

# TRAVELLING LIFE

## OLIVER TEMPLETON

**W**underkind chef Oliver Templeton, 21, made his name cooking for the celebrity-studded top London restaurant, Momo. Born in London, he grew up in Andalusia, Spain, where his expatriate teacher father and artist mother ran the international school in Sotogrande, which Oliver attended with his four brothers.

Cooking became his passion when he was a teenager: at 16, he cooked tagine for 600 at a fund-raiser. Returning to London, he was initially taken on at Momo as an inexperienced but persistent 18-year-old with just a Leith's cookery course qualification to his name ("Not cool – I tend to keep quiet about that, especially with other chefs"). But after starting out by cooking for the staff, he quickly distinguished himself by baking the "best bread they'd ever tasted". Last autumn, he set up – with one of his brothers, two cousins and four ex-Momo chef friends – a pop-up "destination dining" business, Dine Mile High. Launching in London with a Swedish and then Sicilian, Beirut and Mozambique theme in Notting Hill, it will move to Verbier next winter and, he hopes, the Middle East in 2014.

#### How did you come up with Dine Mile High?

Chatting with my cousins in the car on the way home from a family skiing trip about what I should do after Momo, my uncle said: "Quick, record all this on your phone so you don't forget – it's a very good idea!" We came up with the destinations through exciting places we've been or want to see, all different in their culture and off-course in their cuisine. I tapped into old memories of travels, friends, books, ingredients, cooking methods and restaurants I've eaten at. The balance is the first thing I think of – there are four courses plus snacks at the bar, so the flavours, textures and colours have to work with each other and each dish has to set up the next, so it's like taking the consumer on a little journey. Then I cook everything and invite my cousins around for feedback. That's important because it's easy to get lost in your own thoughts.

#### How often do you travel?

As a chef, life can be fairly intense, working a 60-hour week, so I get away when I can. I grew up going to our family's house in Morocco five or six times a year. In 2004, I did a world tour with my family. In India, we stayed in Taj hotels. In New Zealand, we rented a motorcamper and my brothers and I accidentally ripped the table out of its mooring so you could see the road through the hole. I go back to Spain every Easter, and last summer I spent four months in South America, mostly in Colombia, experiencing new cooking techniques and having an adventure. And now I travel for the new company.

#### What's the first thing you do on arrival somewhere new?

Head for the market to see what they make lo-



The young chef tells **Adriaane Pielou** about his new 'destination dining' business, his love for exciting places and cuisines, and the importance of owning a sharp knife

cally. I love baking bread; in Marrakech there's a baker in the main square where the culture dates back to a century. Market life in the Middle East is much better than in Europe. Raw ingredients and artisans prepare food in front of you. In Beirut, you can buy artichokes ready to serve, in lemon juice in a plastic bag. It takes me two minutes to prepare an artichoke; it takes them 10 seconds. They have a kind of thimble with a blade to chop little things such as garlic and chillies.

#### Cases in the hold or hand luggage only?

I went to South America for four months with the same 10-litre Alpine Lowe backpack I had as an 11-year-old. I take my laptop, camera, a Sony Nex 10 and headphones so I can block everything out. And a book or two – always cook-books: Claudia Roden, Antony Thompson, *The Good Cook* series.

#### What sort of hotel do you prefer?

Small boutiques, family-run pensions with good food. I'm not into luxury hotels; I'd rather spend my money on eating out. In San Sebastian, Spain, we did a tapas tour and the food was so incredible I contemplated sleeping in the car in the underground car park just to be able to eat more. My favourite hotel is probably Dar Meziana, a beautiful riad in Chefchaouen, Morocco's "blue town".

#### Favourite restaurants around the world?

Lokal in Berlin – really cool, minimalist decor and understated food. Mustafa's in Kreuzberg, the Turkish area, for roasted vegetable kebab. Ollie's Noodle Shop off Times Square in New York is good. In Beirut, My Waterfront does incredible seafood paella and to eat it at sunset with the view – amazing. Vail is weird but has a lot of good restaurants. Sweet Basil is fantastic, using simple ingredients but advanced techniques, such as crème fraîche reduced to a powder with liquid nitrogen added so it explodes in your mouth. And I like almost anywhere in Thailand. Thai food is my favourite – a stir-fry or spicy green curry.

#### What new ingredients have you been seeing a lot recently?

Artichokes – they have that lovely earthy flavour. Argan oil from Morocco – the nut can only be eaten when it's passed whole through the gut of a goat, then it's dried and cracked. It's got a really nutty taste and an amazing aroma. Good with tomato on toast or simply as a salad dressing.

#### Favourite airline?

British Airways. The space, service and attention to detail is good. So is their food. Great, actually.

#### What have you enjoyed watching or listening to in-flight recently?

I like listening to Foals – a British band. And I watched a BBC programme, *Wild Arabia*, that made me want to go back to the Middle East. I get fixated on places and that's next.

#### How do you find a good meal in an unfamiliar area?

If it's full of locals, that's the best shout. It's always best to have a starter and main rather than main and dessert, because chefs can really play around and be creative with a small-scale starter in a way they can't with a main.

#### Where's your favourite place to buy chef's knives?

The Japanese Knife Company, London. The first time I went there, I felt like Harry Potter before he went to Hogwarts, testing wands. I only have two knives; the last one I bought there cost £160 (Dh900). Just lean it against a tomato and it's sliced. Nothing is more depressing than working with a blunt knife. I wanted to take my knives to South America, in a leather case slung over my back, but my mum wouldn't let me.

**A four-course meal in 'Sicily' (June 12-15 and 19-22) or 'Mozambique' (September 18-21 and 25-28) served up in west London costs £65 (Dh364). The 'pop-up' venue is revealed on booking at [www.dinemilehigh.com](http://www.dinemilehigh.com)**

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