

Qatar International Food Festival 2026 Celebrates Cross-Cultural Collaboration Through Food as Part of the Qatar Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture

11 January 2026 - Doha, Qatar: The Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) 2026, organised by Visit Qatar, the marketing and promotional arm of Qatar Tourism, the governing and regulatory body of tourism in the State of Qatar, returns this week as one of the country's flagship cultural events, serving as a platform for culinary innovation and cultural exchange through food. This year's edition marks the first major event of the Qatar Canada and Mexico 2026 Year of Culture, showcasing how gastronomy celebrates shared traditions, techniques, and stories.

QIFF 2026 will host award-winning chefs from Canada and Mexico whose work reflects deep cultural roots, contemporary craftsmanship, and a commitment to community-centred food traditions.

From Mexico, **Chef Esdras Ochoa**, known as **the Taco King**, will feature in the **Opening Ceremony**, the **Cooking Studio**, and the **QIFF Ring**, alongside **Chef Lupita Vidal**, who will take part in both the **Cooking Studio** and the **QIFF Ring**. Canada's participation will be led by **Chef Christian Gosselin** (Sous Executive Chef, Rosewood), who will represent Canada in the **Opening Ceremony** and the **QIFF Ring**, with **Chef Eric Chong** and **Chef Andy Hay** appearing in the **Cooking Studio**.

His Excellency Mohammed Al Kuwari, Years of Culture Advisor on Latin America and Qatar's former Ambassador to Mexico, spoke ahead of the festival: "I have always had a deep personal love for Mexican food, its flavours and the stories, memories, and emotions embedded in it. When people share a meal together, barriers disappear very quickly. Food creates connection faster than words, and it reminds us how much we have in common. At QIFF, seeing chefs from Mexico and Canada cook side-by-side with our culinary community in Qatar is a powerful reminder that culture lives at the table, in conversation, and in the friendships that begin over food."

Chef Lupita Vidal, an acclaimed ambassador of cuisine from the Tabasco region and one of Mexico's most celebrated research-driven chefs, will represent Mexico's culinary heritage. Through her philosophy of *agua y humo* (water and smoke), Vidal preserves ancestral cooking techniques and elevates the voices of traditional producers and communities. Her participation at QIFF offers audiences rare insight into the diversity of Mexican gastronomy.

Also participating is **Chef Esdras Ochoa**, internationally recognised as a pioneer of contemporary Mexican street food and taco culture. From founding influential taquerias in Los Angeles to leading global culinary collaborations, Ochoa brings a spirit of authenticity, creativity, and cultural storytelling that reflects the movement of people, traditions, and flavours across borders.

Among the featured Canadian participants is **Chef Christian Gosselin**, a distinguished chef with more than two decades of international culinary experience across North America and the Middle East. As Executive Sous Chef at Rosewood Doha, Gosselin is known for his respect for ingredient-driven cuisine and his interest in sustainability and local sourcing, values that resonate strongly with Qatar's evolving food culture.

Another Canadian participant is **Chef Andy Hay**, best known for turning East Coast comfort food into fun, approachable recipes with a big personality. A self-taught cook from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, he first gained national attention on MasterChef Canada after leaving a career in tech.

From Canada's innovative culinary scene, **Chef Eric Chong**, one of the country's most exciting young chefs and a Michelin-recognised restaurateur, will showcase a cuisine shaped by heritage,



experimentation, and multicultural identity. His work reflects how modern Canadian gastronomy continues to evolve through dialogue between cultures, techniques, and personal history.

Together, these chefs embody the spirit of cultural exchange at the heart of the Years of Culture programme. QIFF continues to reinforce Qatar's commitment to cultural diplomacy, hospitality, and global collaboration, positioning gastronomy as a meaningful expression of cultural identity.

Launched in 2012, Years of Culture builds long-term relationships between Qatar and partner nations through a series of cultural, educational, business and creative exchanges. The initiative reflects Qatar's belief that cultural collaboration supports dialogue, strengthens international ties, and promotes understanding across borders.

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About Years of Culture

The Years of Culture initiative, chaired by Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, spearheads long-lasting cultural partnerships between Qatar and other nations. It exists to promote respect and understanding among diverse cultures and serves as a catalyst for bringing people together, nurturing connections, encouraging dialogue, and deepening understanding. At its core, Years of Culture is a portal for making connections across various sectors, including cultural heritage, creative industries, social and economic development, and innovation, which enriches Qatar's ties with partner countries beyond the dedicated year.

Each year is organised with support from Qatar and partner countries' cultural institutions, ministries, foundations, and private and public sector partners, with assistance from Embassies in Qatar and abroad. Programmes are tailored to explore the unique nature of each partner country.

Previous Years of Culture have included: Qatar-Japan 2012, Qatar-UK 2013, Qatar-Brazil 2014, Qatar-Türkiye 2015, Qatar-China 2016, Qatar-Germany 2017, Qatar-Russia 2018, Qatar-India 2019, Qatar-France 2020, Qatar-USA 2021, Qatar-MENASA 2022, Qatar-Indonesia 2023, Qatar-Morocco 2024 and Qatar Argentina and Chile 2025.

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About Visit Qatar

Visit Qatar is the main arm of Qatar Tourism. Visit Qatar's mission is to promote and expand tourism in Qatar by cultivating its rich culture, developing thrilling attractions, enhancing Qatar's calendar, becoming the leading MICE destination in the region, diversifying events and luxury experiences. Visit Qatar is rooted in Service Excellence, boosting the entire tourism value chain, and increasing local and international visitor demand in Qatar. Through Visit Qatar's network of international offices in priority markets, cutting-edge digital platforms, and marketing campaigns, Visit Qatar is expanding Qatar's presence globally and enhancing the tourism sector.

