



The coffee morning at the Majlis Gallery in Bastikiya, Dubai on May 25, where the glass maker Hayley Haddow will discuss the techniques involved in making her intricately fused pieces. Call 04 353 6233 for more information



Sandwiches are assembled for the Dubai company Lunch Boxes before being distributed to customers in schools and offices. Paulo Vecina / The National

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There are menus for children, diabetics and vegetarians

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Lunch Boxes

Who they are: A Dubai-based company set up in 2007 by the South African strategic consultant Lester Owencroft and the chef Zouhair Harkous after Owencroft's daughter started complaining about her daily lunch boxes. His solution was to quiz more than 850 Dubai parents and launch a daily lunch box delivery service to various schools around the city to ease the hassle and waste that parents found with their children's eating habits. The company expanded to offices in Dubai at the end of last year and now serves 18 schools. It delivers nearly 2,000 lunch boxes each week.

The menu: Schoolchildren can choose from plenty of salads or sandwiches, a drink such as orange juice or chocolate milk, a bottle of water, two snacks such as a yoghurt or Mini Cheddars, and a piece of fruit. Adults have the same choices plus the option of a hot meal such as lasagne or Thai curry instead of a salad or sandwich. Sponsors include Kraft, Del Monte and Kellogg's, so their products feature heavily.

Health credentials: Top notch. Owencroft's focus is that children in particular are eating properly. In-house nutritionists have been consulted about all the meals, and lunch boxes are monitored on their return to see what has been left. There is a low-fat dressing option for salads (such as feta and rocket or tuna pasta), and you can opt out of margarine on sandwiches (like ginger tuna or meatball mania). A total calorie count is provided, and, with plenty of snacks included, it's a service that helps remove the tea-time urge for a chocolate bar.

Upsides: The website is easy to navigate and vegetarians are well catered to. Children's lunch boxes include small toys or stickers to keep them entertained. Packaging is also low because boxes are collected at the end of each day.

Downsides: You have to order your lunches before the week begins and guess what you'll feel like by Thursday, but there is so much variety that even this isn't too much of a hard-

ship. There is a waiting list of more than 3,700 office workers in Dubai. The service will be extended to Abu Dhabi from July.

Cost: Dh28 per day, but for every 10 lunch boxes you order, you get one free. One dirham from every box goes to charity.

Delivery times: School lunch boxes are on children's desks (in patented cool boxes) by the time they arrive at school. Office deliveries are made between 10am and 12.30pm daily.

Contact: www.lunchboxes.ae; 04 311 6632.

The D Club

Who they are: An organic catering company set up in 2007 in Abu Dhabi by Dr Shamsheer Vayalil. The radiologist says he was spurred into action after he became dissatisfied with the quality and perception of takeaway food in the UAE. There are now plans to expand. "Many major companies including the armed forces have shown interest and have contracted our services for general catering," Vayalil says.

The menu: There are two to pick from. One contains breakfast options such as omelettes, pancakes and muesli, as well as lunch dishes such as sandwiches, salads and soups. (They've been named with someone with a sense of humour, too – the "skinny bird" sandwich contains smoked turkey breast and salad, and the "saucy bird" is grilled chicken breast, roasted mushrooms and mustard.) The other contains airline-type boxes that come with a hot dish such as seafood paella or beef couscous, as well as a side salad, pudding and juice.

Health credentials: All the items on the first menu have calorie counts, though the lunch box menu does not. It contains suspiciously calorific food like chips and breaded chicken. But the majority of their food is from certified organic producers and the dishes are free from butter, oil and trans fats.

Upsides: Variety. Though they only offer three lunch box options a day, the menu lists 48 choices that they pick from – Indian, Lebanese, Italian and Mexican. It is

comforting to know that the meat is good quality, too.

Downsides: Lunch boxes run out quickly, so you need to get your order in early. There are not many vegetarian options.

Cost: Lunch boxes are Dh45-80, and main dishes from the à la carte menu are Dh25-40.

Delivery times: You can order on the day, but leave them plenty of time. They are extremely busy at lunch-times and delivery can be slow.

Contact: www.thedclub.com; 02 644 6461.

Right Bite

Who they are: Right Bite calls itself a "lifestyle-enhancing nutrition and catering service". It was set up in Dubai four years ago by the dietician Nathalie Haddad to combat the unhealthy lifestyle that adults and children often lead in the UAE, she says. But it is not just designed for those looking to lose weight or improve their general health. They also have menus for diabetics, those with high cholesterol and women who are pregnant or nursing. Even better, they deliver across the UAE.

The menu: Packages range from one or two meals a day to the full range of breakfast, lunch, dinner and two snacks. Breakfast could be a bagel with low-fat peanut butter or egg sandwich in spelt bread followed by a mid-morning snack of fruit. Lunch options include chicken stir-fry or fish tagine with salad and vegetable side dishes. Afternoon snacks include chestnut tart or the intriguingly named "trim tiramisu". Dinner can be quiche, grilled prawns or perhaps even steak.

Health credentials: Good. As a dietician, Haddad understands the importance of what goes into the food, and has closely monitored the menu's development. Consequently, all options are low in fat, salt and sugar. Clients must visit a Rite Bite nutritionist before beginning a plan to make sure all their needs are met.

Upsides: Right Bite will provide a travel box of food for clients who are going away for one or two days. It is designed for business trips.

Downsides: A full 28-day package is

pricey at Dh3,300, and all menus for the week must be faxed or e-mailed in five days before the start of the week's deliveries.

Cost: The full package starts at Dh750 per week, or you can opt for a one meal package for Dh55. Delivery to Sharjah costs Dh250 extra per month; delivery to Ajman is Dh350 extra.

Delivery times: The full packages arrive in the morning; the lunch packages mid-morning. All deliveries come in cooler bags.

Contact: www.right-bite.com; 04 338 8763.

Bite Rite

Who they are: Not to be confused with Right Bite, this company was set up in 2005. It is run from Abu Dhabi and owned by the New Medical Centre hospital group. It also has cafes in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, as well as an online community where dieters can access dietary information and receive invitations to free seminars.

The menu: There is a set, full-day package as well as individual meals, and various types of cuisine are offered. Breakfast options include baked beans on wholemeal bread or an omelette. For lunch you might choose chicken with mashed sweet potatoes, or, for dinner, bean casserole or chicken burghal. Two snacks are included with the full-day package, and each meal comes with side dishes such as soup and salad.

Health credentials: "Every lettuce leaf has been calculated," says one of Bite Rite's nutritionists, Dr Fiji Anthony, of the calorie-control plans. There are three levels for those seeking to lose a few pounds – 1,250, 1,500 or 1,850 calories, though these may vary slightly as every programme is tailored to the person following it. Nutritionists, doctors and endocrinologists (doctors that specialise in hormone-related disorders) are consulted along the way.

Upsides: Convenience. They will deliver each meal separately, so you could have breakfast and dinner sent to your home address, and lunch to your office.

Downsides: Bite Rite says that mere control of the diet isn't enough. Those following the plan must exercise, too. Bad news for those who hate the gym.

Cost: A 14-day plan costs Dh1,200. The four-week diet costs Dh2,200.

Delivery times: They work around you and your working day, delivering to wherever suits you best.

Contact: www.biterite.ae; 02 641 1660.

Home Gourmet Catering

Who they are: The newest kid on the block, this company is run by the Dubai resident Tanya Dhall, who delivers home-made lunches to offices between The Gardens and DIFC Sunday to Thursday. Dhall says she is not a professionally trained chef, just a decent cook who came up with the idea after delivering lunches to nearby friends. It has only recently become a fledgling business, but it is one Dhall plans to expand. "I really think there's scope for it," she says.

The menu: Different cuisines are offered daily. Sunday is Indian, for example, with dishes such as chicken masala and bean sprout salad on offer. Monday is Thai; Tuesday is Italian; Wednesday is Chinese and Thursday is Indonesian. The cuisine days remain the same, but you will never get the same dishes two weeks in a row.

Health credentials: "It's very healthy," says Dhall. "If you come and take a look at my pantry, there will never be anything that is full of fat." Everything is made fresh on the day itself. Oils are trans fat free, and she uses strict portion control.

Upsides: This is proper, home-made fare that Dhall makes from scratch every morning.

Downsides: Dhall has 26 customers at the moment, which is the maximum number she can manage on her own. There may be a waiting list as demand grows and she looks for extra help.

Cost: Dh25 per day.

Delivery times: Boxes are delivered in microwavable boxes between 11.30am and 2pm.

Contact: dubaifreshfood@gmail.com or 050 254 8151.