



The Department of  
Sociology and  
Anthropology, Ben-  
Gurion University of the  
Negev

העמותה הישראלית  
לתרבות קולינארית  
الجمعية الإسرائيلية  
لثقافة الطبخ  
THE ISRAELI ASSOCIATION  
FOR CULINARY CULTURE



THE CHAIM HERZOG CENTER  
FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY

## Call for Papers

# Desert Foods and Food Deserts: Scarcity, Survival and Imagination

International Conference

**19 – 21 November 2013**

**At the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel**

The terms "Desert" and "Food" seem irreconcilable: deserts are associated with aridity, scarcity, and the struggle to survive in inhospitable environments, and are rarely related to the pleasures of fine cooking and dining. Research of desert societies, however, reveals time and again the ingenuity and resourcefulness of desert dwellers, who manage to eke out of their meager environment much more than the calories and nutrients essential for their survival. Indeed, desert cuisines, whether Mexican, Native-American, Bedouin, Mongolian, Aboriginal-Australian or Inuit, may seem simple and even coarse to the uninitiated, yet are surprisingly complex and varied, making for an outstanding human achievement.

If desert foods represent human ingenuity at its best, food deserts, defined as disadvantaged urban areas with poor access to retail food outlets, or as areas where food retail is scarce and expensive and where much of the available food is industrialized, processed, expensive and of low nutritional quality, stand for the degradation of the human condition in the context of modern urbanism.

The distinction between "desert foods" and "food deserts" is not without ambiguity. Processes of modernization undergone by some groups living in desert areas have indeed undermined local and traditional culinary practices and hastened the expansion of fast-food chains into those areas. However, at the same time, a counter-reaction to this process has brought about creative and innovative ideas and practices which seek to produce and distribute quality food in a non-alienated environment. Examples of this include community vegetable gardens, farmers' markets and social networks for the exchange of knowledge and information regarding the cultivation and procurement of fresh food products.

Beer Sheva is the perfect venue for hosting such conference. Israel's "Capital of the Desert" is located at the heart of the Negev Desert and constitutes the administrative, commercial, and cultural center of the surrounding desert communities. The city draws Bedouin semi-nomad shepherds and town dwellers, Jewish farmers in communal and private agricultural settlements, as well as large numbers of migrant workers from different countries, and serves as their culinary centre.

Up until recently, Beer Sheva was a typical "food desert", featuring mainly cheap local fast-food venues as well as small and medium size grocery shops ("minimarkets"). Rising income, the influx of immigrants from the former USSR, the expansion of Ben-Gurion University and the growing communities of migrant workers from Africa and Asia, have led to new and diverse culinary demands. Beer Sheva is now an exciting hub of culinary experimentation and innovation, influenced by its multicultural and multiethnic social mosaic.

The conference seeks to unravel and discuss the rich and diverse culinary concepts and practices in both actual deserts and symbolic ones. To that end it will provide a platform to both scholars and practitioners. Keynote speakers at the conference will be:



**Prof. Sami Zubaida** is Emeritus Professor of Politics and Sociology at the University of London's Birkbeck College, and Research Associate at the Middle East Institute of SOAS (London). He is the author of *A Taste of Thyme: Culinary Cultures of the Middle East* (co-edited with Richard Tapper, 2nd edition, London 2000, translated into Arabic and Turkish), *Law and Power in the Islamic World*, (London 2003/5, translated into Arabic, Danish and Turkish) and *Beyond Islam: A New Understanding of the Middle East*, (London 2011).



**Chef Israel Aharoni** is one of Israel's most celebrated chefs and food authorities. Over the years he has owned and operated several restaurants in Israel. He is the author of 20 bestselling cookbooks. Mr. Aharoni has hosted a number of television shows in Israel over the last several years. He developed and hosted a 32 episode series on the foods of Israel's different ethnic groups. Another television series, soon to be published also as a book, was dedicated to food along the Silk Road.

We seek sessions and individual papers that deal with various aspects of desert foods, food deserts, and possibly their interface. "Deserts" are understood in the broadest possible sense of the term and include any region, territory or era where food is/was scarce and hard to get.

As the conference will also include a non-academic session with the participation of culinary practitioners from various fields proposals are also welcome for that session.

**Potential topics include:**

- Food tourism in the desert
- Food and Politics in the Desert
- Migrant and native cuisines in the desert
- Desert foodways of nomads and permanent settlers
- Ecology, geography and nutrition
- Food deserts and globalization
- Food, nutrition and meaning in scarce environments

The conference is hosted by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in cooperation with the Israeli Association for Culinary Culture, and is supported by The Hertzog Center for Middle East Studies and Diplomacy. The Conference conveners are Dr. Nir Avieli [avieli@bgu.ac.il](mailto:avieli@bgu.ac.il), Dr. Nimrod Amzalak [info@culinaria.org.il](mailto:info@culinaria.org.il), Prof. Aref Abu-Rabiah [aref@bgu.ac.il](mailto:aref@bgu.ac.il) and Mr. Rafi Grosplik, [rafi@post.bgu.ac.il](mailto:rafi@post.bgu.ac.il). Members of the academic committee include Prof. Yoram Meital, , Prof. Pnina Motzafi-Haller, Dr. Julia Lerner and Dr. Uri Shwed.

Attendance at the conference is free and the lectures are open to the public. Pending budget approval, the organizers will provide all speakers with free university accommodation and half board. The program includes study tours in Beer Sheva and the Negev Desert.

Please send abstracts of up to 250 words to [desertfood2013@gmail.com](mailto:desertfood2013@gmail.com) by **MAY 15 2013**.