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Morocco tickles taste buds

Celebrity chef Fatema Hal delighted fans at the live cooking station on Friday evening with a taste of her native Moroccan food.

During the evening, Hal treated the audience to an exciting show and shared her recipe for *brioattes*, a type of sweet samosa made from pastry, ground almonds and butter. "You can also make savoury samosas; they taste really good with goat cheese," she said.

Inspired by family members, Hal began cooking at a young age. She established the Mansouria Restaurant in Paris 25 years ago in order to share her passion for food. "I want to bring the flavours of Morocco around the globe as I feel the food will be well received. According to the famous French chefs Ducasse, Bocuse and Robuchon, Moroccan cuisine is among the three most popular in the world, along with French and Chinese."



Later in the evening, Hal stimulated visitor's palates with her sweet couscous recipe. "After studying Moroccan cooking I decided to write and share the secrets

of Moroccan cuisines through my books, which include *Flavours and Gestures*, *The Book of Couscous* and *The Food of Morocco*," she added.

Bridging Spanish and Arab cultures

Together with speakers Dr Pedro Martinez Montavez and Dr Carmen Ruiz Bravo, host Dr Salah Fadel of the Sheikh Zayed Book Award discussed an intriguing and thought-provoking topic: how Spanish (and to a lesser extent other European) and Arabic cultures are similar, with much shared heritage. "Historically, Arab and Spanish cultures have a shared heritage and common roots," said Dr Bravo. "The cultural gap is lesser than between the Arab world and many other western cultures.

However, we must not rely on the past, but look to the future to reinforce the bridge that is already there."

Dr Montavez pointed out that around 4,000 – 5,000 Spanish words have common roots with the Arabic language. He also admitted that changes to the 'old-fashioned' Arabic curricula for teaching the Arabic language in European schools need to be made. "We learn 'literary Arabic', which is very different from the daily spoken language," he noted.

