

# Desert truffles are Libya's 'manna from heaven'

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White truffle hunters comb the desert in Libya for the fungus known locally as "Terfas" which grows under the sand nurtured by the combined effect of rain and cold temperatures at night

Braving the cold and hostile Libyan desert, Milad Mohammed scratches the ground to extract what he calls "manna from heaven"—white truffles

coveted as a delicacy at home and abroad.

The fungus known locally as "Terfas" is the only thing, besides some wild grass, that grows under the desert sands nurtured by the combined effect of rain and cold temperatures at night.

They have been consumed since Roman times for their delicate taste as well as their nutritious and medical properties, and are sold to Gulf countries as a luxury food item.

Mohammed harvests the white truffle as a hobby and each year before springtime he treks through the desert region of Al-Hamada al-Hamra, southwest of Tripoli, to look for them.

"I don't earn my living from this. It's a passion," says Mohammed, in his 60s, a retired civil servant from the western city of Zintan.

"It's like a therapy, a way to purify myself from the chaos of the city," he adds as he takes a drag from a cigarette outside a tent he pitched in the desert after a day's work.

"It's a beautiful place, and rough, and you feel so isolated here," says Mohammed.

For hours he wanders across the desert by foot or in his pickup truck, covering dozens of kilometres (miles) and stopping at several spots to scratch the sand with his hands or a cane in search of white truffles.



White truffles are coveted as a delicacy in Libya and abroad, especially in the Gulf countries

Usually they are buried deep underground.

## **Digging with bare hands**

"There is nothing more satisfying than to use your bare hands to dig into the sand and extract these delicious truffles," says Mohammed.

"They're manna from heaven."

But searching for this white gold in the oil-rich North African country that descended into chaos after the fall of veteran dictator Moamer

Kadhafi in the 2011 NATO-backed uprising is no easy task.

Libya has been gripped by unrest since the revolt, with various groups vying for control of its oil wealth and cities, while the desert has become a hornet's nest for jihadists and criminal gangs.

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