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OCTOBER 2025

THE MAGAZINE CHEFS LOVE TO READ

# **gulf** **gourmet**

volume 20, issue 8

## **Take Nothing For Granted**

In a chat with Gulf Gourmet, IHG Hotels & Resorts Executive Chef **Grant Marais** shares his insights on leadership, challenges, and hands-on excellence.

### **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**

Marking Breast Cancer Awareness Month with recipes and empowering insights from chefs **Divine, Vanessa**, and **Zulaika**



### **MIDAS TOUCH!**

The ECG team defends its title as Best National Team for the third consecutive time at the Maldives FHAM 2025 Global Culinary Challenge



### **THE UNEXPECTED ON EVERY PLATE**

This month's challenger for the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition is Chef **Chandu Ahangama** from NAMMOS Dubai





# Real Ingredients, Richer Flavor!

New





# president'sstation

[emaileditor@gulfgourmet.org](mailto:emaileditor@gulfgourmet.org)

Dear Members, Friends, and Partners,

Welcome to the October issue of Gulf Gourmet. As we step into a busy season, I want to take a moment to pause and reflect on what has been a remarkable year so far. Our UAE culinary team recently traveled to the Maldives for the Food Hotel Maldives 2025 Global Challenge, and I am proud to share that they returned with extraordinary success. For the third year in a row, the team earned the 8th Edition FAHAM Most Outstanding National Team Award, bringing home 21 medals.

Our success in the Maldives would not have been possible without the support of our chefs, mentors, partners, and hotel teams. I salute the collective effort of everyone because no great achievement is ever a solo act.

This issue is a special one. On the cover, we feature Chef Grant, who talks about the importance of never taking learning for granted. Every lesson, no matter how small, can change the path we take. Growth comes when we keep listening and keep learning.

We also mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month with a feature where powerful women chefs who have stepped forward to share how healthy meals, regular check-ups, and self-care can give women strength and that no woman should ever feel alone in this fight. This initiative comes together through the Culinary with Purpose project in partnership with JM Foods and the Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG).

We bring more stories worth reading. Chef Prachi opens up about her fight with cancer and how she returned stronger than ever. Chef Trisha gives us her view on pastry trends, sharing the idea that listening to the ingredients and letting them tell a story makes the difference. And for those who enjoy a challenge, this month's Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition features Chef Chandu Ahangama from NAMMOS Dubai who believes in stepping out of the box to serve something unexpected on every plate.

Inside the issue, there are also thoughtful pieces on negotiation, entrepreneurship, advice on keeping hope while job hunting, a vlog of summer adventure in Britain, insights into the world of meat, and plenty more.

A huge thank you to the Hilton Dubai Palm Jumeirah team for hosting our September meeting. Thank you also to our corporate partners for all the great product tasting.

As we approach the final months of 2025, it is worth remembering that success is rarely a straight line. It is found in our daily practice and in the willingness to learn from both wins and missteps. Looking ahead, the months promise new challenges, competitions, fresh ideas, and plenty of room to push your limits. We encourage readers to stay connected through our website, social media, and past issues.

We invite you to explore past issues <https://issuu.com/gulfgourmetmagazine> and [emiratesculinaryguild.net](http://emiratesculinaryguild.net) to stay



updated on events and news. If you have not already, follow us on social media to see what chefs around the world are creating, and perhaps connect with someone who inspires you.

Take a moment to explore the company profiles of our corporate members. Also, do look at the Friends of the Guild pages to see all of our amazing supporters. These are the people and companies that help us keep the spotlight where it belongs that is on chefs and stories that make a difference.

As always, if there is something you would like to see in a future issue, send us an email. Let us know what matters to you, what stories you want told, and what lessons you have learned along the way. If you have any questions about the events, please reach out to us at [emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com](mailto:emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com)

A heartfelt thank you to every member, corporate partner, supporter and friend of the Emirates Culinary Guild who has contributed to our initiatives, and competitions this year. Together, we are building a community where talent is recognized and learning never stops.

Great things happen through many small efforts. So, keep reading, and keep cooking, and do not forget that small steps lead to big wins.

Culinary Regards,  
**Alan Orreal**



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## CREDITS

### EMIRATES CULINARY GUILD

### EDITORIAL

**Andy Cuthbert**  
Guild Coordinator  
+971 56 801 4089  
emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com

**Alan Orreal** | **Uwe Micheel**  
President | Past President

**Andy Cuthbert**  
Editor

**Amaresh Bhaskaran**  
Associate Publisher  
amaresh@amareshbhaskaran.com  
+971 50 456 8161

**Vahiju PC** Art Director

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### CONTRIBUTORS

**Shreya Asopa**  
**Atim Suyatim**

### PUBLISHED BY SALES ENQUIRY

Emirates Chefs Guild, Dubai, UAE  
info@gulfgourmet.org



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# newsbites

## EMOTIONAL CUISINE

Celebrating Culinary Innovation, Passion & Growth – June 19, 2025

The culinary world thrives on innovation, passion, and a constant pursuit of knowledge and on June 19th, 2025, we witnessed a true embodiment of that spirit. The culinary workshop, masterfully organized with excellence and intention, brought together aspiring chefs and seasoned professionals for a transformative day of learning, creativity, and connection.

We had the distinct honor of learning from esteemed industry leaders Chef Mohamad El Ghazzaoui and Chef Nikolay Sarychev whose engaging demonstrations and expert techniques left a lasting impact. Their sessions, particularly on modern plating and flavor balancing, were not only educational but also deeply inspiring.

One of the most striking aspects of the day was the meticulous attention to detail in both presentation and flavor. Each dish presented was a harmonious blend of elegance and taste, a true artistic expression on the plate. It reminded us all that culinary art is more



than cooking; it is storytelling through flavor, form, and finesse.

Throughout the day, I had the opportunity to gather feedback from fellow participants and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Many shared how this experience not only introduced them to new techniques but also reignited their passion for the craft. A standout moment came from Chef Nikolay, who said:

"To grow in your career, the best thing you can do is share your knowledge. In giving to others, you grow even more." A powerful



reminder of the value of mentorship and collaboration in our industry.

What stood out most was the energy and drive of the young chefs stepping into their culinary journeys with enthusiasm, creativity, and bold commitment. Workshops like these equip them with the tools and confidence they need to thrive in an ever evolving profession.

A heartfelt thank you to the organizers - IFFCO Professional, ECG, ECGYCC and Worldchefs. and to the mentors, supporters, and everyone working tirelessly behind the scenes. Your efforts are not only shaping careers but also building the future of culinary arts in a powerful and meaningful way.

Let's continue to create spaces where learning, collaboration, and inspiration can flourish. ■



To get your chef or company related news featured in this section, email [editor@gulfgourmet.org](mailto:editor@gulfgourmet.org)

# Changing the Way We Judge Food...

For decades, culinary competitions have celebrated skill and creativity. Yet for organizers, judges, and participants, the process has not always been seamless:

- Manual tabulations causing delays
- Scores left unvalidated and open to error
- Little to no record of judging processes

As events grow in scale and prestige, the need for a smarter, more accurate solution has become urgent — one that matches the caliber of chefs and the standards of competition.

## Introducing Foodverse Compete, A Game-Changer for Culinary Competitions

Foodverse Compete is the first digital platform purpose-built for the culinary world. It understands the need for standardization, validated accuracy, and transparent processes. From competitor registration to live judging, it streamlines everything in real time and delivers results with just a click.

## What Is Foodverse Compete?

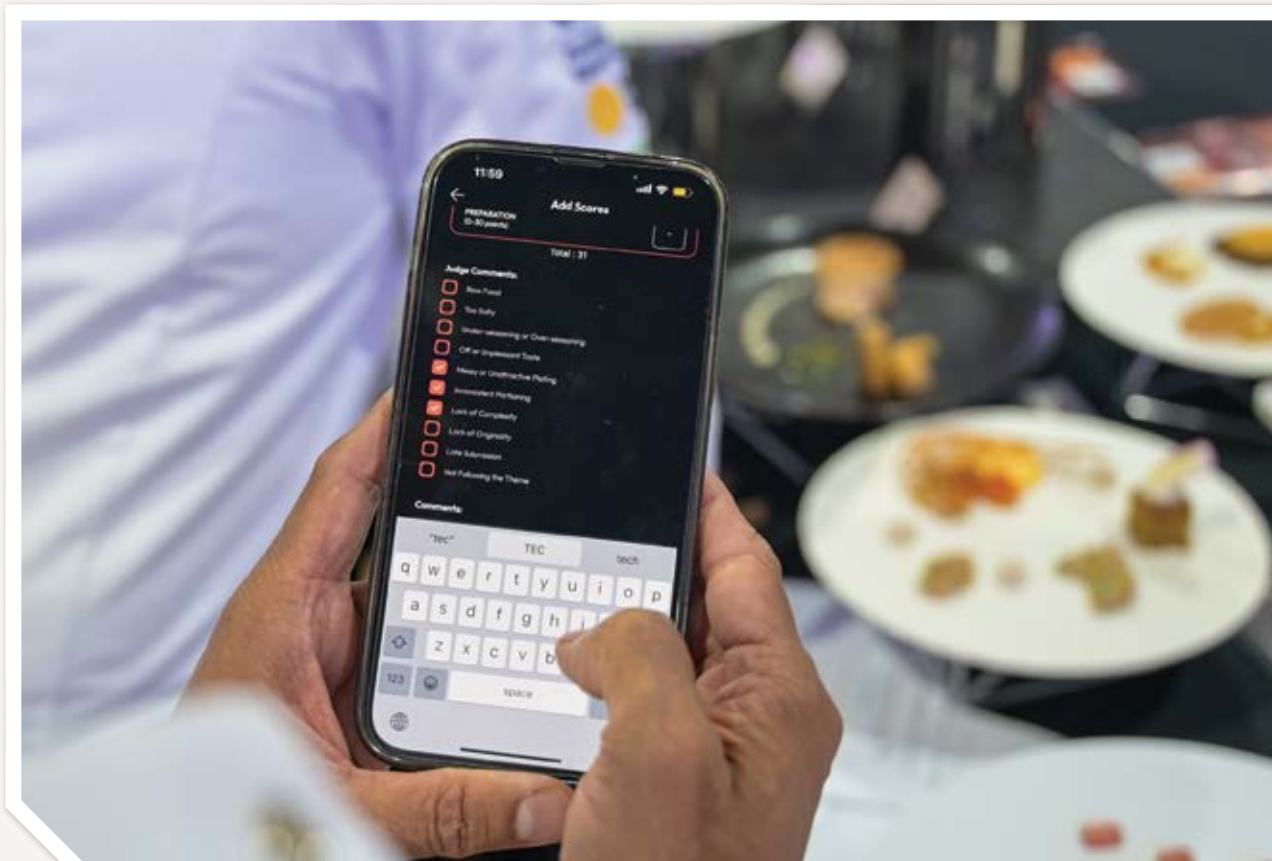
It is a comprehensive competition management and judging system designed for chef events of every scale — from grassroots contests

to international championships. The platform handles each stage flawlessly: competitor sign-ups, category management, judge assignments, live scoring, digital certificates, and global visibility.

## Features That Truly Matter

What sets Foodverse Compete apart is not just what it does, but how it feels to use. Built with insights from world-class competition organizers and seasoned judges, its interface is intuitive, and the features deeply relevant:

- ♦ **Live Digital Judging** - Scores entered directly into devices and auto-tabulated in real-time.



- ◆ **Instant Leaderboards** - Dynamic scoreboards keep spectators engaged and participants informed.
- ◆ **Seamless Admin Panel** - Manage categories, registration, judge assignments, and announcements from one place.
- ◆ **Digital Certificates & Badges** - Blockchain-secured, delivered instantly, eliminating delays.
- ◆ **Global Visibility** - Chef profiles and wins are showcased across the Foodverse community for recognition and opportunities.

## Used By the Best

In March 2025, the Emirates International Salon Culinaire, one of the region's largest and most prestigious competitions, transitioned fully to a digital platform with Foodverse Compete. With 900+ competitors, 39 categories, and 23 international judges, the platform handled the scale effortlessly while enriching the experience for all involved.

Now, Worldchefs, with its network of 10 million chefs across 97 countries, is integrating the platform into its global infrastructure, bringing this innovation to the world stage.

## More Than a Tool, It is A Movement

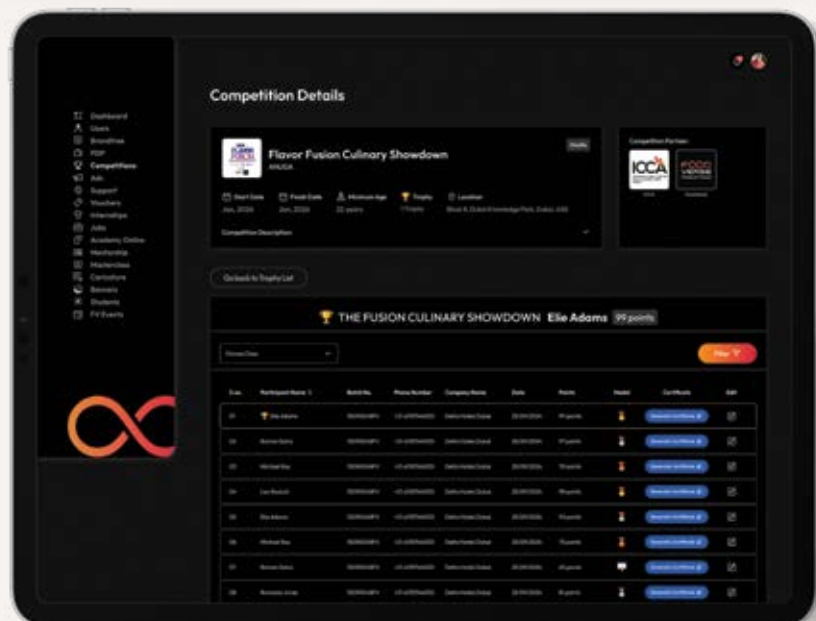
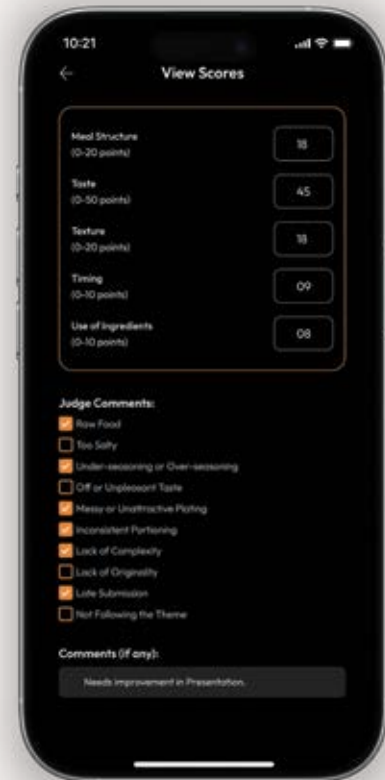
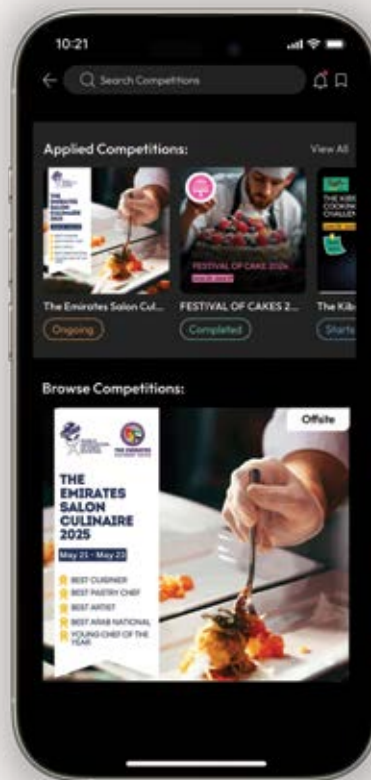
Foodverse Compete is redefining competitions as part of a chef's professional journey. By connecting achievements to Chef Profiles, every milestone becomes shareable, verifiable, and globally visible. Chefs can:

- ◆ Build a living portfolio
- ◆ Showcase wins to the world
- ◆ Get discovered by mentors, employers, and brands

In an era where personal branding and digital proof matter, Foodverse Compete gives chefs an edge long after the medals are awarded.

## What's Next

In the kitchen, precision matters. In competitions, fairness, visibility, accuracy, and speed are equally important.



Foodverse Compete brings the culinary world into a space where technology meets talent, with instant results, and every chef gets a platform to shine. As more competitions connect to this ecosystem, judging will not just be about the dish; it will be about the complete experience that surrounds it.

**Foodverse...**  
Now Byte It!

Download the app on the App Store and Google Play Store.





# Midas Touch!

## Emirates Team Triumphs Again at Maldives (FHAM) 2025 Global Challenge

The Emirates Culinary Guild Team has made an impressive mark at the Food & Hospitality Asia Maldives (FHAM) Global Culinary Challenge 2025, returning home with an outstanding haul of gold medals and trophies. For the third consecutive year, the team, comprising both young and senior chefs, claimed the prestigious 8th Edition FHAM Most Outstanding National Team Award after an exceptional performance that garnered a total of 21 medals (18 gold, one silver, one bronze, and five gold medals with distinction).

Alan Orreal, Guild President and Senior Vice President of EKFC, said the UAE's culinary scene is growing and exciting, and the Emirates Culinary Guild is proud to showcase the country's talent on the global stage. "I am so proud of our chefs for achieving this remarkable outcome through the team's hard work, commitment, and the leadership of Chef Sanjeeva Chamil from Radisson Blu Yas Island. I would also like to thank our partners: Deep Seafood, Le Pain Français, S.H. Ali Trading, Fabel La Royal, and Simply Gourmet, for their incredible support in making this possible," says Chef Alan.

Extending gratitude to the hotels that supported the Guild and the chefs, he further added, "We sincerely thank Abu Dhabi Hotels, Hilton Yas Island, Yas Plaza Hotels, and Kieta Catering for their continued support to the Guild and our chefs."

The team, composed of both young and senior chefs was led by Chef Sanjeeva Chamil, Chairman of Abu Dhabi & District, who guided them through yet another inspiring victory. Take a look at the list of winners:



### Take a look at the list of winners

#### DINESH HASHAN KINSON

##### HITON ABU DHABI YAS ISLAND

- ♦ BEST PASTRY CHEF (TROPHY) FULL PAID CHOCOLATE COURSE FROM DUBAI BY NESTLE MALDIVES.PETITS FOURS OR PRALINES (PASTRY) (GOLD DISTINCTION).
- ♦ DRESS THE CAKE (PASTRY) (GOLD)
- ♦ TEAM EVENT - HOT COOKING (THREE-COURSE MEAL) ( GOLD DISTINCTION )
- ♦ ARTISTIC PASTRY SHOWPIECE (PASTRY) (GOLD DISTINCTION)

#### THARISHMA MADUSHANKA MENDIS

##### ROYAL KEITA CATERING L.L.C

- ♦ ARTISTIC PASTRY SHOWPIECE (PASTRY) (GOLD)
- ♦ DRESS THE CAKE (PASTRY) (GOLD)
- ♦ FRUIT & VEGETABLE CARVING (SILVER)

#### NISHAN NAYANA KANTHA

##### RADISSON BLU HOTEL YAS ISLAND

- ♦ WHITE FISH HOT COOKING (GOLD)
- ♦ TEAM EVENT HOT COOKING. (THREE-COURSE MEAL) (GOOD DISTINCTION)

- ♦ US BEEF HOT COOKING ( GOLD)
- ♦ PLATED THREE-COURSE MEAL (GOLD)

#### ABINASH SAHOO

##### CROWN PLAZA ABU DHABI YAS ISLAND

- ♦ FAHAM BEST CHEF AWARD
- ♦ POULTRY - HOT COOKING (GOLD).
- ♦ US BEEF - HOT COOKING ( GOLD ) TOP WINNER
- ♦ YELLOW FIN TUNA - HOT COOKING (GOLD DISTINCTION).
- ♦ DUNAR RICE CREATIVITY - HOT COOKING. ( GOLD)
- ♦ TOP WINNER FULL PAID TOUR TO INDIA DUNAR RICE FACTORY

#### ROMANI LIYANAGE

##### RADISSON BLU, YAS PLAZA HOTELS

- ♦ POULTRY LIVE COOKING (GOLD)
- ♦ SEAFOOD LIVE COOKING (GOLD)
- ♦ BEEF LIVE COOKING (GOLD)
- ♦ ASIAN NOODLE CHALLENGE (BRONZE) (TOP WINNER)

#### KRUSHNATH JADHAV

##### CROWNE PLAZA YAS ISLAND

- ♦ LAMB LIVE COOKING (GOLD)
- ♦ BEEF LIVE COOKING (GOLD) FIRST RUNNER UP



# You Are Not Alone

What happens when food, care, community, and courage become a common denominator in Dubai kitchens this Pink Month? You see food as medicine, as a source of strength, and as an act of solidarity. This Pink Month, chefs **Divine Grace**, **Vanessa**, and **Zulaika** take a step forward by sharing how balanced meals, regular screenings, and self-care can empower women, underscoring that no woman is alone in this fight

In 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that breast cancer remains the most prevalent cancer in women worldwide, estimating that around 2.3 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer globally, resulting in about 670,000 deaths. October marks Pink month, a time when conversations around breast cancer come into focus. This symbolic month serves as a platform to advocate, educate, and encourage women to prioritize their self-care.

Early detection and treatment remain the lead actors in the fight against breast cancer; balanced, nutrient-rich meals also play an indispensable co-star role in supporting the healing process. Through



You are not alone in this journey of fighting cancer. You can always lean on your community, family, and friends

— Divine Grace

JM Foods' Culinary with Purpose initiative for Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we learn from three expert chefs who see food as a conversation starter and recipes

that become part of a broader dialogue about breast health and wellness. Read on to find out how mindful cooking, a balanced diet, and self-care can empower women this Pink Month.

## No Single Superfood Can Prevent It

"You are not alone in this journey of fighting cancer. You are healing both emotionally and physically, so you can always lean on your community, family, and friends," says Chef Divine Grace, a former culinary baking instructor and now a pastry chef and sales team member at JM Foods.

Having spent years in both the kitchen and education, she knows how easy it is for working women to skip meals, eat on the run, or take whatever is quickest.



# Appetizer / Canapé

By Chef Divine

## Avocado & Beyond Mince Lettuce Cups with Pomegranate

### Ingredients (Serves 6–8 as appetizer)

Beyond Mince	200g
Olive Oil	1 tbsp
Garlic Clove, Minced	1
Red Onion, Finely Chopped	½
Smoked Paprika	1 tsp
Avocado, Diced	1
Lemon Juice	1 tbsp
Head Romaine Or Butter Lettuce (Leaves Separated)	1
Cup Pomegranate Seeds	¼
Fresh Herbs (Mint Or Parsley), Chopped	

### Glaze:

Cup Pomegranate Juice	¼
Honey Or Agave	1 tbsp
Balsamic Vinegar	1 tsp

### Directions

- ♦ Sauté onion and garlic in olive oil, add Beyond mince, and season it with paprika, salt, and pepper. Cook until brown.
- ♦ Prepare Avocado: Toss diced avocado with lemon juice and herbs.
- ♦ Make Glaze: Reduce pomegranate juice, honey, and balsamic vinegar over medium heat until syrupy.
- ♦ Assemble: Spoon mince into lettuce cups, top with avocado, drizzle glaze, and sprinkle pomegranate seeds.

### Dessert: Avocado Cacao Mousse with Berry Coulis

- ♦ A guilt-free dessert rich in antioxidants, magnesium, and healthy fats.
- ♦ Avocado creates a creamy base, replacing heavy cream.
- ♦ Dark chocolate + berries highlight women's health benefits.
- ♦ Can be served in elegant glass cups or jars.

### Ingredients (Serves 4)

Ripe Avocados	2
Raw Cacao Powder (Or Unsweetened Cocoa)	3 tbsp
Honey, Agave, Or Maple Syrup	3 tbsp
Vanilla Extract	1 tsp
Pinch Of Sea Salt	
Fresh Mixed Berries (Raspberries, Strawberries, Blueberries)	½ Cup
Lemon Juice	1 tsp

### Directions

- ♦ In a blender, combine avocado, cacao powder, honey, vanilla, and salt. Blend until silky smooth. Chill for 30 mins.
- ♦ For Coulis: Blend berries with lemon juice and a touch of honey. Strain for a smooth sauce.
- ♦ Pipe mousse into glasses, drizzle berry coulis on top, and garnish with fresh berries and edible flower petals.

That awareness leads many to ask her a common question, 'Is there one superfood that can act as a cure-all for breast cancer?'

"I wish it were that simple," she says. "In reality, you need a variety of foods, like antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables, omega-3 fatty acids, and proteins, to support overall wellness."

Walking us through her recipe for the Pink Month, she notes that it must be inclusive and innovative. "I have prepared a lettuce cup topped with

savory mince from Vian Foods, gently sautéed with red onion and garlic, finished with a glossy pomegranate reduction. The red jewel of the pomegranate can symbolise the pink ribbon on the plate. It is quick to make, easy to eat, and products from JM foods make the culinary offer better and speak to the idea that healthy choices can be delicious and convenient."

In an industry that chases trends and flavors, Chef Divine believes October is the ideal time to incorporate wellness menus, doing more than just posting a

seasonal hashtag. "A pink-themed dish or wellness menu can be a great way to start conversations at the table."

Nutrition, she says, is part of a bigger picture. "Nourish broadly. Take care of yourself. If you are a chef, use your menu and your voice. If you are a diner, ask questions. And if you are scared, remember you are not alone."

### Food Should Never Feel Like Punishment

Chef Zulaika Mwase, Head Chef at Nowbl Café, believes that while women chefs





## Sultana's Breakfast Beyond

By Chef Zulaika

### Ingredients

Turkish Labneh	100g
Poached Eggs	2
Lemon	2g
Cumin Powder	2g
Mint	2g
Olive Oil	2g
Sundried Tomatoes	

Beyond Mince	50g
Cucumber Pickle	4g
Pine Nuts	3g
Dill Simac Powder	
Salt & Pepper to taste	
Gluten-free Bread Slice	
Smoked Red Oil	
Rocca Leaves or Microgreens	

### Directions

- ♦ Sauté your Beyond mince to perfection, then keep it aside.
- ♦ In a clean bowl, mix the labneh, lemon,

pepper, salt, mint & cumin powder.

- ♦ Poach two eggs to your preference.

### Presentation

- ♦ In a clean bowl, put in ur labneh mix, top with two poached eggs, cucumber pickle diced, sun-dried tomatoes & sumac powder
- ♦ Then add beyond mince on top & side, smoked red oil, toasted pine nuts, dill, rocca, or microgreens.
- ♦ Serve with a toasted gluten-free bread slice.



are steering the ship during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, restaurants also have an opportunity to make awareness tangible.

"Chefs and restaurants should come up with dishes that are up to the theme of breast cancer awareness. Vibrant colors, perhaps with a hint of pink. Small things, like color, can convey a message to someone. From one meal, someone can have a message and enjoy it as well," she explains.

Food itself is part of that conversation. "Food has always been called medicine," she asserts. "It shouldn't feel like a punishment. It should be viewed as a nourishing source of antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals."

Her special dish, celebrating Pink Month, showcases her lively philosophy. "It is a vibrant dish," she says, describing her pitaya-based creation. Using pitaya



Those pink and red colors bring out the symbol. We are together in these colors

— Zulaika Mwase

caviar, pine nuts, leafy greens, and vegetables, her dish combines color and flavor. "Pitaya is our seasonal fruit. It is full of antioxidants. Those pink and red colors bring out the symbol. We are together in these colors."

She also credits premium ingredients for supporting her creativity. "JM ingredients give you the ability to create more. They

are rich in flavors. JM is more than just a supplier. It bridges the gap between premium products and us chefs."

This balance and care in her dishes also carry over into her advice to women in kitchens. "Women in our field need to prioritize rest. We get so caught up in what we do, especially when we are passionate about it, that we forget about ourselves. Take plenty of rest. Keep fighting, go for screenings, keep showing up. There is an entire community with you."

### Food as Daily Medicine

Chef Vanessa Bayma, Founder and F&B Director of CBC Consultancy and Events, approaches the conversation from a personal perspective. Having lost her grandmother to cancer, she stresses the importance of nutrition as protection. "My grandmother died of cancer. A friend of mine is in remission now," she paused. "We have underestimated women's bodies for too long. Medical research earlier

was focused on males, and only recently has attention turned toward female physiology, like pre-menopause, hormonal shifts, and different immune responses."

Food in daily life, she says, is part of the combat against these diseases. In her 13 years in Dubai, she has seen the city as a long, vibrant dining table with flavors from every corner of the world. Over time, she has come to realize that food is more than merely touted as delicious; it can also be a form of medicine.

"Our guts hold good bacteria and bad. Processed foods strip away goodness and add chemicals that encourage inflammation," Chef Vanessa explains. "For breast health, it is important to eat foods that help reduce inflammation and are rich in vitamin C, beta-carotene, lean proteins, and minerals."

Debunking persistent misconceptions about food for cancer prevention, she explains that meat is automatically assumed to be harmful. "That is a huge misconception," she says. "But lean proteins are essential when you are fighting cancer. You need the energy." The real culprit, she insists, lies in processed sugars and low-quality oils. Protein, when sourced cleanly and prepared mindfully, is nourishment, not a threat.



Lean proteins are essential when you are fighting cancer. The real culprit lies in processed sugars and low-quality oils

— **Vanessa Bayma**

For Pink Month, her dish is all about comfort food. She has prepared a Thai-Asian fusion spring roll with papaya, vermicelli noodles, fresh vegetables, and lean protein. "It is packed with vitamins and protein, gluten-free, and the papaya helps fight inflammation while adding natural sweetness. Using high-quality ingredients from JM Foods, including fresh produce and Australian lamb and beef, really helps me create dishes that make customers come back for more," she explains.

Stress and the pressure of the kitchen are front and center in her advice on self-care. "We became cooks to bring joy. Therefore, take care of yourself.

Do not punish yourself for a weekend cheeseburger; instead, make the next meal healthier. Fighting cancer is both a mental and physical battle."

Taking care of friends and family is just as important because they may be suffering in silence. The bonds formed with supportive friends and loved ones can make a real difference. "Keep enjoying life. Do not give up. Take every day one step at a time. We are all here for you. Even the friend you hesitate to reach out to, just pick up the phone and make that call. None of us is meant to face this alone," she signs off.

This initiative is executed in strategic partnership with JM Foods and Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG). Spearheaded by Evelyne Thuo, Marketing & Communications Manager at JM Foods, the Culinary with Purpose initiative for Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a project driven by pro-women's health conversations that blends social responsibility with storytelling, partnerships, and celebrating chefs who make a difference. The success of this initiative would not have been possible without the invaluable support of her teammates, Ara Collas and Ramshad Rahman, who added their magic to the mix.

## Thai Spring Rolls with Sweet Chili Sauce (gluten free)

By **Vanessa Bayma**

**Ingredients (Serves 6–8 as appetizer)**

Skinless, Boneless Chicken Thigh Meat	200 g
Fresh Mint Leaves	10 g
Thai Rice Paper Wrappers	3 sheets
Spring Onion, thinly sliced	10 g
Rice Vermicelli Noodles	60 g
Fresh Coriander Leaves	5 g
Fresh Papaya, julienned	
Cucumber, julienned	30 g
Thai Red Chili, thinly sliced	

(adjust to taste) 1  
Sweet Chili Sauce (for dipping) 60 g

### Directions

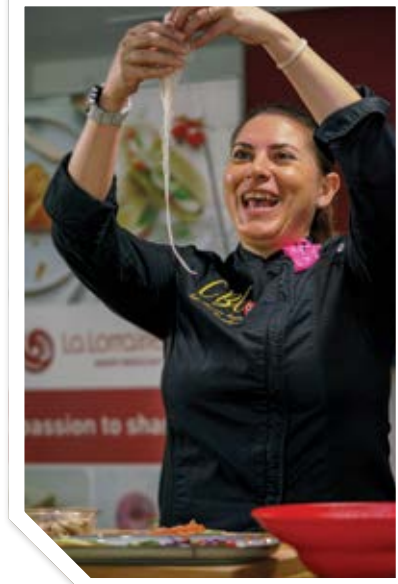
- ♦ Prepare the chicken. Cook the chicken thigh meat (boil, steam, or grill). Once cooked, let it cool and slice into thin strips.
- ♦ Cook the noodles. Soak rice vermicelli noodles in hot water for 3–4 minutes until soft. Drain and set aside.
- ♦ Prepare the vegetables. Julienne papaya and cucumber. Slice spring onion and chili thinly. Wash and pat dry mint and coriander leaves.
- ♦ Soften the rice paper wrappers. Fill a shallow dish with warm water. Dip one

rice paper sheet for 5–10 seconds until soft but not mushy. Place it flat on a clean, damp kitchen towel or board.

- ♦ Assemble the rolls. Place a few strips of chicken, a small handful of vermicelli, papaya, cucumber, spring onion, chili, mint, and coriander in the center of the wrapper. Fold the bottom edge over the filling, then fold in the sides, and roll tightly like a burrito. Repeat with remaining wrappers.

### Serve

- ♦ Slice each roll in half (optional). Serve immediately with sweet chili sauce for dipping. Makes 3 rolls
- ♦ Research shows that the antioxidants



in papaya, particularly lycopene, can reduce cancer risk and benefit those undergoing cancer treatment, and chicken is a good source of protein.

- ♦ Quick summary of potential benefits (ingredient → short evidence-backed notes)

#### **Chicken (lean protein — 200 g)**

Protein supports tissue repair, maintains muscle mass, and helps people tolerate treatment (chemotherapy/radiation). Cancer care guidelines recommend good protein intake during and after treatment. (American Cancer Society)

#### **Mint (10 g — peppermint)**

Peppermint (oil/extract) has been shown in clinical studies to reduce nausea and vomiting in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and can help appetite/nausea symptoms. Fresh mint may provide similar soothing benefits for digestion/comfort. (Source: PMC+1)

#### **Spring onion / Allium vegetables (10 g — scallion/green onion)**

Epidemiological and mechanistic studies suggest that allium vegetables (onions, garlic, leeks, etc.) contain organosulfur and other phytochemicals that are associated with lower risk or protective effects in some studies of breast cancer — though the evidence is mixed and not definitive. Including allium vegetables as part of a plant-forward diet is generally encouraged. (Source: PMC+1)

#### **Thai red chili (capsaicin)**

Lab (in vitro and some animal) studies show capsaicin can induce cancer cell death and inhibit proliferation in breast cancer cell lines. These are promising mechanistic findings, but they do not

mean eating chilis cures cancer — they suggest capsaicin-containing foods deserve further study. (Source: PMC+1)

#### **Coriander (cilantro) — 5 g**

Coriander contains antioxidant compounds; several laboratory studies report antioxidant and anticancer activities (including effects on breast-cancer-related cell lines or metastasis models). Human clinical evidence is limited, but coriander is a source of antioxidants with potential complementary benefits. (Source: PMC+1)

#### **Papaya (30 g)**

Papaya is rich in vitamin C, beta-carotene/lycopene and other phytochemicals. Recent reviews and lab studies report antioxidant and anticancer potential for papaya extracts/seeds in vitro; as a food, papaya provides vitamins and fiber that support general health and immunity. (Source: PMC+1)

#### **Cucumber (30 g)**

Cucumbers are highly hydrating (≈96% water) and provide small amounts of vitamins and antioxidants. Hydration, low-calorie nutrient-dense foods, and foods that are easy to eat can be helpful for patients with treatment-related appetite changes or mucositis. (City of Hope Cancer Treatment Centers+1)

#### **Rice vermicelli / Thai rice sheets**

These are mainly carbohydrate sources (white rice vermicelli). Moderate amounts are useful to maintain calories and energy, especially if appetite is low. Evidence on white rice and cancer risk is mixed — moderate consumption is generally fine, but attention to overall diet quality and glycemic load is prudent

(higher glycemic diets have been associated with some increased risks in some cancers). (PubMed+1)

#### **Sweet chili sauce**

#### **(60 g — dipping sauce)**

Many commercial sweet chili sauces are high in sugar and sodium. High added-sugar intake and diets high in ultra-processed foods can negatively affect overall health and body weight, which matters for cancer prognosis. It's fine in small amounts for enjoyment, but moderation is recommended. (See general diet/glycemic guidance.) (Source: PMC+1)

#### **Practical takeaways for breast cancer patients:**

- ♦ **Protein (chicken)** — keep lean protein in meals to support muscle, immune function and recovery. Recommended by cancer-support guidelines. (American Cancer Society)
- ♦ **Use herbs & spices (mint, coriander, chili, scallions)** — they add flavor and bring antioxidants and potentially helpful bioactive compounds; peppermint may specifically help chemo-related nausea. (PMC+2)
- ♦ **Fruits & vegetables (papaya, cucumber, herbs)** — supply vitamins, fiber and antioxidants that support general health and may help reduce oxidative stress. (PMC+1)
- ♦ **Carbs (rice vermicelli, rice paper)** — useful for calories/energy; prefer balanced portions and pair with protein and vegetables to lower glycemic impact. (PubMed+1)
- ♦ **Limit high-sugar condiments (sweet chili sauce)** — enjoy in moderation; prioritize whole-food meals where possible. (PMC+1)





## Take Nothing for **Granted**

Delivering newspapers at dawn, picking up everyday wisdom in a coffee shop, and eventually commanding the region's most complex kitchens. These are some snippets of Chef **Grant Marais'** story. **Amaresh Bhaskaran** chats with the Executive Chef about his leadership, challenges, and hands-on excellence in an honest-to-goodness chat

Chef Grant Marais' journey to becoming Executive Chef at IHG Hotels & Resorts began long before he ever set foot in a professional kitchen. Unlike most chefs who rise through the kitchen alone, Chef Grant began his career in front-of-house before his introduction to cooking. Born in Pretoria, South Africa, his first lessons in responsibility came at the age of 13, when he delivered newspapers at dawn. On weekends, he learned the art of service while bussing tables in a lively coffee shop. "I started working very early in life. Back then, my world was only into gaming and sports. If I wanted something, my parents made it clear I had to earn it," he recalls.

That checkered early experience did more than earn him pocket money; it taught him to read a room and balance speed with attention, making every guest feel acknowledged. By the age of 15, teen Grant was cooking dinner most evenings at home while his mother worked late. Simple dishes like spaghetti bolognese became his comfort food. Eventually, a cornucopia of lessons in service, cooking, task management, and understanding people came when he joined a lively coffee shop. In the ambiance of freshly brewed coffee and experimenting with everything from espresso to French press, the place ignited his love for coffee.

Soon, a nearby coffee shop offered him the role of restaurant manager. He accepted, but his ambitions didn't stop there. "I was having fun and enjoying my time, but I wanted to get out of my comfort zone and explore more," he says. That decision set him on the path toward professional culinary training in Johannesburg, opening the door to the world of high-level kitchens and leadership. A few days later, Chef Grant walked into what looked, from the outside, like a ubiquitous warehouse. Inside, an epiphany amidst the knead and natter. He was at Sinclair's Signature, a bustling food production establishment that immediately captivated him.



Strength isn't in  
silent endurance;  
it is in teamwork,  
communication,  
and balance

"It was like stepping into Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," he grins. "Steam hissing, pans clattering, pastry ladies gossiping while rolling dough, and people darting back and forth with crates, trolleys, uniforms. Beautiful chaos. For

the first time, I thought I was in the right place at the right time. I belonged."

When he first met the company's owner, Glen Sinclair, he sensed that his life was about to change. Sinclair asked when he could start, and Grant, pointing jokingly at Sinclair's chef's jacket, replied, "If you have one of those in my size, I can start today." Sinclair laughed, they shook hands, and that moment marked the start of his formal culinary career as a commis chef intern.

Over the next three years, Chef Grant honed his skills in a hands-on environment, mastering everything from sushi and butchery to sauce-making and preparing mise-en-place, all

while completing a condensed culinary training program that covered six months of curriculum in just six weeks each year. "Culinary school has been an important part of my journey. The formal training and practical experience gave me a solid foundation in techniques, equipment, and kitchen operations," he explains. After earning a promotion to chef de partie, he sought new challenges to continue his growth and broaden his experience, stepping into opportunities that would expand both his culinary and leadership skills.

A pivotal chapter followed at Radisson Blu Gautrain Hotel, where he entered a defining stage of his career. At 24, he joined the kitchen as a Chef de Partie, and within six months, he rose to Sous Chef, regularly taking charge in the executive sous chef's stead.

In hindsight, the demanding environment accelerated his growth. This fast-paced environment became his education, chiseling the mettle that would carry him further, refining both his precision under pressure and his ability to inspire a team.

In 2016, he took on a new challenge, moving internationally to Qatar. "Qatar was a place I had not imagined I would be, but the opportunity was incredible, and I knew it would shape me both personally and professionally," he recalls on the culinary recurve. Here, he navigated a multicultural kitchen with forty different nationalities, leading a gamut of operations ranging from all-day dining, steakhouse outlets, banquets, and overseeing food costs across eleven operations. For five years, he immersed himself completely, mastering every aspect of kitchen life from production to management.

By then, his skills had fructified, paving the way to the Mandarin Oriental in Qatar, where he rose to Chef de Cuisine. Then COVID came. The world went catawampus, and he was tasked with navigating unprecedented challenges



It is not a weakness to ask for help; it is strategic, and it strengthens the team

in the kitchen. During the pandemic, he successfully managed the creation of quarantine meals for staff and guests with dietary requirements, a complex operational challenge that was executed flawlessly. Post-pandemic, he led the launch of the hotel's cake shop, translating chaos into creativity and demonstrating his ability to innovate under pressure.

Chef Grant then moved to Dubai, signaling a bold step into a new phase of leadership and culinary innovation. He began with the launch of Adrift Burger Bar under Gates Hospitality, collaborating closely with Michelin-starred Chef David Myers to develop the brand's signature burgers for the brand's first regional debut. It was a project that demanded precision and an understanding of local palates, which Chef Grant delivered with ease.

His role quickly expanded, taking charge at Publique before being entrusted with one of Gates' most high-profile ventures, the Akira Back pop-up Dasha: The Dubai Chapter. Working directly with Michelin-starred Chef Akira Back, he helped shape an exclusive six-month dining experience built around a Japanese-Korean menu that pushed boundaries and elevated Dubai's pop-up dining scene.

At the same time, he lent his leadership to several of Gates Hospitality's flagship venues, including Bistro des Arts, Publique, Folly, and Reform Social & Grill, ensuring consistency, creativity, and guest satisfaction across multiple outlets. His influence was not limited

to restaurants alone; he played a strategic role in global-scale events, from supporting Expo 2020 Dubai to spearheading pre-opening concepts for COP28. At Expo City Dubai, he oversaw six restaurants and three food trucks, demonstrating his ability to manage complexity, inspire large teams, and deliver at the highest level of international hospitality.

A globetrotting career spanning multiple continents and diverse culinary styles has sharpened Chef Grant's ability to deliver results under pressure while fostering collaboration and teamwork. Needless to say, as an Executive Chef, he now channels decades of expertise at IHG Hotels & Resorts into revitalizing the Food & Beverage division, blending creativity with operational excellence. In just three months, he has introduced forward-thinking concepts that cut food waste by 50% and reduce costs by 7%, all while maintaining uncompromising culinary standards.

"Beyond the numbers, I focus on cultivating a culture of innovation, mentorship, and guest-centric dining that sets a new benchmark for the brand. From designing inventive menus to streamlining operations and shaping high-performing teams, I strive to transform kitchens into well-oiled engines of innovation and efficiency," he explains.

### Leadership Beyond the Line

Most recently, Chef Grant Marais was re-elected as Vice President of Dubai at the Emirates Culinary Guild, a position he accepts with both pride and a sense of responsibility. "I was really happy about being re-elected because it means I can continue contributing to competitions and supporting the next generation of chefs," he says.

To him, holding this position is about more than a title. It gives him a platform to shape the future of culinary talent in the Emirates. That's why he has already stepped into the world of judging, completing his first exam and





making his debut this year as a rookie judge at Salon Culinaire.

"Salon Culinaire is my pride and joy," he explains. The competition alludes to his own past, those years in Qatar when he trained chefs, preparing them for competitions, and watching them return with medals, trophies, and invaluable experience.

Chef Grant's involvement in competitions goes beyond evaluation. He actively supports participants, ensuring they have the resources and guidance to succeed. "I check on contestants, make sure they have what they need, and help troubleshoot if equipment breaks down. Though there are marshals, for me, it is personal. I want them to know they are not alone," he says.

Having been in high-stakes kitchens himself, he understands that even the



Leadership is not about doing it all yourself; it is about empowering your team and leaving a legacy of growth

most skilled chefs are fallible under pressure. "I've been in kitchens handling 1,500 burgers in a day with 20 chefs on the line and guests waiting. That pressure is one thing. But competitions? The stress there can break you if there is no support."

That is where his hands-on style makes a difference. "You have to make sure that the bridge between you and the

competitor is not broken. Sometimes all you need is to see that someone's got your back."

The culinary world has its brilliance, but there is also a flip side to long hours, impossible standards, and the silent expectation that you endure. Chef Grant was not the kind of person to raise his hand and ask for help. He balked at the idea until that silence left him broken. "I remember starting at six in the morning, finishing at eleven at night, juggling fifty covers for breakfast, preparing à la carte service, mise en place, pastry displays, all without any backup."

He takes a considered pause. "I thought if I could not handle it alone, I was not good enough," he says, adding that in kitchens, some chefs bemoaned the hours and left, while others, like him, stayed quiet, burying exhaustion until it hollowed them out. "But I have learned that

strength isn't in silent endurance; it is in teamwork, communication, and balance."

Burnout as a recipe for success is twisted at best, which is why he later came to the consensus that no great kitchen is built on endurance alone. Today, he frames strength differently, pushing against those old, malleable notions of toughness. "It is not a weakness to ask for help; it is strategic, and it strengthens the team. Times have changed. Look after your health and understand that strength is not in silence."

Looking ahead, Chef Grant envisions expanding his influence further, either by taking on larger operations or by launching his own culinary venture. "Because my initials are GM, maybe it's in my destiny to run the show as a general manager," he says with a grin. "Setting up a restaurant venture in the UAE or Asia is also on the horizon."

Through every role, his philosophy is clear: leadership is about building people as much as it is about building dishes. Pressure can forge skill, but it is guidance, mentorship, and balance that create lasting impact.

### Award-Winning Career

Combining formal culinary training with hands-on experience, Chef Grant has built a career marked by precision, leadership, and skill in the kitchen. Earning his Advanced Chef and Cookery Diploma in 2010 from HTA Culinary School, he developed a strong foundation in Food Costing, French Terminology, Menu Planning, Cookery Theory, Practical Cookery, Nutrition Assessment, and food and beverage service. This rigorous training provided him with technical expertise and a structured approach that would later inform both his menu development and operational strategy across multiple kitchens.

Throughout his career, he has consistently demonstrated mastery in both culinary technique and leadership. He earned second place in the Chef of



Pressure can forge skill, but it is guidance, mentorship, and balance that create lasting impact

the Year Award (2014) and achieved Best in Category for Best Burger at Salon Culinaire (2017), in addition to receiving the Award for Best Salon Cuisinier that same year. His leadership extended beyond individual competitions to managing high-performing kitchens recognized for excellence in all-day dining, café, and steakhouse operations, earning commendations for casual dining concepts at Dubai Expo 2020.

On the international stage, Chef Grant represented the UAE as runner-up in the "Dates Connection" competition finals in Milan, Italy, further demonstrating his ability to translate culinary creativity into results recognized globally.

Beyond accolades, these achievements reflect Grant's hands-on approach

to leadership and mentorship. He uses his experience in competitive kitchens to guide emerging chefs, fostering resilience, precision, and operational discipline while maintaining a supportive environment that values teamwork and well-being.

Grant's accomplishments are not merely milestones on a resume; they highlight how he transforms challenges into opportunities, whether through developing innovative menus, optimizing operations, or mentoring teams to excel under pressure.

### Mentoring Tomorrow

With decades of hands-on expertise across global kitchens, he focuses on building high-performing, guest-centered teams where mentorship, well-being, and operational optimization coexist. Success, for him, is measured not just in dishes but in the strength, growth, and competence of the people behind them. Beyond the kitchen, he takes an educational approach, helping staff across the organization understand culinary operations, bridging the gaps between front-of-house and back-of-house, and creating a culture where knowledge and collaboration drive results.

"Leadership is not about doing it all yourself; it is about empowering your team, turning challenges into opportunities, and leaving a legacy of growth. The measure of a chef, or a leader, is in the people you inspire as much as in the results you achieve."

Pressure makes diamonds. But pressure can also break you. Chef Grant has seen what relentless pressure can do, and he chooses a different path, one where excellence never comes at the cost of well-being, and success is shared, not hoarded. At the end of the service, he believes, it is not the dishes remembered, but the people inspired, the teams strengthened, and the leadership that is never taken for granted. If that is not what it means to pull a Grant, then what is? ■



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October 2025 **Gulf Gourmet**

# A Chef's Battle Beyond Cancer

Chef **Prachi Ganoo Kulkarni** faced cancer head-on, letting her scars speak for the life she rebuilt and the kitchen she returned to stronger than ever

In every professional kitchen, chefs are trained to thrive under heat, pressure, and impossible timelines. But for Chef Prachi Ganoo Kulkarni, the toughest service she ever faced was not behind the pass. It was inside her own body.

What began as training for her 2nd marathon led to an unexpected diagnosis: Stage 2 breast cancer with lymph node involvement. Suddenly, life shifted from prepping mise en place to managing chemotherapy schedules, double mastectomy scars, radiation burns, and hormonal therapy. Yet, just as she had learned in the kitchen, Prachi leaned on discipline, creativity, and resilience to plate hope where despair threatened to dominate.



Mastery is not about brute force, but about flow, rhythm, and vision

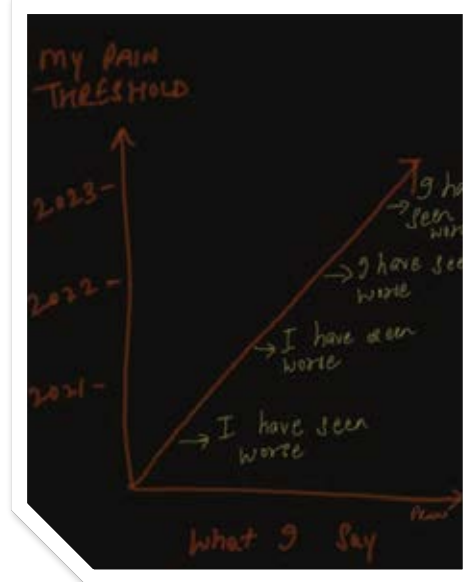
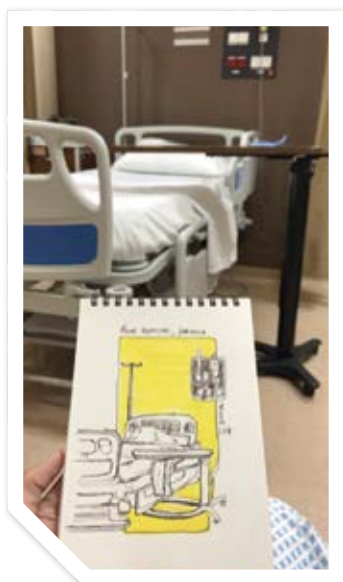
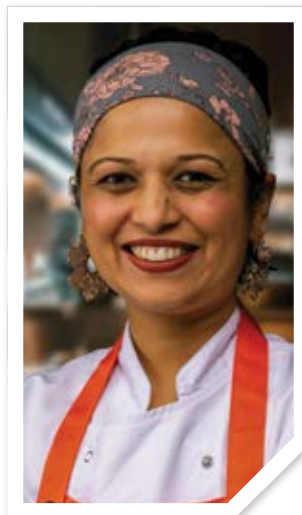
## When Taste Fades, Memory Leads

Chemo dulled her palate, sometimes leaving food tasting like metal—or nothing at all. For a chef, this was devastating. “Imagine designing a dish you cannot taste,” she recalls. But chefs know that taste is more than the tongue. It is memory, instinct, and emotion. Prachi

relied on years of culinary experience, her muscle memory guiding her hand with precision in the use of spices, seasoning, and textures. She tested dishes through feedback from family and colleagues, rediscovering that food is as much about connection as it is about flavour.

## Adapting in the Kitchen

Fatigue turned once-simple kitchen tasks into marathons. Lifting heavy pots was harder than sprinting through service. Long prep sessions drained her energy faster than a double shift. But just as chefs redesign menus for dietary



needs, Prachi redesigned her kitchen routine by delegating heavy lifting, working in shorter bursts, and focusing on dishes where intuition mattered more than physical stamina. She learned that mastery is not about brute force, but about flow, rhythm, and vision.

### The Secret Ingredients: Humour and Art

Chefs are storytellers, and when words failed, Prachi turned to drawing. Her artwork expressed the sharp edges of fear, the bright strokes of resilience. In the kitchen, humour became her seasoning. "If I had to lose my hair, at least my chef's hat finally fit," she joked with her team. These moments of levity

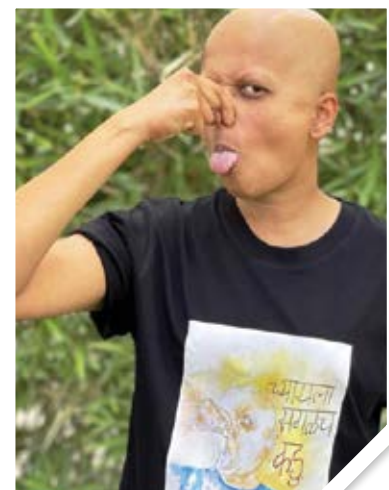


Self portrait depicting everything tastes bitter

reminded her crew, and herself, that even in crisis, kitchens run best with laughter.

### Rewriting the Recipe for Life

Her four pillars—exercise, creativity, humour, and support—became the mise en place of her recovery. She completed



a 17 km run during her radiotherapy and trains for an upcoming triathlon.

Art gave her a creative outlet when flavours dulled. Family and friends became her sous chefs in life, stepping in when energy ran out. She has conducted art workshops at the Al Jalila Cancer Foundation for other cancer patients.

### Back to the Pass

Today, Prachi is scarred but smiling, back in her whites with renewed perspective. She sees food not only as flavour, but as medicine and memory. For her, cooking is no longer about perfection; it is about nourishment, resilience, and courage. She has been featured extensively in newspapers in the UAE and India, as well as on webinars, radio, and podcasts. Prachi works as a product development chef and is immersed in ceramics, currently aiming to be ready for exhibiting her handcrafted, one-of-a-kind sculptures.

Her message to chefs is clear: "In the kitchen, as in life, the heat will rise. You cannot control the fire, but you can decide how to cook with it."

Because sometimes, the bravest dishes are plated not in spite of our scars, but because of them. ■



If I had to lose my hair, at least my chef's hat finally fit



# First-Evers Today, Norms Tomorrow

The **Gulf Gourmet's** all-women edition and the ECG–WCC collaboration show that when women rise, diversity and innovation follow, explains Chef **Tarryn-Leigh Green**

September was a month of 'first-ever' for the culinary community. The **Gulf Gourmet** published its first-ever all-women edition, and we also witnessed the first-ever collaborative event between the Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG) and the Women's Culinary Chapter (WCC). Both moments were groundbreaking in their own right, but what truly stood out was the partnership that developed between them. Men and women are working side by side to bring these initiatives to life.

And where better to host such a moment than at The Hilton Palm Jumeirah, a hotel that has achieved gender parity across its entire operation. That in itself is a feat not to be dismissed. To gather in a space already embodying the principles we are striving for made the event a holistic embrace of what the future of our industry can and should look like.

The beauty of these 'first-ever' lies not only in their symbolism but in the impact created when men and women align toward a common goal. When we come together to pursue a common vision, the results always exceed the original target. Which leads me to ask: why do we not do this more often?

## The Missed Opportunity of Inclusion

The honest answer, at least from my observation, is that there are not enough women being embraced and empowered within the industry. When women are absent or underrepresented, diversity in its many other forms, such as nationality, race, ethnicity, age, education, and disability, also struggles to find its rightful place.



Our industry thrives on creativity, perspective, and the ability to connect with communities. By overlooking women, we inadvertently close the door on wider dimensions of diversity and inclusivity that would make our kitchens and our businesses stronger, more relevant, and more sustainable.

## The Superpower of Women

Women, by nature, tend to bring inclusivity with them. It is part of our genetic makeup as nurturers. We are predisposed to patience, acceptance, and collaboration. These are not just soft skills; they are strategic strengths that shape culture, build resilience, and enable progress.

When women are embraced and empowered, the ripple effect extends far beyond gender. Suddenly, the environment becomes more welcoming to different voices, backgrounds, and ideas. Diversity stops being a checkbox exercise and instead becomes an intrinsic part of how the system operates.

This is not about positioning women against men. It is about recognising

the unique strengths women bring and ensuring those strengths are integrated into the industry.

## The Way Forward

The first-ever all-women **Gulf Gourmet** edition, the first ECG and WCC collaborative event, and The Hilton Palm Jumeirah's achievement of gender parity are powerful signals of progress. Together, they prove that when both men and women put their weight behind inclusion, meaningful change can happen. These initiatives were not the work of women alone; they were supported, championed, and enabled by men who saw the value of balance and partnership. That matters.

But to move from 'first-ever' to 'the norm,' we must continue to build on this momentum. Empowering women in the culinary industry must be more than a headline or a one-off event. It must be woven into how we recruit, train, mentor, and promote talent. It must shape the way we design operations, the way we recognise leadership, and the way we measure success.

September's 'first-ever' were moments of pride and progress. But they should not be the exceptions. They should be the beginning of a new way forward, where the inclusion of women is not a milestone but a standard, and where diversity in all its forms becomes second nature.

If the culinary industry can adopt this mindset, as The Hilton Palm Jumeirah has demonstrated, it is clear that the future of hospitality can be one of true balance, belonging, and brilliance. ■





## A British Summer Feast (With Extra Calories)

Chef **Helen Morris** documents her mouth-watering journey through Britain's boldest, most inventive, and unpretentious cuisine

A British summer. What can I say? Finally, blue skies, golden sun, and fruit practically hurled itself off the trees into my basket. Usually, we Brits are united in complaining about the weather, including rain, drizzle, and wind, but this time the sun actually showed up for most of my visit.

While Europe sweltered in a heatwave, I stayed put and embarked on a serious mission to sample as much food as possible in the British countryside, coast, and in the big city. Think of it as culinary fieldwork, but with more calories and fewer academic references.

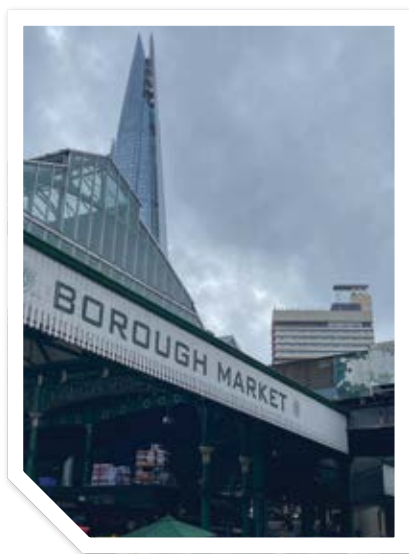
My first stop was the local market town near me, once considered the preserve of pensioners buying dubious polyester socks and turnips. Back in my college days, you would not be seen dead there unless you had lost a bet. But times

have changed, and the markets have had a glow-up, and it now hums with food stalls that would make even Borough Market give it a round of applause. There were Moroccan tajines bubbling like edible lava, Thai curries sending out lemongrass perfume, Chinese dumplings so plump they could double as stress balls, and even organic sourdough pizza, chewy, blistered, and smugly proclaiming they had been fed with starter older than me! I loved the market. It was rustic, unpretentious, great value, dangerously addictive, and proof that British markets are reinventing themselves as a young, vibrant social space where food is the real headline act.

I went straight for the Thai stand. Usually, I am skeptical, too many places drown everything in fluorescent sauce and call it a curry. But here? Authentic, fragrant, with just the right spice kick. I scoffed my favourite green curry and left only enough



The smells of Borough Market alone should be bottled as perfume

October 2025 **Gulf Gourmet**

rice behind to be polite. On my next visit, I switched camps to Chinese. Dumplings, pickled cucumbers, spring rolls, it was like my personal dim sum Olympics. Gold medal to me for consumption.

Next came the Welsh coast. Miles of beach, salty breeze, and... culinary options slightly thinner on the ground. Two pubs and a bakery. The bakery, though, deserves medals; it served Oggie, a local cousin of the Cornish pasty. Inside the pastry fortress lurked mutton, potatoes, leeks, butter, and a whisper of salt and pepper. It was hearty, unapologetic food, the sort of thing you eat and instantly want to chop wood or at least carry a deckchair uphill.

But of course, seaside Britain means one thing: fish and chips with curry sauce. It is my ritual, my homecoming handshake with the UK. Except the chippy was closed on a Tuesday. A small sign declared that they would only be open on Thursday to Saturday due to rising costs. Imagine

the scene - beaches packed, car parks overflowing, sun blazing, and me staring at a locked door, vinegar bottle in hand like a tragic extra in a soap opera. Still, I did mutter about government support for hospitality all the way down the street as my soul wept for the missing fish and chips. Imagine staring at a 'Closed' sign; it felt like a national emergency.

Next, if you want culinary theatre without the pomp, head to Stockport's Where The Light Gets In. Now, you do not so much arrive at the restaurant as survive it. The entrance is reached via an alley of uneven steps that feel less like architecture and more like a test of balance, dignity, and ankle strength. Once you have performed this impromptu audition for a mountain goat, you are rewarded with a menu that reads like a mischievous love letter to both farm and sea.

Here, the tasting menu provides no choice, and I love the boldness of that statement. The chefs decide the dishes

based on the season and daily availability, and you, the humble diner, surrender. The kitchen is completely open, with no glass screen and no hiding. Chefs plate dishes with the concentration of surgeons and then stroll out to explain them as if they have just invented fire.

Home-grown, picked vegetables, smoked beetroot, and sheep's yoghurt open the show, earthy and tangy enough to reset your palate, quickly followed by tomato, damson, and summer savoury, packed full of flavour. A Carlington oyster appears next, a salty smack from the sea and fresh enough to look you in the eye and demand a napkin, while sourdough and cultured butter swagger in with all the confidence knowing that they are irresistible. The pasta course, with lovage and courgette tortellini, feels like a carefully wrapped gift from Italy, while the Cornish mackerel turns up sleek and smug, shimmering on the plate as if it knows it is the good-looking one, and proves that sometimes simplicity is pure seduction.

Then comes Staffordshire lop (a special meat), paired with blackberries and Korean mint. The special meat melts in your mouth, berries that tease, and mint that gatecrashes like the life of the party. Dessert, of course, refuses to be upstaged: a berry Karpotka, delicate and quivering, the sweet that refuses to sit still until eaten, and finally a delicate apple, quince, and elderflower jelly, the graceful bow before the lights go down.

At times, the sunshine was beaming brightly, and on hot summer days, there was a call for ice cream, and this time, I







headed to a local farm that has turned a humble scoop into a full-blown empire. As a child, you would see the cows being milked, watch the ice cream churn, then tuck into a single flavour with no frills. Now? Chaos. Families, bouncy castles, and more flavours than you can count. It is now known as a family attraction, and trust me, that is not attracting me in any shape or form. Thankfully, someone had a stroke of genius, the ice cream drive-through.

You park by a number around a pond and greenery, scan a QR code, and moments later, a golf cart whizzes over with your order. No queues, no screaming toddlers, just you, your cone, and a deckchair. My chocolate-mint scoop was heavenly, simple, classic, and far less chaotic than the main attraction. Eating ice cream in a deck chair by a pond felt gloriously British: slightly eccentric, totally brilliant. Whoever designed this system deserves a knighthood.

No trip to the UK is complete without a visit to London and its culinary scene. First stop: Borough Market. The smells alone should be bottled as perfume. Here, you can eat your way around the world in ten minutes (ok, that is an exaggeration). But my highlight was a sandwich so enormous it could double as a pillow. Stuffed with special meat, fennel slaw, truffle mayonnaise, and parmesan. For dessert? A jam-filled doughnut, rolled in sugar, calorific enough to keep me guilty for a fortnight but worth it.

Then came Quaglino's, an old haunt. We pre-gamed at Fortnum & Mason with a



## Sometimes the simplest cooking is the bravest

glass of Kent sparkling, crisp, refreshing, and proof that English wine has seriously grown up. At Quaglino's, I ordered pan-fried Atlantic cod with a supporting cast of Cornish crab and basil emulsion. My friend's salt marsh lamb looked like a piece of art. But, Chef, a word - fries as the only potato option and in Britain, where new potatoes practically leap from the soil begging to be served with butter? Missed opportunity. Otherwise, impeccable.

Next stop, The Crispin in Spitalfields, we sat outside in the glorious sunshine, ordered a cold bottle of something, and fell into the trap of 'just a few small plates.' Of course, the plates were not small. Sourdough with brown butter (feed me this all day), crispy potatoes with crème fraîche and chives, a modern-day Pomme Anna, and utterly addictive, burrata with grilled peach and basil (the food equivalent of a summer fling), and charcuterie, crispy skin, and melon (my mouth is still watering). We finished with a brown butter cake topped with lemon curd and crème fraîche, proof that cake should always come with butter in the title.

Three days of London feasting left me wobbling, but I could not resist Noble

Rot in Shepherd's Market, Mayfair. There it was... lamb sweetbreads on the menu, rare these days, but one of my favourites. Delicate, melt-in-your-mouth, seasoned with skill. My friend's Herdwick hogget was equally divine, paired with greens so good even the cabbage had swagger. It was indulgence without fuss, proof that sometimes the simplest cooking is the bravest.

Before heading home, I ducked into a country pub famed for its food. We were not after a banquet, just a snack, but the menu tempted us otherwise. Steak ciabatta with chunky fries (classic, flawless), salt and pepper squid with sweet chili sauce (simple, delicious), and the star of the show, the ham hock terrine with homemade piccalilli and watercress. A classic dish packed with flavour had me plotting how to make my own version at home for the festive season.

Of course, food needs company, and this summer Britain's 'grape' stole the show. Especially Kent, no longer producing 'sour mouthwash,' but crisp, elegant bottles that rival the French without requiring a second mortgage. Supporting locals never tasted so good.

From dumplings to Oggie, from truffle-slathered sandwiches to golf-cart ice creams, my month of eating across Britain was nothing short of gluttonous bliss. Sure, my trousers now require negotiation to close, but every bite was worth it. Besides, I can always buy bigger pants.

Until the next feast, pass the butter and hide the scales. ■



# Geek Out on Food, Not on Trivial Trends

Chef **Trisha Singh Henault** reveres the sanctity of ingredients, letting tradition, history, and her inventive flair guide every dessert she creates. Recognized as one of Caterer Middle East's 30 Best Chefs Under 30 two years in a row and awarded Highly Commended Pastry Chef of the Year, she continues to focus on telling a story with every plate. **Shreya Asopa** chats with the Executive Pastry Chef of Five Luxe JBR to experience that story firsthand and see her dream in action



These days, it does not take much for a dessert reel to explode on our feed. A flat, caramelized croissant, half-dipped in chocolate, is irresistible in slow motion. Suddenly it goes viral, replicated multiple times and fades a week later. I am no different. I scroll through reels like anyone else. What grates is the shallow chase that rarely leads to anything true. And seeing all of this, I know I had to seek out a cassandra amid the noise of copycat desserts. Chef Trisha Singh Henault has seen enough of these cycles to know better. "I do not like to follow trends blindly for the sake of it," she says.

"Everyone on social media is doing the same thing. There is so much doom-scrolling, so much to consume, and it gets repetitive." Following every viral trend will run you aground. She cuts through the smoke and mirrors, summing it up in a notion best summarized as learning the basics, then



I never planned on being a chef. It felt random, but it became my calling

letting novelty amplify, not replace, the craft. Technology and AI have their place, but she keeps a wary eye on the noise.

AI provides her with food-illustration tools and faster prototyping of ideas, and she utilizes both; yet, she refuses to let the internet's spurious trends dictate her menus. When the feed grows loud, she tells herself to put a sock on impulse copying and instead returns to texture, provenance, and restraint. "Pastry is always a reflection of its era and the society. Classic French pastries were a pinnacle of sophistication. That was the foundation. Today, the era has evolved; we have nouvelle cuisine, but always remember you can walk with simplicity and innovation when your foundation is strong," remarks Chef Trisha.

That respect for strong foundations also flows from her unconventional path. She was not a prodigy who always knew she would be a chef. She was a Delhi girl dreaming of fashion school, following her mother's footsteps to become a fashion designer, and even cracked the NIFT entrance test. However, a random newspaper ad from Oberoi's programme in Kitchen Management changed everything.

"I never planned on being a chef," she says. "My mom saw the ad and told me to apply. It felt random, but I went for it. The decision became a turning point. I was one of 80 selected from across India for the program. The moment I landed in Chennai for the training, I had cold feet and decided to return, but something kept pulling me back. That is when I realized it was a calling," remarks Chef Trisha, her hands almost sketching the air.

Pastry, she explains, requires the same patience and imagination as sketching. "I was always a creative child. My mom enrolled me in various classes. On weekends, we baked together. On weekdays, I attended pottery, painting and tennis classes... You name it, I was doing it. Today, when I see videos of chocolate becoming the new clay



## I am a bit of a food geek when it comes to menu

in pottery trends, I just think... at the end of the day, you never know which experiences will prove helpful."

Still, creativity alone could not carry her through the rigors of professional kitchens. The Oberoi training drilled her from dishwashing to handling breakfast service at scale. The program was grueling and many quit along the way. Some days she felt she would be trailing, fighting a losing battle, but her intensity never wavered. "I did not want to fail. I wanted to make my mom proud."

By graduation, she had moved through every station, from the hot kitchen to pastry, tandoor, and even banquet, armed to take on her first challenging

job. Chef Trisha began at the pastry kitchen at The Leela Palace in New Delhi as a commis, followed by a stint at Franco-Italian fine dining, Le Cirque.

However, as happens often, opportunities arrive when you least expect them. One day, an email landed in her inbox. It was an invitation to join the pre-opening of the St. Regis in Dubai. "At first I thought it was a scam," she laughs. "But it was real, and a great chance to join the team."

In 2016, she stepped into Dubai and has since worked at several properties, including the St. Regis at the Al Habtoor Complex and the Bvlgari Resort, rising through the ranks from chef de partie to sous-chef chocolatier. "Those were one of the most formative years of my life. I trained under Japanese and European chefs, specialized in several techniques, and handled the chocolate section," she recalls.

In all this, you can sense her instinct for gravitating toward pre-openings. In unfamiliar kitchens, where many chefs are busy parrying against deadlines and

everything teeters between chaos, she thrived between the chasm of vision and reality. "A chef should be able to go beyond their role. I love setting standards, determining where to place equipment, and establishing hygiene and cleanliness protocols. Pre-openings give you the chance to do that from scratch," she explains.

Three and a half years later, seeking a new challenge, she moved to become Executive Pastry Chef at 25hours Hotel Dubai One Central and Creative Culinary Director at Tandoor Tina. Step by step, role by role, she has carved out her own voice in the city's kitchens. Today, she is the Executive Pastry Chef at Five Luxe JBR. "The scale and diversity of this role have made it nothing short of an epic and extraordinary experience. It is important to find people who share your vision, as it helps with consistency and alignment. I am grateful to work alongside an amazing team. Every success is a credit to their passion, talent, and commitment."

When asked how she dreams up menus, she smiles like she is about to let you peek into her notebook. "It always starts with the classics," she says, tracing history, technique, and region until each recipe opens up. Mediterranean, Spanish, and European, she revisits different pairings and textures. "I am a bit of a food geek when it comes to menu," she admits to often putting her own inspiration on canonical dishes.

Her piña colada riff for Cielo Restaurant is a perfect example. "It is a hollowed baby pineapple with coconut milk custard, a grilled pineapple base, and a caramelized top like crème brûlée that diners crack with a spoon. It looks like a whole pineapple at first, but when you lift the lid, surprise! This is me! Full of textures and flavor, bringing regional identity to the dish."

Banana flower, a staple in Southeast Asian cuisine, became her nod to South India through a dessert of cardamom-



## Progress comes from persistence, not shortcuts

spiced banana flower compote with coconut sugar, paired with smoked chocolate mousse, chocolate streusel, and coconut dacquoise. "Or black garlic! That is another underrepresented ingredient. It bridges the sweet and savory. Even recently, at the Salon du Chocolat, I conducted a masterclass on the alchemy of black garlic and chocolate, which featured a silky black garlic-infused chocolate mousse layered with crunchy almond praliné, chocolate crèmeux and roasted almond-cocoa sponge. It was a harmony of umami and texture in every bite."

Her curiosity also extends to local products such as Hatta honey, dates, desert plants, and camel milk. "At COP25, I prepared a dessert centred on sustainability, an éclair comprising dates, coconut sugar, and camel milk. It was well received and felt like a small victory for sustainable thinking," she recalls."

Family grounds her in a world of flavors. "I'm an Indian soul with French pastry techniques and now a French husband, which makes life truly rich and cross-cultural. My favorite holidays are when both our families come together, and food becomes the common language. From baking cakes with my mom as a

child to baking tarts with my mother-in-law, who once dreamt of becoming a chef herself, it feels like life has come full circle. It is a true blessing," she smiles."

Between then and now, Chef Trisha has remained anchored in her philosophy of never giving up. Her advice rises above the clamor of a generation quick to quit at the first criticism. The memory of peeling onions until her eyes burned or chopping chilies until her hands blistered is imprinted in her memory. "In my early days, a senior chef suggested rubbing oil on my hands to ease the chili sting. Of course, it only burned more," she recalls wryly. "They found it funny; I did not. I learned to push through."

It is no surprise that the abstractions resonate with many chefs today. Some days, kitchens feel like feinting against impossible odds, but it is vital to also rebuff the generation's mad obsession with instant gratification and job-hopping without real learning. "You will face people who try to pull you down. Quitting lets others decide your path, and what is the guarantee that you will not always find easier critics in your next role? Confidence in your own work is everything," she says.

"I suppose what keeps me going is my love for the work itself, and the knowledge that progress comes from persistence, not shortcuts." Chef Trisha has accomplished what few do in a landscape that caricaturizes trends at the expense of substance. She is creating desserts that are thoughtful, memorable, and idiosyncratic. In a world full of trends, she dares to be timeless. ■



# Oops! The Entrepreneurial Don'ts

When courage and confidence outweigh fear, extraordinary growth becomes possible, writes Chef **Vivek Huria**

**B**ack when I was an executive sous-chef at the Royal Meridian in Mumbai, a jovial sous-chef asked the team a question I have never forgotten, 'What will you become when you grow up?' In a kitchen full of grown men earning salaries, it felt as absurd as asking a fish what it wants to be when it learns to fly. But it made us think about whether we were happy with what we were doing.

I think about that question now, at sixty, as the proud owner of my restaurant. A lot of learning went into this. The early days were filled with voyeuristic stares from curious critics, watching every misstep, eager to comment. But my passion for cooking never fizzled. It was the kind of mad obsession to make something uniquely mine.

By the time I conceived the idea for the restaurant, I had the courage to risk everything I had. More than anything, I dared to attach my own name to a business and stand by it. That is why I called it Jalfrezi by Vivek Huria.

I remember speaking to a friend who had traveled the world and seen countless businesses succeed and fail. He told me, "Not many people put their name on their business, but you have done it without hesitation." For me, it was confidence. I believed the food I served would be the best in the area. If I offered anything less, it would reflect on me.

Those early lessons, learned through courage and confidence, showed me the pitfalls to avoid.



Your team is your backbone. Nurture them, and they will carry your vision forward

Here are some don'ts to keep in mind while starting your business:

- ♦ **Don't start a business without mastering your craft:** My first entrepreneurial venture, a supermarket, was launched on blind trust and naiveté. Predictably, it faltered because I jumped in without a complete understanding of the retail sector. By the time Jalfrezi

came along, I had decades of kitchen experience behind me, which gave me the confidence to move forward, even in the face of setbacks, and the rigour to learn as I grew.

- ♦ **Don't forget your customer:** Jalfrezi was never about serving what I wanted to cook. It was about understanding what people longed for, which was food that tasted like home and felt like an experience. Too many businesses assume what customers want instead of listening to them. Feedback is not noise; it is the recipe.
- ♦ **Don't forget that your team is your backbone:** No business survives on a lone hero. The ten years I spent working at Hyatt taught me that loyalty stems from trust, culture, and mentorship, not just paychecks. But building that bond takes time. It is easy to say that employees are like family, but it is harder to live up to that standard. That is when culture matters most. Nurture your team, and they will carry your vision forward.

Like the dish Jalfrezi, the journey was messy, fiery, and full of chaos. And as people now enjoy the experience I have built, I know that every ounce of courage I poured in made it possible. The daring to believe that you can create something extraordinary and the ability to laugh at our own embarrassment are how we find the freedom to grow.

The don'ts are not dead ends. They are invitations to introspect, adjust, and grow. In the next edition, I will share how some of these very don'ts turned into guiding principles that carried me forward. ■

# Still in the Making

Chef **Tarek Mourieess** on holding hope through the hustle and letting courage pave the path



Kitchens are beautiful paradoxes. They demand passion and discipline

When I see young men and women on the metro with their folders tucked under one arm, headphones in, and phones clutched like lifelines, I see both my younger self and the weight of this generation's uncertainty. Their eyes are heavier with doubts about where the next opportunity will come from.

This takes me back to 1979 when. I was a young Chef de Partie and had no idea that the culinary world I was entering would forge my very soul in a furnace of irony, heat, and loss.

Kitchens are beautiful paradoxes. They demand passion and discipline. One moment you're creating something breathtaking, the next you're on your knees looking for the cap of a squeeze bottle because the budget won't cover a new one until next week. People see the finished plate. They see art. What they don't see is the sculptor, drenched in sweat, starting the shift at one in the morning because a commis accidentally threw out the clarified butter that had taken three hours to make, or the chef who felt alone in the struggle, hiding tears in the steam while still pushing forward.

The most important lesson I ever learned in a kitchen came when a steward mistakenly threw away the consommé I had prepared, and with the help of my colleagues, I recreated it. It was a memory that, even after 65 years, still reminds me how quickly things can be lost and how bouncing back against the odds brings them back.

That same ability to weather the storm was tested many times throughout my career, though not always in ways that could be solved with teamwork

or a recipe. Leadership feels easy when things are going well. The real test comes when business slows and problems become personal. In those times, you also see how some people, even those you've worked closely with, will always find excuses and justify the harm they cause. But you will also realise that you cannot force a person to become self-aware if they choose not to be. Sometimes, the strongest, most resilient thing you can do is to simply walk away from a toxic situation so that the truth finally rises above the hope.

And this is for my friends, my colleagues, still on the metro, still searching. I see you. The tunnel feels endless, I know. But as they say, when life breaks you, it is because you are ready to be put back together differently.

**"We are all just ingredients waiting to be used."**

You would see the light at the end of the tunnel because your eyes adjust, you adapt. We are all chefs of our own lives. We take the bitter, the sweet, the sour, and the salty to make something meaningful.

And also understand that thinking about success isn't enough, you've got to take action. Stop overthinking. Start doing. But don't mistake it completely for doing it alone. No great service is ever a solo act. Kitchens are proof. Together is better. You can get a lot done on your own, and it might even look impressive. But partnership, mentorship, and co-creation - that's where the real breakthroughs happen.

And maybe your masterpiece isn't on the plate yet. It's still in the making. But you are not alone, neither in your hustle, in the kitchen, or on the train. ■



# Food & Beverage Industry series

In F&B, the most powerful word is not 'yes', it is no, writes **Elvis Taylor**

## Negotiation Lessons from the FBI – Volume 1 The Power of 'No'

In the F&B world, we are wired to please guests, landlords, suppliers, and even our own team. Saying yes feels like service, and yet in reality, the most powerful tool a leader has is the ability to say no.

**Why We are Comfortable With No:** From childhood, no is one of the first words we learn. Parents use it to protect us: No, don't touch that. No, not now. Kids do not just adapt to it; they adopt it. Every toddler eventually discovers the joy of saying no to themselves. It is their way of standing tall, of claiming independence. As we grow up, that instinct never leaves.

Saying no gives us safety, control, and a sense of identity. That is why, in negotiations, 'no' works better than 'yes'. It does not corner people. It makes them feel respected and in control, which is exactly why it opens the door to cooperation.

**Flipping Questions to No.** Here's how I have used this in everyday leadership and life:

- ♦ **Staff Scheduling** - A manager once asked to take Tuesday off. Normally, I would ask: "Can you shift it to Wednesday?" That puts pressure on him to say yes, even if he does not want to. Instead, I asked: "Would it be a bad idea to take you off on Wednesday instead?" The response came instantly: No problem. The power was not in forcing a yes; it was in giving him the comfort of a no.
- ♦ **Kitchen Heat** - Service was in full swing, and a chef raised his voice in the heat of operations. I could have matched his energy or told him to calm down, but that would have



The most powerful tool a leader has is the ability to say no

escalated things. Instead, I asked: "Are you against speaking in a normal tone and volume?" He paused. The "no" gave him control, but it also gave me calm. The shouting dropped. The kitchen flow returned.

- ♦ **The Grocery Call** - One evening, I needed just one item: a carton of milk, less than 10 AED. When I called the supermarket, the staff told me, "Sir, the minimum order is 25 AED." I didn't argue. I simply said: "Is it a bad idea to send it this time? I am your loyal customer." The man replied: "No, sir, we will send it." Ten minutes later, the milk was at my door.

These moments may seem small, but they show a larger truth: people feel safe when they can say no. And when they

feel secure, they often give you exactly what you need.

**Tone:** The Delivery That Makes 'No' Work. Here's where delivery matters. **Tone is half the message.**

- ♦ **Down-word inflection** (↘): End with a lower tone to project confidence and calm. "Would it be a bad idea to take Wednesday?" (firm, steady).
- ♦ **Up-word inflection** (↗): End with a slight lift when you want to invite openness. "Are you against speaking in a normal tone?" (gentle, non-threatening).
- ♦ It is not just the words, it is how you say them. The right tone turns from confrontation into connection.

## How to Use It Today

- ♦ Flip your questions. Frame them so the other person feels safe saying no.
- ♦ Mind your tone. Use a calm, steady delivery from the anchor to invite.
- ♦ See no as progress. It is not the **End of a discussion**; it is the start of clarity.

**Closing Thought:** We grow up with no. It sets boundaries, builds resilience, and teaches us who we are. As leaders, we can use it the same way to bring clarity, calm, and control. In F&B, where margins are thin and emotions run high, no is not the end of service. It is the guardrail that keeps us on course and often, the doorway to a better yes. This is Volume 1 of my series on Negotiation Lessons from the FBI Applied to Food and Beverage Leadership. In the next volume, we will explore mirroring, how repeating just a few words can unlock cooperation in your kitchen, dining room, or boardroom.

Best regards,  
**Elvis Taylor**



# Grilling Right and Reducing Waste in the Kitchen

Grilling prime beef cuts and turning trimmings into value-added dishes is reshaping menus across restaurants, hotels, retail, and airline catering, writes **Sulemana A. Sadik**

When it comes to grilling beef, the choice of cut plays a crucial role in both flavor and presentation. Prime grilling cuts, such as ribeye, sirloin, tenderloin, striploin, and rump cap, are typically favored for their tenderness, marbling, and ability to deliver both juiciness and visual appeal. Chefs often focus on the right balance between searing and resting the meat, ensuring that the juices are retained and the natural flavor of the beef is allowed to shine. Each cut has its unique characteristics; for example, ribeye delivers a buttery richness due to its high marbling, while sirloin offers a firmer bite with bold flavor.

The rump cap, a favorite in South American-style grills, is often slow-cooked over open flame and sliced against the grain to maintain tenderness. Tenderloin, being the most tender, is typically reserved for high-end menus and cooked with precision medium-rare to medium at most—to avoid dryness. Grilling is both an art and a science, and temperature control is paramount. Chefs in hotels and restaurants understand that beyond just the cut, the consistency of the heat source, seasoning, resting time, and even the carving method all contribute to the guest's final experience on the plate.

However, beyond the beauty of plated steak lies an often-overlooked but equally important aspect of beef preparation, which is what happens to the trimmings. During the portioning and

trimming of primal cuts into steak-ready pieces, there is a substantial amount of offcuts that do not necessarily qualify for grill presentation, but still carry rich flavor and excellent utility.

Rather than being discarded or sold off cheaply, many chefs and foodservice operators have become increasingly creative in turning these trimmings into value-added products that extend margins and reduce waste. In restaurants and hotels, these trimmings are often minced or diced to create premium burger patties, meatballs, and koftas. By mixing different parts of the trimmings—lean cuts with some fatty offcuts—kitchens can engineer a perfect fat-to-lean ratio that delivers a juicy, flavorful burger without relying on imported patty blends. Marination and seasoning of these value-added products can be tailored to suit local taste preferences, offering a sense of innovation while maintaining cost control.

The versatility of beef trimmings extends even further when considering applications in retail and airline catering. In retail, smaller packs of seasoned beef cubes or minced meat blends, vacuum-sealed and branded under house labels, have found a strong customer base. These packs, made from high-quality trimmings, often carry more flavor than premium lean-only options and are ideal for home cooking. Retailers also benefit from offering pre-marinated skewers, stir-fry mixes, and ready-to-cook beef fillings for wraps and tacos, especially in



markets where convenience is valued. Airlines, with their unique constraints around weight, portion control, and reheating, use beef trimmings strategically to prepare braised dishes, slow-cooked beef ragouts, or shepherd's pie-style entrees. These meals, often frozen and reheated in-flight, maintain texture and flavor well thanks to the richness and moisture in the trimmings. Additionally, airlines appreciate the uniformity that comes with using finely processed beef components, which help them deliver a consistent product across thousands of meals daily.

The push toward zero-waste kitchens, combined with economic pressure to control food costs, is leading to a redefinition of how kitchens perceive trimmings not as waste, but as an opportunity. Training butchery and culinary teams to value every part of the cut and to innovate around it is not just good business practice; it also aligns with sustainability goals that more diners are becoming aware of. When the grill delivers a perfect steak and the same beef provides a handmade slider at the bar or a flavorful in-flight meal, the full cycle of value creation is achieved. Ultimately, it is this kind of smart kitchen strategy that differentiates a food operation from merely good to truly great. ■

# Decades of Dedication

A brief profile of Chef **Shyju Varghese**, the Executive Sous Chef at the World Trade Centre, who talks about his triumph over adversity

**T**he heat in the kitchen is nothing compared to the fire life throws at you. Chef Shyju Varghese knows both kinds of fire well.

Currently serving as the Executive Sous Chef at the World Trade Centre in Dubai, he leads daily kitchen operations, ensures cost control, and drives productivity with practiced ease. Closely collaborating with his team, he designs culinary offerings, each plate carrying intention and skill.

Over the years, he has stepped into the competitive arena. In 2024, he proudly represented the UAE Team at the Culinary Olympics, bringing home a staggering total of 44 international culinary medals.

But medals do not tell the whole story. Beneath the shine lies the shadows of a personal battle. Chef Shyju hails from Kerala, often referred to as God's Own Country, a land renowned for its lush foliage and tranquil backwaters. It is a place where tradition and spices flow through every corner of the state. But even in paradise, storms rolled in his life.

"After losing my mother to blood cancer and my father to a heart attack, I faced the hardest chapter of my life," he says. "I still remember catching the 4:30 am train from Gujarat to Mumbai, feeling a deep resolve to make something of myself, to honor their memory. My mother's incredible cooking inspired me from an early age, sparking my fascination with food and leading me toward a career in the culinary arts," he recalls.

It was this love for food, combined with a desire to create, that guided him



into the culinary world. What followed were five dynamic years at Emirates Flight Catering before he moved on to DWTC, where he spent 27 years learning, growing, and honing his craft.

When discussing his food preferences, he admits that Spanish tapas hold a special place in his heart. "I love how these small dishes bring together diverse flavors – from garlicky gambas to tangy olives – perfect for sharing." He continues, "I even specialize in creating exquisite tapas, canapés, and finger foods that offer a perfect blend of flavors in every bite."

He understands spices, respects them, having grown up in their aroma. But it is the underrated combination of salt and pepper that he finds indispensable. "Together, they create a foundation that allows other flavors to shine. Sometimes, the simplest elements are

the most powerful in cooking. Clove is another fascinating ingredient I love working with. During the festive seasons, it is definitely on my list. This warm, aromatic spice brings depth and richness to dishes, and you also get a hint of sweetness along with an earthy, slightly peppery kick."

For young chefs hoping to follow this journey, his advice is to build a strong foundation. "Master the basics, keep your creativity alive, and practice relentlessly. Innovation comes when you combine dedication with a love for discovery," he signs off.

A simple message on how to succeed in the culinary world, shared by someone who has spent over three decades in the field. It may sound understated, but it catches light in the eyes of those who chase with grit. ■

# The Timeless Taste of Nepal

A Culinary Journey through the Himalayas by Chef **Sandeep Khatri**

Nepal is more than just towering mountains and sacred temples—it is a land where food tells the story of its people, history, and soul. As a chef who has spent nearly three decades exploring the depths of Nepali cuisine, I've come to see our food as a living heritage, passed down through generations, shaped by the land, and enriched by the many cultures that have called Nepal home.

From the bustling streets of Kathmandu, where Newari feasts celebrate life's milestones, to the remote Himalayan villages where a simple bowl of thukpa warms the body against the cold, Nepal's cuisine is as diverse as its landscapes. Here, food is not just sustenance—it is tradition, medicine, and a vital part of community.

## A Melting Pot of Flavors

Nepal's culinary identity has been shaped by centuries of trade, migration, and adaptation. Tibetan traders brought momos and thukpa, while influences from India introduced spices and techniques like tadka (tempering). The Newars of Kathmandu Valley perfected the art of fermentation, creating delicacies like kwati (sprouted bean soup) and chatamari (rice crepes). Meanwhile, in the hills, the Khas people sustained themselves on hearty grains like buckwheat and millet, turning humble ingredients into nourishing meals.

## Food as Ritual

In Nepal, cooking is more than just a daily chore—it is woven into festivals, ceremonies, and seasons. During Shivaratri, sugarcane is roasted to mark



Food in Nepal is not just sustenance — it is tradition, medicine, and a vital part of community

the end of winter, while Dashain brings families together over plates of sel roti (rice doughnuts) and spicy goat curry. Even the planting and harvesting of rice come with their own culinary traditions, like eating dahi-chiura (yogurt with beaten rice) for strength and good fortune.

What makes Nepali food truly special is its connection to nature. The same Himalayan herbs that flavor our dishes—jimbu, timur, and bhang—have been used for centuries in Ayurveda for healing.

Fermented foods like gundruk (dried leafy greens) and sinki (preserved radish) were born out of necessity but remain beloved for their bold, tangy flavors. And then there's dal-bhat, the humble lentil-and-rice meal that fuels the nation, served with a side of homegrown pickles and seasonal vegetables.

## A Legacy Worth Preserving

Today, as the world rediscovers the value of traditional and sustainable eating, Nepal's culinary heritage has never been more relevant. Our ancestors knew the secrets of fermentation, the benefits of wild herbs, and the importance of eating in harmony with the seasons, long before modern science confirmed these insights. This is the story of Nepali cuisine: one of resilience, ingenuity, and above all, flavor.

Join me as we explore the dishes, techniques, and traditions that make Nepal's food culture truly extraordinary. With 28 years at the intersection of Swiss precision hospitality, clinical nutrition, and enzyme biotechnology, I've dedicated my career to decoding Nepal's culinary heritage through three lenses:

- ♦ **Neurogastronomy** — How timur pepper's hydroxy-a-sanshool alkaloids rewire reward pathways.
- ♦ **Altitudinal Biochemistry** — Why 3000m elevation makes chhurpi cheese a superior ACE-inhibitor.
- ♦ **Ritual Food Engineering** — The HACCP-compliant genius behind kwati's 12-bean sprouting protocol.

This is not just cooking — it's the world's longest-running clinical nutrition trial, written in clay pots and copper karuwas.



### Altitudinal Nutrigenomics

The Sherpa genome has evolved unique adaptations reflected in their diet:

Ingredient	Genetic Adaptation	Modern Use
Yak Chhurpi	*LCT-13910 persistence* mutation	Lactose-free protein powder
Buckwheat	AMY1A gene duplication	Diabetic-friendly pasta
Timur Pepper	TRPV1 desensitization	Opioid withdrawal support

The Living Laboratory of Nepali Cuisine

### The Fermentation Pharmacopoeia

Kathmandu Valley's pH-controlled fermentation systems predate modern food science:

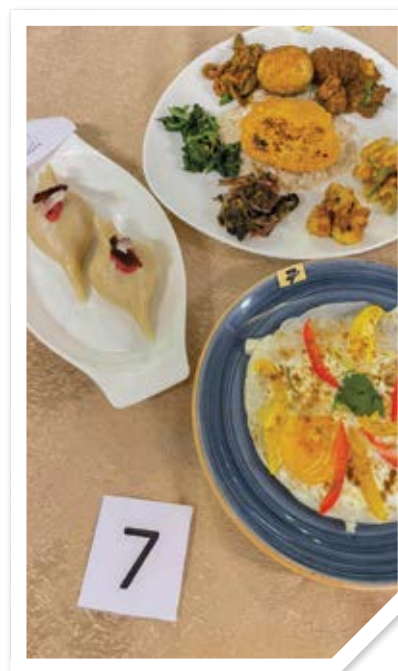
- Kinema (soybean): *Bacillus subtilis* produces nattokinase (240 FU/g), a potent fibrinolytic enzyme.
- Gundruk: Contains  $3.2 \times 10^8$  CFU/g of *Leuconostoc* spp. – higher than Korean kimchi.
- Sinki (radish): Natural isothiocyanates prevent *Helicobacter pylori* colonization.

**Culinary Application:** We have adapted these strains at my Kathmandu lab to create psychobiotic chocolate (72% dark cocoa + *L. brevis* Gundruk-7) for anxiety patients.

### Ritual as Applied Food Science

The Newari 12-step kwati protocol is a masterclass in enzymatic activation:

- Lunar cycle soaking maximizes GABA in black gram.
- Himalayan sun-drying preserves protease inhibitors.
- Copper vessel cooking enhances iron bioavailability.



### A Call for Gastronomic Archeology

Mass spectrometry reveals what our ancestors knew that sel roti's Maillard compounds activate CREB pathways for memory formation, while yomari's jaggery filling provides the perfect 3:1 fructose-glucose ratio for hepatic glycogen replenishment.

As we stand at the precipice of personalized nutrition, Nepal's cuisine offers:

- Enzyme libraries from 217 documented fermentations
- Clinically validated neuro-nutrition protocols
- Altitude-specific polyphenol profiles

**Final Data Point:** My recent trials show chhurpi's ACE-inhibitory peptides ( $IC_{50}=0.87\text{mg/ml}$ ) outperform commercial antihypertensives in Stage 1 hypertension patients ( $p<0.01$ ). This is not just heritage, it is the future of functional food, preserved in the amber of tradition. The Himalayas have been conducting the world's longest-running double-blind nutrition study. It is time we read the results.

**Chef Khatri leads the Himalayan Food Innovation Lab, blending Glion's hospitality frameworks with biotech research. His clinical work focuses on culinary interventions for substance abuse disorders.**

> **\*References:** 23 peer-reviewed studies available at [HimalayanGastronomy.org] – IRB-approved human trials ongoing.



October 2025 **Gulf Gourmet****ARLA  
PRO.****CHEF  
OF THE  
YEAR  
2025**

# The Unexpected on Every Plate

This month's challenger for the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition is Chef **Chandu Ahangama** from NAMMOS Dubai. With his instinct for invention and tenacity, he is chasing flavors that speak louder than trends

Not every chef chases trends. Some, like Chef Chandu Ahangama, set their own. Currently a pastry chef at NAMMOS Dubai, he assists the Head Pastry Chef, Syarif, and the team in managing daily operations of the pastry kitchen, including workflow, scheduling, and collaborating on the development of new recipes, seasonal items, and innovative menu offerings.

Time on the job as a pastry chef has sharpened his instincts. When it comes to handling obstacles without being caught off guard, he places discipline at the top. "It is non-negotiable," he says. "After that comes mutual respect in the kitchen and a willingness to learn. If you ask for guidance, you will be mentored to develop skills."

He adds, "I have learned a lot from my mentors, and it is all about sharing knowledge. Seeing the team adopt each other's techniques is the most rewarding part." Even one of his own desserts on the menu shows not just his pastry skills, but also the trust and collaboration within the team.

In the age of endless reels and TikTok hacks, by the time the frosting's set, the trend has moved on. Swirls one week, austere minimalism the next, and Chef Chandu watches it all, but he is not chasing trends on a whim. "There are a lot of trends out there. But what I enjoy most is when someone comes to me with a special request for desserts that demands innovation, modern cakes, clean designs, layering, or contemporary garnishes, and a clean finish," he explains.

For him, it is never about slotting into what is popular. "Even if it is a small cake, I think about the visual concept of creating something in a way that is not commonly seen," he adds, on his instinct to break convention.

And this modus operandi of the unexpected took tangible form, crystallizing in his dish, Sweet Bloom.



Discipline is non-negotiable. After that comes mutual respect in the kitchen and a willingness to learn

For example, the delicate flower in the dessert required a mold he made himself from silica, and for the flavors, he chose sudachi and orange, a nod to the citrus and freshness of the petals.

"As for the soft chocolate cake, initially, I tried making it in a rectangular shape. After five or six attempts, still dissatisfied, I changed it to a cylinder shape. For the filling, I think citrus complements the chocolate, and this combination pairs beautifully with Arla Cream Cheese. As for the sorbet, I use

orange and a touch of ginger. Usually, when you try a cake or dessert, you eat everything together for the flavor burst. But in this dish, the signature is everywhere; even if you try them individually, you will experience the delightful taste of the citrus and fruit."

As much as he plays with multiple individual elements on the plate, he knows creativity does not thrive in isolation. It requires the right environment and the right people. "You need the team behind you. And my head chef gives me that freedom and trust, that is when you really start experimenting, refining, and improving."

Outside the kitchen, there is another side to Chandu, one that comes alive during a friendly game of cricket. "I am a good batsman," he grins. "Whenever we get a break, my colleagues and I play a match. It is always fun and a nice way to relax."

The other way he finds the thrill of challenge is through competitions. This is



his second tryst with competition, having earned a silver medal last year at the live cake decoration during Salon Culinaire. "I competed alongside my mentor, Chef Saman," he recalls. "He was proud of me for stepping up. He won the gold, and I took the silver. Maybe next time I will get first place. One step at a time."

That confidence of taking the step forward in competition, he credits to his head chef, Syarif Purawinata, who encouraged him to enter the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition. At first, Chandu hesitated, knowing his mentor, Chef Syarif, had competed in the same contest the previous year; he was unsure if his creativity would measure up. "When I told him this, he said, 'Chandu! You should compete. Your skills and creativity are more than enough for this competition, and I know you will give it your best.' With his support, the dish finally came together," he recalls.

### Falling for Pastry

For most chefs, the story begins with their mother's cooking. Not for Chandu.



**Creativity was always in my hands—long before sugar and chocolate**

The 35-year-old Colombo-born chef is a rarity; he proves that sometimes the apple does not fall far from the tree, having caught the culinary bug while watching his brother, who was a manager at a restaurant in the Hilton Hotel.

Watching him in action lit the fire in young Chandu, and it was only natural that he followed his instincts into the pastry world. With his background in art, drawing, and carving, a culinary program felt like the perfect next step. "When I was in school, I used to draw a lot. I still have many of my drawings at home. My mother never threw them away," he says with a smile, pointing even then,

creativity was in his hands, long before sugar and chocolate would be.

After completing his program, he began his career at the Hilton Hotel in Colombo, where he trained for two years as a commis III and gained valuable experience. From there, a new door opened, and he moved to Dubai to join the InterContinental Hotel. Spending seven years there gave him the chance to test his creative voice.

"Whenever I had an idea, I created a summary to present to the chef. Most of the time, they approved it because I didn't bring half-baked ideas; they could see the effort I put into the execution, and that gave me more confidence to keep pushing boundaries.

In hindsight, he says, "During my seven years there, I worked alongside six different French executive pastry chefs, picking up refined techniques in texture, plating, and chocolate. I also learned a great deal from Chef Saman, who always pushed the team to do more."

His career has had its twists and turns. What he thought would be his next big break came at the end of 2019, but before things could take off, COVID hit and brought everything to a grinding halt. Still, when one door closes, another opens. He moved to Holiday Inn Hotel, where he sharpened his leadership skills. Just as things started to fall into place, another wave of the pandemic led him back to Sri Lanka.

"Later, Namos led him back to Dubai, where he has been part of the team for over four and a half years. His skills, combined with the chefs' recognition and the support of the team, led to his promotion to sous-chef last year. "When I am working, I do not feel any anxiety. And as they say, when passion takes the wheel, fear moves to the back seat."

Clearly, Chef Chandu lets his passion guide him, focusing on the work and letting the results speak for themselves. ■





## Sweet Bloom

### Orange Gel

Orange Puree	500g
Sudachi Puree	50g
Sugar	50g
Agar	2g
Pectine NH	4g

### Method

- ◆ Combine the sugar, agar, and pectine, then set aside.
- ◆ Bring the puree to a boil, then add the sugar mixture.
- ◆ Bring the mixture to a boil again, then pour it into a container to set.
- ◆ Once fully set, blend until smooth to achieve a gel-like texture. Set aside for use.

### Orange Blossom Sorbet

Water	300ml
Sugar	30g
Super Neutrose	6g
Glucose Powder	120g
Trimoline	120g

Orange Puree	600g
Orange Blossom Water	25ml
Ginger Juices	25ml

### Method

- ◆ Mix all dry ingredients and set aside.
- ◆ Heat the water to 40°C.
- ◆ Add the dry ingredients to the water and cook until the mixture reaches 82°C, stirring continuously.
- ◆ Pour the mixture into the fruit puree and blend well
- ◆ Add orange blossom water and ginger juices, mix thoroughly, and let it rest.
- ◆ Churn the mixture in an ice cream machine.

### Hazelnut Crumbles

Arla® Pro Unsalted Butter 82%	25g
Flour	45g
Hazelnut Powder	35g
Milk Chocolate	40g

### Method

- ◆ Melt the milk chocolate and set aside.
- ◆ In a mixer, blend all ingredients

(except the chocolate) using a paddle attachment until the mixture has a sandy texture.

- ◆ Add the melted chocolate and continue blending until a smooth, dough-like consistency forms.
- ◆ Spread the dough on a baking tray and bake at 150°C with fan setting 3 for about 25 minutes, or until golden brown.

### Cream Cheese Insert

Arla Pro® Full Fat Cream Cheese 34%	200g
Vanilla Pod	0.5g
Sugar	25g
Fresh Orange Zest	1/2pcs

### Method

- ◆ Scrape the vanilla bean and add it to the cream cheese along with the orange zest.
- ◆ Combine all ingredients and mix until smooth and thoroughly blended.
- ◆ Spread the mixture evenly into a mold, allow it to set, and use it as an insert for the cake.



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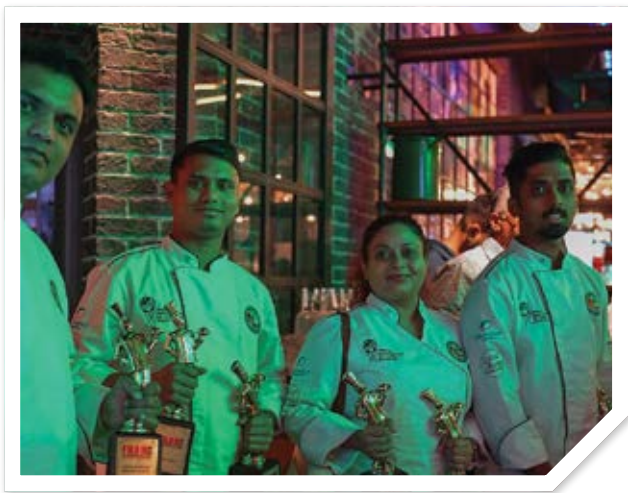
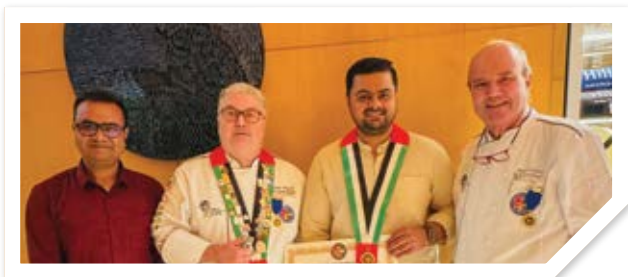
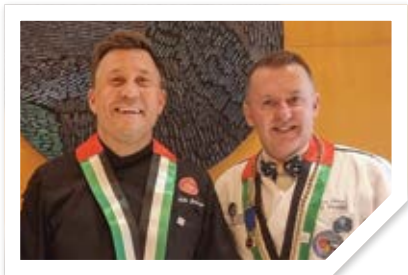


## The Guild Meet

The Guild's September meeting was successfully held at the Hilton Dubai Palm Jumeirah. A huge thank you to the exceptional Hilton team, including Sebastian Nohse, Emma Banks, Patrick Boucher, Niki Walsh, Ryan Bagnas, Andreas Searty, and everybody who worked behind the scenes for their outstanding support and hospitality in hosting us.

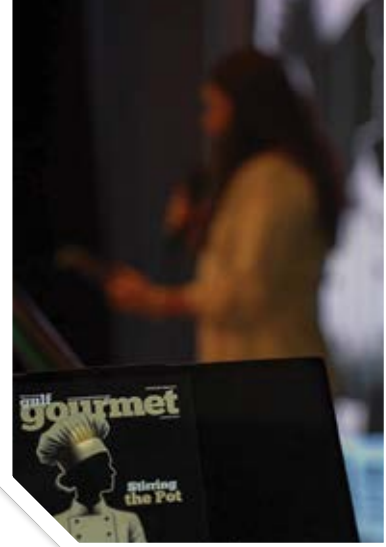








October 2025 **Gulf Gourmet**







*Bob's Red Mill  
Oats*

*Hershey's  
Chocolate Chips*

*Rich Ribbon  
T55 Flour*



# A CRUNCH OF INDULGENCE

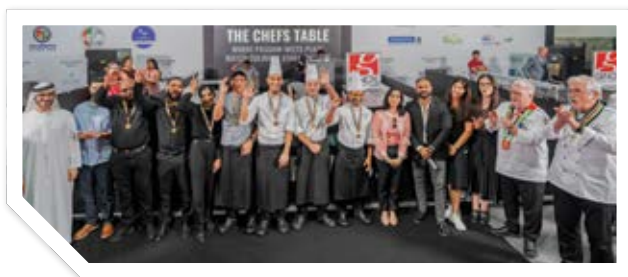


BAKED WITH THE FINEST T55 RICH RIBBON FLOUR, HERSHEY'S CHOCOLATE CHIPS, AND WHOLESOME BOB'S RED MILL OATS, THESE COOKIES OFFER A PERFECT MIX OF HEARTY AND SWEET.

A TREAT THAT'S SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE.





October 2025 **Gulf Gourmet**

## Culinary Showdown Served

With nine outstanding culinary teams from the leading hotels in the region, The Chef's Table made a comeback at The Hotel Show Dubai 2025 for its eighth edition. Organized by the Emirates Culinary Guild, the three-day competition challenged participants to create a five-course menu that focused on zero-waste hospitality practices.

Over the course of the event, the teams contended to earn the prestigious title of 'Hotel Culinary Team of the Year.' The teams impressed judges and VIP guests

alike with their creativity, technical skill, execution, and presentation. Meanwhile, the judging process was rigorous, evaluating taste, originality, and presentation.

The Chef's Table at The Hotel Show continues to set new standards in the culinary world, encouraging chefs to push boundaries and express their art. The culmination of the event was marked by an awards ceremony that celebrated the winners and participants who contributed to an intense and intriguing competition in the culinary arts. ■



### And the Winners Are:

AWARD	TEAM
The Champions of The Chefs Table 2025	1st Place - Zero Gravity
	2nd Place - Radisson Blu Waterfront
	3rd Place - Pullman
Best Kitchen Team of The Chefs Table 2025	Zero Gravity
Best Service Team of The Chefs Table 2025	Radisson Blu Waterfront
Best Bar Man of The Chefs Table 2025	Dubai World Trade Centre





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## A Chef-tacular Night

**H**ospitality Group has announced the winners of the Chef Excellence Awards 2025, wrapping up its 8th edition of the Middle East Chef Excellence Awards held at the Address Skyview Hotel in Downtown Dubai. The event brought together over 300 culinary leaders, professionals, and industry partners to celebrate the finest talents in the region.

This year's event featured a dynamic mix of accolades, including the Popular Choice Awards, Judges' Choice Awards, and the exciting Live Cook-Off, where five young chefs competed for the title of Young Chef of the Year.

In addition to the awards, Hozpitality Group unveiled the highly regarded Hozpitality's Best – Culinary Powerlist, which honored the 30 Most Popular Culinary Leaders across the region.

The event was held in association with the Emirates Culinary Guild and ICCA Dubai, with generous support from a stellar lineup of sponsors and partners. Nestlé led as the Gold Sponsor, with additional support from US Beef and Delta Food Industries as Powered By sponsors.



"We are humbled by the overwhelming response and participation at this year's Chef Excellence Awards," said Raj Bhatt, Founder and CEO of Hozpitality Group. He further added, "The level of passion, talent, and innovation in the Middle East's culinary industry continues to inspire us. This platform is a tribute to the unsung heroes who bring flavors to life and shape the future of hospitality."

The 2025 Chef Excellence Awards once again proved a prestigious stage for honoring culinary excellence, camaraderie, and the passion driving the industry forward.

### Key Winners

#### Young Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Uresh Thantrige – Commis Chef,

Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Deira Creek

- ♦ **Silver:** Myat San San – Commis 2, Claw BBQ Palm

#### Executive Chef of the Year - Institutional Catering (Airlines, Cruise, Catering, etc.)

- ♦ **Gold:** Andre Ghanimeh – Group Executive Chef, Sodexo Kelvin Catering Services & Facilities
- ♦ **Commended:** Francesco Dimonte – Executive Chef, EKFC

#### Executive Chef of the Year – Hotel

- ♦ **Gold:** Clive Micallef – Executive Chef, Marriott Marquis Dubai at Jewel of the Creek
- ♦ **Commended:** Michael Kreiling – Executive Chef, Waldorf Astoria Ras Al Khaimah

#### Executive Chef of the Year – Free Standing Restaurant

- ♦ **Gold:** Dwarika Bhatt – Executive Chef, Zero Gravity
- ♦ **Commended:** Juber Shaikh – Culinary Director, AB International Restaurant LLC

#### Head Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Htet Naing Aung – Head Chef, Paramount Hotel Midtown
- ♦ **Commended:** Mevish Appadoo – Specialty Head Chef, Twine, ibis World Trade Centre







### Female Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Syifani Fortuna Azzahra – Pastry Chef, EMAAR - Arabian Ranches
- ♦ **Commended:** Aye Ngon Phu – CDP, Paramount Midtown Hotel Dubai

### Kitchen Manager of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Peter Safari – Senior Production Administrator, Emirates Flight Catering
- ♦ **Commended:** Shaikh Abdul Samee – Assistant Production Manager, Kitopi

### Executive Sous Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Abdul Hameed – Sous Chef, Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Ajman
- ♦ **Commended:** Jose Carlos Sierra Garcia – Complex Executive Sous Chef, Le Meridien Dubai Hotel

### Pastry Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Abdul Muneer – Senior Chef De Partie, Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche
- ♦ **Commended:** Nimesh Madushan Kurera Jayalath Arachchi – Junior Sous Chef - Pastry, Stella Di Mare Dubai Marina

### Chef de Cuisine of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Baris Kahraman – Chef de Cuisine, Rixos Al Mairid Ras Al Khaimah
- ♦ **Commended:** Sheneer Kandathil Muhammed – Chef de Cuisine, Bab Al Qasr Hotel

### Sous Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Adrian V. Oidem – Sous Chef, DoubleTree by Hilton Dubai M Square
- ♦ **Commended:** Joseluis Mira – Sous Chef, SLS Dubai - Fi'lia

### Chef de Partie of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Imesh Abeyesundara – Chef de Partie, Wafi Hospitality LLC - Thai Chi
- ♦ **Commended:** Somsak Sokkeaw – Chef de Partie, Benjarong Thai Restaurant, Dusit Thani Dubai



### Garde Manger of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Debu Singh – Executive Sous Chef - Garde Manger, Emirates Flight Catering
- ♦ **Commended:** Mayank Verma – CDP, DoubleTree by Hilton Dubai M Square

### Demi Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Santosh Tamang – Demi Chef De Partie, Fujairah Rotana Resort & Spa
- ♦ **Commended:** Ian Zander D. Mendoza – Demi Chef de Partie, EMAAR - Arabian Ranches

### Commis Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Jewel Kurishinkal Jacob – Commis 1, AB International Restaurant LLC
- ♦ **Commended:** Richmond Fobi – Commis Chef, Emirates Flight Catering

### Kitchen Steward of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Santhosh – Kitchen Steward, Dusit Thani Dubai
- ♦ **Commended:** Tafadzwa – Steward, Soul Hospitality Restaurant LLC

### Kitchen Helper of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Hom Bahadur Magar – Kitchen Steward, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel
- ♦ **Commended:** Vibindas Thayyil Ramadas – Administration Assistant, Emirates Flight Catering

### Butcher Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Asabul Dewan – Sous Chef, Bab Al Qasr Hotel
- ♦ **Commended:** Junie Pamaylaon – Chef De Partie, Soul Hospitality Restaurant LLC

### Banquet Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Binay Kumar – Junior Sous Chef, Bahi Ajman Palace Hotel
- ♦ **Commended:** Rajiv Subba – Chef de Cuisine – IRD & Banquet, SLS Hotel and Residences Dubai

### Hidden Gem of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Nathaliya Christin – Chef,

Hilton Dubai Jumeirah & Hilton Dubai The Walk

- ♦ **Commended:** Syed Ali Ahmad Farooq Gillani – Commis I, Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche

### Rising Star Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Saumya Tamrakar – Senior Chef De Partie, Hilton Dubai Jumeirah & Hilton Dubai The Walk
- ♦ **Commended:** Rajikaran Nadarajah – Chef De Partie, Grand Hyatt Dubai

### Lifetime Achievement Award

- ♦ **Gold:** Ali Zaroual – Pastry Chef, Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Ajman
- ♦ **Commended:** Ziyad HeJamady – Chief Steward, Hilton Dubai Jumeirah & Hilton Dubai The Walk

### Most Popular Chef of the Year

- ♦ **Gold:** Muchie Masunungure – Executive Chef, Soul Hospitality Restaurant LLC
- ♦ **Commended:** Mazen Mohamad Khaddour – Executive Chef, Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Ajman

### Judges' Choice Awards

- ♦ **Chef Supporter of the Year:** Helene Raudaschl – Indoguna Dubai
- ♦ **Hospitality Technology Partner:** Foodverse
- ♦ **Executive Chef of the Year:** Dip Shrestha – Executive Chef, Wyndham Garden Ajman Corniche
- ♦ **Promising Chef of the Year:** Arshad Khan – Senior Chef de Partie, Coral Beach Resort Sharjah
- ♦ **Inspiring Chef of the Year:** Manzoor Hassan Balghari – Executive Chef, Top Deal Party Services
- ♦ **Rising Star Chef of the Year:** Elie Lteif – Culinary Advisor, Nestlé Professional
- ♦ **Culinary Leader of the Year:** Ludovic Garnier – Executive Producer, Culinary, Paramount Hotel Dubai
- ♦ **Team Player Chef of the Year:** Ruan Potgieter – Executive Chef, Arabian Ranches Golf Club, Dubai

# Carry Your **Light**

**Ekta Alreja**, from ICCA, engages in a conversation with Chef Christine Garcia, reflecting on her remarkable journey from humble beginnings in the Philippines to a global career in Greece



Christine Garcia never planned to become a chef. Her journey began behind the counter at a KFC in the Philippines, but what seemed like just a job soon revealed itself as the first step toward her true calling. “God knows what my heart wants,” Christine reflects. “He placed me exactly where I was meant to be.” That chance beginning took her from the bustling streets of her hometown to the international kitchens of Dubai and beyond.

As the eldest of four and the family’s breadwinner, Christine has always carried the weight of responsibility on her shoulders. Her family remains her strongest motivation. “Even in the hardest moments, I look at our family photo and remind myself of the future I want to give them,” she says. That sense of duty has guided every decision she has made, helping her stay committed through long hours, modest salaries, and the challenges of starting over in a new country.

Christine’s early years in Dubai were both demanding and defining. She



God knows what my heart wants. He placed me exactly where I was meant to be



faced skepticism and pressure but quickly turned those challenges into sources of strength. By leaning on hard work, determination, and humility, she gradually built the confidence and opportunities that followed. Inspired by her mentors, Christine lives by their words: "If you want something in your life, you have to push and you have to fight for it. You have to earn it."

### The Scholarship That Changed Everything

In 2021, Christine's determination led her to the ICCA Dubai Culinary Scholarship Program, a moment she describes as 'a dream come true.' The

scholarship not only honed her technical skills but also gave her the confidence to see herself as a professional chef. "The program motivated me to achieve my goals and gave me the pride to carry my skills anywhere I go," she says.

Today, Christine is part of the team at the prestigious Lindos Grand Hotel in Greece, where she continues to build her career in hospitality. "ICCA prepared me for every challenge I have faced," she says. "From knife skills to time management, I walked into a professional kitchen ready." But for Christine, success is not just about working abroad; it is about the joy she



If you want something in your life, you have to push and you have to fight for it. You have to earn it

brings to others through her food. "It is the excitement and the smiles on people's faces when they see the dishes I create," she explains.

### Carrying Her Own Light

Her journey is also a reminder of the road less traveled and the sacrifices that come with rising beyond your limits. Christine admits to moments of self-doubt and the constant pressure of supporting her family, but she has never let these hold her back. Instead, they have shaped her into a chef with both grit and grace.

Looking to the future, Christine dreams of continued growth in the industry, building stability for her loved ones while reaching for greater culinary heights. She offers heartfelt advice to aspiring chefs: "The beginning may be tough, but if you have determination and perseverance, you will overcome any challenge. Keep shining; when you carry your own light, it becomes easier to find your place in the spotlight."

Every month, Rising Star features inspirational stories of talented chefs who have dedicated their lives to perfecting their craft and continuously pushing the boundaries of culinary excellence. This initiative is executed in strategic partnership with the Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG), the World Association of Chefs Societies (WorldChefs), and City & Guilds, London.

**Picture credit:** (Pictures taken by Ashutosh Pandey)



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## ECG Corporate Member directory

### Agthia Group PJSC

**Sasha Kannan**, Category Development Manager  
Tel: +971 56 177 87 86,  
sasha.kannan@agthia.com, www.agthia.com

### Al Chef

**Ranin Bakhitt**, Marketing Manager  
Tel: +971 4 357 0320, Mob: +971 50 687 0224  
ranin.b@alwholesale.ae, www.alcheftohome.com

### Al Wholesale

**Ranin Bakhitt**, Trade Marketing Manager,  
Mob: +971 50 6870 224,  
ranin.b@alwholesale.ae, www.alwholesale.ae

### Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI)

**Manjusha Jambhekar**, Overseas Marketing Representative – MENAWA,  
Tel: +971 4 357 7979, Mob: +971 55 5333740  
manjusha.m@focusmworld.com,  
www.alaskaseafood.org

### Alliance Abroad International

**Zama Nkabinde**, Talent Acquisition Manager,  
Mob: +971 52 2339 779,  
znkabinde@allianceabroad.com,  
www.allianceabroad.com

### Alto Shaam, Inc

**Gabriel Estrella Talenti**, Director of Sales,  
Tel: +971 4 321 9712, Mob: +971 50 8531 707  
gabriele@alto-shaam.com, www.alto-shaam.com

### Americana Foods

**Laurent Stevenart**, Plant Based Food Director,  
Mob: +971 52 1354 732,  
lstevenart@americana-food.com,  
www.americanafoods.com

### Arab Marketing and Finance, Inc. (AMFI)

**Simon Bakht**, Tel: +961-1-740378 / 741223 / 751262, SBakht@amfime.com

### Arla Foods

**Rachna Amarnani**, Marketing Specialist,  
raamy@arlafoods.com, B7 Building Digital park - Dubai Silicon Oasis - Industrial Area - Dubai  
www.ArlaPro.com, www.arlafoods.com

### Bakemart FZ LLC

**Syed Masood**, Director of Sales  
Mob: +971 55 609 7526, Tel: +971 4 56708  
masood@bakemart.ae, www.bakemart.ae

### Barakat Group of Company

**Kenneth D'Costa**, Managing Director  
**Neil Ranasinghe**, Head Culinary Innovation  
Tel: +971 4 8802121

### Cuisine Solutions Middle East LLC FZ

**Juan van Huyssteen**, Company GM  
Mob: +971 52 926 5628,  
jhuysssteen@cuisinesolutions.com,  
www.cuisinesolutions.com

### Del Monte Foods (U.A.E) FZE

**Hany Shamseldeen**, Mob +971 50 146 7400,  
hali@freshdelmonte.com, me.freshdelmonte.com

### Diamond Meat Processing Co.L.L.C

**Kamparath Suresh**, Assistant General Manager Business Development,  
Mob: +971 50 655 4768  
wnedal@siniorafood.com,  
www.almasadubai.com

### dmg events

**Hassan**, Tel: +971 4 4380355,  
Mob: +971 56 8360993,  
aysehassan@dmgeventsme.com,  
www.thehotelshow.com

### Emirates Snack Foods

**Marwan Hussein / Vincent Lobo**,  
Head of Sales – Food Service / Creative Head  
Mob: +971 56 5267 181, +971 55 3692 344  
marwan.hussein@esf-uae.com  
vincent@esf-uae.com, www.esf-uae.com

### Essity Hygiene and Health AB

**Ozge Osmanoglu**, Customer Marketing Activation Manager MEIA,  
Mob: +971 52 7571 486  
ozge.osmanoglu@essity.com,  
www.torkmeia.com

### Faisal Al Nusif Trading Co. L.L.C

**Thomas Das**, Managing Director  
Tel: 04 3391149, thomasdas@fantco.net,  
Web: www.fantco.net

### Farm Fresh

**Feeroz Hasan**, Business Development Manager  
Al Quoz, P.O Box 118351, Dubai, UAE  
Office No : +971 4 3397279 Ext: 253  
Fax: +971 4 3397262, Mob: +971 56 1750883

### Farzana

**Fariborz Kadem**, Head of Food Service,  
Mob: +971 55 8846 293, Tel: +971 4 3200 101,  
fariborz@farzana.com, www.farzana.com

### Flora Professional

**Marwan Abidaoud**, **Jean Lteif**, **Ronica Sanchez**,  
**Nadia Lagdah**, **Neelam Karim**,  
Regional Lead Culinary Chef - AMET,  
Culinary Chef UAE & QBOK, Food Service Sales Manager, Head of Marketing, Senior Brand Manager, Mob: +971 50 796 6264,  
+971 52 829 9891, +971 58 233 1463,  
+971 50 290 3820, +971 53 369 4190  
marwan.abidaoud@florafg.com,  
jean.lteif@florafg.com,  
ronica.sanchez@florafg.com,  
Nadia.Lagdah@florafg.com,  
neelam.karim@florafg.com

### FSEP Catering Equipment Trading LLC

**Shivani Rawat**, Office Manager  
Tel: +971 4 8851 610  
info@fseprof.com, www.fseprof.com

### German Icecream Factory

**Boris Mueller**, Mob: +971 50 108 9030  
boris@drmuellers1969.com  
www.drmuellers1969.com

### Greenhouse Foodstuff Trading

**Edgard Abounader**, UAE Sales Manager – HORECA, Tel: +971 4 8170000,  
Mob: +971 56 442 4608,  
Edgard.Abounader@greenhouseuae.com,  
www.greenhouseuae.com

### Ginox Swiss Kitchen

**Tiziana Ricottone**, Personal Assistant & Communications Manager,  
Mob: +971 50 5091 689,  
tiziana.ricottone@ginoxgroup.com,  
www.ginoxgroup.com

### Hamid and Kumar Enterprises LLC

**Sunil Ahluwalia**, General Manager,  
Tel: +971 4 3474712, +971 4 3474571  
dry@hkfoodgroup.com, www.hkfoodgroup.com

### Harvey and Brockless Foodstuff Trading LLC

**Julie Caulton**, Sales Director,  
Tel: +971 4 272 5524, +971 50 507 7539  
Julie.caulton@harveyandbrockless.co.uk,  
www.harveyandbrockless.co.uk

### HK Enterprises

**Era Jain**, Marketing Manager,  
Mob: +971 56 6589 246,  
era@hkfoodgroup.com, www.hkfoodgroup.com

### Hospitality Monster

**Naseer Kareem**, Manager,  
Mob: +971 56 871 00 87, +971 50 256 72 00,  
hello@thehospitalitymonster.com,  
thehospitalitymonster.com

### Hospitality by Dubai World Trade Centre

**Georg Hessler**, Director - Culinary Operations,  
Tel: 04 3086571, Georg.Hessler@dwtc.com,  
https://www.dwtchospitality.com/en/

### HUG AG

**Riyadh Hessian**, 6102 Malters / ,  
food-service@hug-luzern.ch,  
www.hug-luzern.ch, fb/hugfoodservice  
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Near Khaleej Times Office,  
Mob +971 507648434, www.aramtec.com

### IFFCO

**Mary Rose Lopez**,  
Associate Customer Service Manager,  
Mob: +971 506719882, 065029025 / 6264  
mlopez@iffco.com, www.iffco.com

### Indoguna Dubai LLC / Indoguna Productions FZCO

**Ana Elena Saenz**, **Juancho Capistrano**,  
Regional Business Dev Manager,  
Group Sales and Marketing,  
Mob: +971 58 2469 330, +971 54 3934 123  
ana@indoguna.ae,  
juancho@indoguna-dubai.ae  
indogunadubai.com,  
indogunaproductions.com

**IRCA MEA TRADING LLC**

**Shairra Mae Bartirzal-Periales**,  
Trade Marketing Manager,  
Mob: +971 54 515 4430,  
shairra.bartirzal@irca.eu, www.ircagroup.com

**JM FOODS LLC**

**Rajan J.S. / Maikel Cooke / Grace Renomeron**  
Management, Tel: +971 4 883 8238,  
sales@jmfoodgulf.com, www.jmfoodgulf.com

**Johnson Diversey Gulf**

**Marc Robitzkat**  
Mob: 050 459 4031, Off: 04 8819470  
marc.robitzkat@johnsondiversey.com

**KAPP**

**Kerem Uner**, Sales and Marketing Director  
Tel: +90 53 2599 9638,  
kerem.uner@kapp.com.tr, www.kapp.com.tr

**Kerry Taste & Nutrition MENTA**

**Simon Martin**, Executive Chef  
Tel: +971 52 450 0845  
simon.martin@kerry.com, www.kerry.com

**LG FMCG TRADING LLC**

**Joel C. Peñañiel**, Trade Marketing Manager  
Tel: +971 56 993 5175,  
joel.cortez@lalsgroup.com,  
www.lalsgroup.com/brand/81/fmccg

**Lowe Refrigeration LLC**

**Mark Wood**, General Manager  
Tel: +971 4 8829440,  
Mob: +971 52 8693695  
mark.wood@lowerental.com,  
www.lowerental.com

**Masterbaker Marketing FZCO**

**Sanket Shah**, Sales Manager  
Tel: +971 4 8239 800,  
Mob: +971 50 4516 459  
sankets@uae.switzgroup.com  
www.masterbakermc.com

**Meat & Livestock Australia**

**Damon Holmes**, Business Development  
Manager, Tel: +971 52169 4743,  
dholmes@mla.com.au, www.lamandbeef.com

**MEIKO Middle East FZE**

**Jay Dhanrajani**, Sales Manager  
Tel: +971 4 3415 172,  
jay.kumar@meiko.ae, www.meiko.ae

**Meyer Group Ltd**

**Anjana Vaswani Kavasseri**,  
General Manager - Middle East,  
Tel: +971 50 5950 772, anjana@meyeruk.com,  
www.meyergroup.co.uk

**MKN Maschinenfabrik**

**Kurt Neubauer GmbH & Co.KG**  
**Elias Rached**, Regional Director Sales  
Middle East & Africa, Tel: +971 4 358 4000,  
Mob: +971 50 558 7477  
rac@mkn-middle-east.com, www.mkn.com

**Nestle Middle East FZE**

**Elie Lteif / Luma Karadsheh**, Culinary Advisor  
/ Commercial Development Manager,  
Mob: +971 55 4427 010, 55 3437 632 (Elie)  
elie.lteif@ae.nestle.com, luma.karadsheh@ae,  
www.nestleprofessionalmena.com

**Nina Pita**

**Mario Nehmeh**, Sales manager,  
Tel: +971 50 9347 930, mario@ninapita.com,  
www.ninapita.com

**NRTC Group**

**Iyad Nouneh**, Regional Head of Digital  
Marketing & E-Commerce Manager,  
Tel: +971 4 320 8889,  
marketingmanager@nrtcgroupp.com  
www.nrtcgroupp.com

**Peachtree Foods ME**

**Manisha Dissanayake**, Regional Sales  
Manager, Mob: +971 50 6416 139  
mesales@popcakesa.co.za,  
www.popcakesa.co.za

**Pear Bureau Northwest**

**Nina Halal**, Director  
Mob: (Lebanon) +961 3664088,  
(UAE) +971 58284 0008, halal@cyberia.net.lb

**Potatoes USA**

**Victoria Hassani**, Managing Director,  
Mob: +971 50 1013 541  
potatoesusa@gmadubai.com,  
www.usapotatoes.com

**Quadrant International LLC**

**Dipu Muralidharan Nair**, Managing Director,  
Tel: +971 4 885 2551, Mob: +971 50 559 7913  
dipu.nair@quadrantintl.com,  
www.quadrantintl.com

**RAK Porcelain**

**Sadik Variyathodi**, General Manager,  
Mob: +971 50 4868 141, +971 4 3335 474  
sadik@rakrestofair.ae, www.restofair.ae

**Restofair RAK LLC**

**Sadik Variyathodi**, General Manager  
Mob: +971 50 4868 141,  
sadik@rakrestofair.ae, www.restofair.ae

**Robot Coupe**

**Chandrakanth Pathi**, Area Manager-UAE  
Tel: +971 54 4894896,  
pathi@robot-coupe.com, www.robot-coupe.com

**Safco International Genera Trading**

**Pankaj Chanta / Naresh Khushalani**,  
Corporate Head - Pastry & Bakery /  
Marketing Manager,  
Mob: +971 55 899 0183, +971 870 2000,  
chef.pankaj@safcointl.com/naresh@safcointl,  
www.safcointl.com

**Silal Food & Technology**

**Aparna Joseph, Omaira Abdalla**, Manager -  
Marketing & Branding, Marketing Officer  
Tel: +971 2 614 4467, Mob: +971 52 650 3454  
ajoseph@silal.ae, oabdalla@silal.ae,  
www.silal.ae

**Skinny Genie**

**Lucy Mwangi**, Sales Executive  
Mob: +971 56 411 8287, +971 56 411 8287  
lucy@skinny-genie.com, www.skinny-genie.com

**Sounbula Mills**

**Karim Al Azhari**, CEO & Owner Sounbula Mills  
karim@sounbulamills.com

**Sweet Connection the Gluten-Free Kitchen**

**Ahmed Alhamadani** (Founder & Managing  
Director), **Chef Janitha** (Head Chef),  
Mob: +971 50 4599 401, +971 50 3057 760  
info@chillydate.com,  
www.chillydatefoods.com

**Switch Foods**

**Robert Hazzam**, Sales Manager  
Tel: +971 2 6759 555, Mob: +971 52 8979 062,  
rhazzam@switchfoods.com, switchfoods.com

**Taaza Group Companies LLC**

**Ms. Krishna Vijith**, Chief Executive Officer  
Tel: +971 56 2829 002; +971 4 2828 993  
krishna@taaza.ae, www.taaza.ae

**The Deep Seafood Company LLC**

**Shibu Abdul Jabbar**,  
Director Sales & Operation's  
Tel: +971 2 673 34 45, Mob: +971 55 233 66 88  
shibu@thedeepseafood.com,  
www.thedeepseafood.com

**Tork - Essity Hygiene and Health AB**

**Ozge Osmanoglu**,  
Tel: +971 4 551 5907, Mob: +971 52 757 1486  
tork.meia@essity.com, www.Torkmeia.com

**Tramontina**

**Saniya Sarguru**, Marketing Coordinator,  
Mob: +971 54 995 8033, Tramontina.ae

**UNOX Middle East DMCC**

**Matthew Roberts**, Managing Director  
Tel: +971 4 5542146, Mob: +971 52 304332,  
info.uae@unox.com, www.unox.com

**Upfield Middle East Limited FZCO**

**Marwan Abi Daoud**, Flora Professional  
Regional Lead Culinary Chef AMEA  
Mob: +971 50 796 6264  
marwan.abidaoud@florafg.com,

**USA Cheese Guild**

**Angelique Hollister**, Senior Vice President,  
Global Cheese Marketing,  
Tel: 703 528 3049, ahollister@usdec.org,  
https://www.usacheeseguild.org/

**US Meat Export Federation**

**Bassam Bousaleh**,  
Tel: +971 50 3589197, +971 50 358 9197  
Bassamb@ams-me.com

**USA Poultry and Egg Export Council Inc (USAPEEC)**

**Jena Gress**, Global Marketing Manager  
Tel: 14048823920, www.usapeec.org

**US Poultry**

**Andrew El Halal**, Marketing Manager  
Mob: (Lebanon) +961 3200332,  
(UAE) +971 52 135 1405  
andrewh@amfi-me.com

**VITO AG**

**Mark Marquez**, Mob: 971 56 2431303  
info@vito.ag, www.VITO.ag

**Welbilt**

**Rakesh Tiwari**, Mob: +971 56 406 1628,  
rakesh.tiwari@welbilt.com



# THE EMIRATES CULINARY GUILD APPLICATION FORM

Date of Application: .....

Family Name:	First Name/s:	Ms/ Mrs/ Mr/ Other:
Nationality:	Civil Status:	Date of Birth: dd/mm/yyyy
Employee/ Business Owner:	Name of Business:	Designation:
Work Address:	Email Address:	Contact Number:

Type of Membership: (please tick)	
<b>SENIOR:</b> (Above the rank of chef de partie/ senior chef de partie on executive chef's recommendation).	<b>AED350 joining fee/ AED150 renewal fee</b> Includes certificate; member-pin, member medal and ECG ceremonial collar
<b>MEMBER:</b> (Below the rank of chef de partie 29 years old and over).	<b>AED150 joining fee/AED75 renewal fee</b> Includes certificate; member-pin, member medal and ECG ceremonial collar
<b>YOUNG MEMBER:</b> (under 28 years)	<b>Free</b> Includes certificate; member-pin

Declaration to be Signed by Applicant:

I wish to join The Emirates Culinary Guild in collaboration with The Women's Culinary Chapter.

I have read the ECG Constitution and By-laws. I agree to be bound by the requirements of the constitution.  
If elected, I promise to support the Guild and its' endeavours to the best of my abilities.

Signature: .....

Proposed By:	Signature: .....
Seconded By:	Signature: .....

For Official Use Only				
Remarks:				
Payment Received?				
Certificate Given		Pin Given		Medal & Collar Given
Approved by President:			Signature: .....	
Approved by Chairman:			Signature: .....	

**Note:** The membership is only applicable to those who are working in the UAE as professional chef or with a background related as Chef in the hotel and restaurant industry.

The WCC is in collaboration with the Emirates Culinary Guild, which is a member of the World Association of Chef's Societies





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Cheese*





*Gustodoro  
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# Culinary Trends Express

Simon Martin, Executive Chef at Kerry Taste & Nutrition (Food Service) dishes out the regional food trends, from Pashmak, savoury chocolate to the surprising role of sound in making dishes crunchier and tastier

Welcome back to Trends Express. Without further ado, let's jump on board the "Trends Express" and see what's hot and appearing in our region. Remember, **"LIKE IT, BUY IT, SNAP IT, SHARE IT."**

They're not complicated, but just a few simple ingredients will rock your culinary planet .....

Wow, what a summer it has been, and now we are all back and pushing the culinary boundaries towards the next level. Let us take a few minutes to see what is big out there in the region, which culinary trends are going to **Float your Boat** and bring us satisfied customers as well as drive bigger sales tickets??

What is the new Dubai chocolate phenonium I hear you say.... Well, look no further than **PASHMAK**. Normally seen on Persian desserts such as Gaz or Qottab, and not dissimilar to Turkish Pismaniye. Some have called this the Iranian cotton candy. However, it is now not only being seen on cakes, ice-creams, and served with fruits. But incorporated into chocolate bars, served on mocktails as a cap. Made from sugar syrup, sesame oil, and roasted flour with an array of profiles from saffron to pistachio. **The Question is**, will we see this grow and evolve? **WHAT DO YOU THINK??** I am thinking Chocolate Chilli Pashmak or even Salted Carmel Pashmak served with Fried Chicken....I have food envy just thinking about it... ©

Talking of Chocolate last year we saw savoury chocolate-based sauces such as 'Mole' from Mexico, but now it has suddenly grown up as we see the trend



**Chef Simon says...**

of **SAVOURY CHOCOLATE**, which is evolving across the Middle East. From Smokey Chocolate Chipotle Hot sauce, to Chocolate Chili BBQ. Seven years ago, we were seeing chocolate spread into beef burgers, and it has now come back, only this time it is bigger, bolder, and more relevant to us all. From orange, balsamic chocolate dressing to bitter chocolate short ribs. Whether as a rub, dressing sauce, or ingredient, Dark Chocolate is the new Black .....Only this week I have seen Chocolate Chicken Curry...and for the younger generation, keep an eye out for Chocolate Tahini and Cheese Slice Sandwiches.... Yummy sounds great... can you see this coming onto your menus? **GO ON GIVE IT A GO...you might like it.**

Finally, let us look at the '**SONIC CRUNCH**'. This is the sound created not only by food while eating but also by packaging, which can make food taste

by up to 20% .... YES, that's right, taste better from the sound. Have you ever wondered why chip bags rustle and foil lids pop when you open snacks? Why do Crispy French fries always make you reach for more? Adding texture to a sandwich or dish elevates it on more than one level. This all sounds very technical; however, it's a proven fact that sound, light, and ambiance can enhance our customers' experience, whether it's a simple sandwich, a bag of chips, or a high-end fine dining plate. Try finishing a dish with crispy onions or popped rice and notice how much better it tastes.

Over the summer, I have tried many new dishes and revisited a few old ones as well. Always seeking inspiration or the next scalable idea in our market, from sour apple mayonnaise to finding the best cinnamon roll in Dubai(a personal quest). Soft, fluffy, balanced between sweet and salty... **GO ON, TELL ME YOUR GO TO SWEET BUN, IT MIGHT SURPRISE ME©**

**Finally, looking at trends, our corporate partners at the Emirates Culinary Guild are also helping define the landscape of trends with their visions. Their foresight to avail their latest products to us at our monthly meetings, reflects both innovation and current market trends. Stay ahead of the curve, talk to them, and try their products. Join them and us in driving the trends in our region.**

Kerry Foodservice provides custom-made solutions (coatings, sauces, beverages, etc.) and branded solutions such as Chefs Palette and DaVinci Gourmet to global and regional chains, QSRs, and casual diners across the region.



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