversees the cocktail program at Alder, the New York restaurant run by innovative chef Wylie Dufresne, has these suggestions for pre-dinner drinks to get you in the takeout spirit. Try mixing a spicy rye whiskey with ice-cold ginger beer and a squeeze of lime to cool chili heat. On a cold day, add a splash of aged rum to hot oolong tea with an orange peel "for a soothing, contemplative takeout session."

SAISON BEER

Saison beer, also known as farmhouse ale, is a good match with its generally dry flavor profile. As proud Brooklynites, Hamawi and Rosenberg recommend Brooklyn Brewery's Sorachi Ace for its lemon characteristics and earthy peppery notes, a good choice for spicy and garlicky Sichuan dishes. And for something a little more widely available, Myers, of ThinkFoodGroup, "will admit to wrecking Miller High Life" with steamed dumplings in garlic vinegar.

SHERRY

Eben Klemm, partner and beverage director of King Bee in New York City, has a wine pairing with an ingenious twist. Serve aged sherry and soda (or lemon soda) over ice and use the orange wedges that come with delivery as a garnish. Also, make things easy on yourself and serve that sherry in plastic cups. "The whole point of takeout is that no one has to do dishes, am I right?" says Klemm.

Yes.

Yarrow's site: <http://www.vinography.com>
Michelle Locke tweets at <https://twitter.com/Locke> — Michelle

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