



Get a taste of Sofra Istanbul – sofra means “a table with different foods”, and restaurant-goers love tasting them all

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS



ABOVE: Zohra Teke received a helping hand from Absa and became a major force to be reckoned with on Durban’s finest restaurant strip.



ZOHRA Teke is the proud owner of Sofra Istanbul, a Turkish restaurant serving freshly baked and grilled fare – a treat for the taste buds inspired by exotic flavours.

It’s all about sourcing the best ingredients and freshly preparing the food. “Nothing is left over for the following day, we prepare early every morning with the freshest ingredients delivered daily from the farm or butcher directly to our stores,” Zohra says.

The mother of two credits her upbringing and her strong-willed mother who raised her on her own and inspired her to reach for her dreams, no matter what life throws at you. The restaurateur is also a skilled journalist and credits Zwelakhe Sisulu, the late son of ANC stalwart Walter Sisulu, as her mentor and editor while working at The New Nation newspaper.

Fast-forward a few years, inspired by travels abroad and after settling in the UK for over 10 years with her Turkish husband, they decided to



LEFT: The Baklava dessert is a crowd favourite. BELOW: Chef Resul preparing the meat for the popular dishes.



move back to South Africa. Zohra set up a media company and worked as a freelance political writer.

Life threw another curveball when her husband was diagnosed with cancer, after losing her mother to cancer. He managed to fight it and this led to the beginning of what would be a promising business move.

“While I was busy with my media work, I felt he needed something to occupy his mind and refocus his attention, and so opening a small Turkish café seemed like a good idea. We also felt there was a lot of demand for this cuisine particularly as many South Africans were increasingly flying to Istanbul for holiday.”

They opened the first shop in the food court at The Pavilion in 2016 and it proved to be a hit. “From day one we had streams of people coming in. They loved our food and the entire experience,” Zohra says.

She soon had to give up her media work and focus on the restaurant. “We were quite shocked, overwhelmed and amazed at the support we received. People loved it!”

They also learnt along the way. “Trying to manage the finances, the initial set-up expenses, learning about the intricacies of new business, teaching staff that have never been exposed to Turkish food and also setting the standards.”

The fact that they prepared the sought-after cuisine in an open-plan kitchen offered another challenge, but the decision no doubt sets Sofra Istanbul apart from the rest.

“It paid off as our customers value this and know they are guaranteed fresh food in a clean environment which they can see for themselves,” Zohra adds.

As the business grew, so did Zohra who also took over the social-media presence of the business and found cost-effective alternatives to run the restaurant, while growing in the cut-throat industry. The restaurant was a success and she soon decided to branch out.

“We knew we needed to grow. Customers were asking us every day for a franchise opportunity, to open a sit-down restaurant and for more additions on our menu.”

They eventually opened a restaurant in Durban’s bustling and trendy Florida Road and enlisted another partner. It proved to be the perfect location for a thriving eatery offering flavours from around the world. She also believes in sharing her success.

“We employ those with no or little experience and mentor them in our business. My best staff

started out as cleaners, some as car washers, some as car guards. They have gone on to become my best bakers and managers.

“Never underestimate the potential in someone. It’s not always about experience. Sometimes all a person needs is a chance.”

Zohra plans to go national and expand across South Africa. “I would also like to have a formal mentorship programme for young talent so that they can go out and start their own home industries, particularly in rural areas. There’s a lot we can teach them to ensure they’re self-sufficient and financially independent.”

REACH FOR YOUR DREAMS WITH ABSA

Zohra struggled to find funding but Absa saw potential and offered a much-needed helping hand.

“Absa mentored me on how to formalise my vision into a business plan and communicated every step of the way. They gave me excellent advice on structuring deals with my suppliers and also how to look ahead in terms of growth and benefits as a woman-owned business.”

On her relationship with Absa, Zohra adds, “It’s one where I am comfortable in calling them or WhatsApping them when I feel the need. They are approachable and take the financial fear out of being in business.”

“I love the fact that my team at Absa is also women so they can relate to the challenges we face as women in business – trying to juggle the various roles while having someone believe in your dreams.”

Zohra champions women in business and reveals her ethos: “Empower others as you grow, don’t give up simply because someone does not believe in your dreams.”

Here’s to more women in business. If you’d like more information on opening a business account online, call Absa on 0861-000-734.



Sofra Istanbul is in a committed relationship with Absa Business Banking



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