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### In the kitchen with Mama Italia

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We savour the flavours of Mama Doretta's kitchen as she introduces us to all things tasty during the ongoing Italian Festival Weeks

Take a step into Mama Doretta's kitchen and you might not want to leave.

From fresh homemade pastas to simmering pots of tomato sauce, the smell of her authentic Italian cuisine is a treat for the taste buds.



Chef Doretta Calchetti and her sons run the Andiamo restaurant at the Grand Hyatt hotel and are taking part in the Bella Italia Food Festival to commemorate all things Italian.

While the exact number of Italians living in the UAE is unknown, their culinary presence is felt throughout the country with hundreds of family-run restaurants churning out local favourites.

Chef Doretta "feels right at home" in Dubai, a city she has spent the last four years feeding. A native of Tuscany, a region known in Italy for its breathtaking landscapes and food, she recalls her upbringing in the family kitchen.

"We had a small shop in the countryside where we could sell everything, but we still struggled to get by. I had to think of a new way for our family to survive," she says.

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“I began catering food to families throughout the community and business began to boom.”

Speaking through her son Ricardo, also a chef, she gleams as she looks out over the restaurant patrons. Her hands are busy kneading flour for her famous pasta.

“I have very strong character,” she explains, “but to work in a kitchen you must also be patient and proud.”

“The most important thing for me is when I see guests happy. My heart smiles when people enjoy my food.”

The Bella Italia Food Festival, which runs until November 12, will see local eateries organising special tasting sessions as well as cooking classes. Numerous other events celebrating Italian culture run until December 4.

Back in the kitchen, Chef Doretta is preparing her favourite dish – stuffed raviola over a sea of wheat bringoli. She minces the imported Italian meats, packages them seamlessly into her homemade pasta shells and lays them onto a simmering pan. Assistants cater to her requests without being asked.

“In my kitchen, I feel like a queen,” she says as steam from a boiling basin pours out into the air.

“I am happiest when I am in the kitchen cooking, and a happy chef makes the best dishes.”

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