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It helps that I have a Maltese boyfriend and his family make me feel one of them.

From Moldova... with love!

Elena Boico only knew Malta from the Eurovision. But then she found love.

Elena Boico, 29, was very surprised to meet a Maltese tourist in Moldova. “I only knew Malta from the Eurovision,” she says. “I remember when I was young, I was watching the song contest with my family. When the Maltese singer came up on stage, I asked my father where Malta was. He told me to go look it up on his map and I found it.”

Elena fell in love with the Maltese tourist, Ruben Schembri. After one and a half years of visiting each other, they decided to settle down in Malta. “It was very difficult to live apart and only meet when we visited each other, so to be together in Malta was the right choice,” Elena, who has now been in Malta for two years, says.

From the very first time that Elena visited her boyfriend in Malta, she could see

that the island was very different from her home country. “First, there’s the size of the country,” she says. “I also noticed how everyone is in a good mood and smiling. To be honest, I was a bit jealous, as the people in Moldova

are different. There, people struggle to improve their life – they work very hard and you can see this struggle on their face.”

Another difference that Elena noticed was that young people in Moldova grow up and become mature faster because they leave their family when they are young to go study or work in the capital.

“I left home when I was 17 to study at the technical university in Chişinău. It was difficult, yet the experience taught me how to live alone and take care of myself.”

Elena studied water management and treatment and graduated as a hydro-engineer.

One of her colleagues in Malta, where she works as a hydro-engineer, says that Elena takes her work very seriously.

“She works very hard,” says Sean Carl Grech. “And she is such a fun person to be with. When I am stressed out, I just go to her desk and she manages to calm me down with a joke or a funny story.”

Elena didn’t find it hard to integrate in Malta.

“I first met Elena at my family’s Christmas dinner,” says Triza, Ruben’s sister. “We hit it off immediately – she has a great sense of humour. And she is very determined – when she told me she wanted to learn Maltese, I told her that it was a very difficult language, yet she just went ahead.”

“I feel very comfortable in Malta,” Elena says. “It helps that I have a Maltese boyfriend and his family make me feel one of them. But then, all Maltese are very outgoing and I feel very safe.”

Elena dreams of one day raising a family of her own – in fact, Elena and Ruben will be getting married later on this year.

“And if you dream about something, then it will happen,” she says. “I dreamt about love, and I found it.” ●



Recipe

Placinte

A tasty snack that can be sweet or savoury.

You will need: 2 eggs • 1 egg, beaten • 500gr flour • 1 glass of warm water • ½ cup of sunflower oil • Sheep’s cheese, crumbled • 1 spring onion, chopped • 1 ripe apple, chopped • 100gr pumpkin, chopped • Sugar • Cinnamon.

Method: To make the pastry, mix the flour, oil, water and two eggs. Then shape it into little balls and roll out. For the first filling, add the spring onion to the sheep’s cheese. For the second filling, mix the pumpkin with sugar and cinnamon. For the third filling, mix the apple with sugar and cinnamon. Fill the pastry with the different fillings, close and then roll in the shape of a bun. Glaze with the beaten egg. Bake for 30 minutes at 200°C. *Makes around 15 to 16 placinte.*



Keeping the faith

When **Adekemi H. Boyo-Obayuwana** found it difficult to integrate in Malta, she turned to her faith.

Adekemi H. Boyo-Obayuwana is not one to give up. When she first came to Malta, she found it difficult to integrate – yet she persisted and, two and a half years later, things have improved a lot.

Adekemi, or Addey for short, is from Lagos, Nigeria, where she studied accounting. She is 37 years old and came to Malta to join her husband, Michael, an engineer who works in the communications industry.

“My first shock when I came to Malta was when I realised how small the island is – it’s like you can walk around the island in a day.

“I was also shocked at the treatment I received from some people – I would greet them and they would not respond, instead looking at me as if I had fallen from heaven. I remember how once, I went into a shop and to buy soft drinks. When it was my turn to be attended to, the shopkeeper just looked at me, turned his back and went inside the shop, leaving me standing there.

“But since my husband and I moved to Qormi, things have changed – some people greet me on their own volition and others respond to my greetings.”

Sabrina Zammit, Addey and Michael’s neighbour, has only good things to say about the Nigerian couple.

“They’re very quiet. It makes no difference that they come from another continent – they are good people and that’s all that matters,” she says.

Addey is also a woman of great faith. “My mum is a pastor but I was born into a Baptist family. People would gather in our living room to pray. When I lost my father, God took his place – I gave God my father’s position and he takes care of me. In 2001, when I was sick, despite the medications, I was not healed until I turned to God through fasting and prayers.”

Addey has another passion – beautifying things.

“My father was an artist and my mother sews – I’ve done interior design and fashion design courses and I also sew and thread beads.

I must have inherited my parents’ love of beautiful things.”

Unlike Addey, Michael didn’t find it difficult to integrate as he came to Malta already with a job.

“We arrived in Malta on a Thursday evening and on Monday morning I was at work. I miss my family and Nigeria, but I work with a very good team – my colleagues made me feel at home and helped me to integrate quickly,” says Michael. ●

“
I believe
things will
continue to
improve.”



Recipe

Egusi soup

A healthy melon seed soup, inspired by the land and sea.

You will need: 500gr beef • 500gr smoked fish • 500gr stockfish • 450gr spinach • 2 tomatoes • 1 red pepper • 1 large onion • 250gr egusi, ground (melon seeds) • Stock cubes • Palm oil • Scotch pepper, ground • Water • Salt.

Method: Wash and season the beef and stockfish with the stock cube, salt and pepper. Steam till the juice dries up.

Add two cups of water. Cook for 20 minutes. Chop the spinach and set aside. Wash and bone the smoked fish. Heat the palm oil and add the tomatoes, onion, scotch pepper and red pepper. Fry for five minutes. Add the egusi. Cover the pot. Do not stir for eight minutes. Add the water and boil for a further 10 minutes. Add the remaining stock and stir. Simmer for two minutes. Add the spinach and salt to taste. Simmer for a few minutes. Remove from heat and serve with pounded yam, eba (garri), cassava fufu or semolina. Serves 4 to 6.



Finding a balance

Jianmin Li's life philosophy is to be kind to a country which has welcomed him.



I want to contribute to Maltese society.



For those of us living in the West, Eastern cultures are a source of fascination for us. Yet this is also reciprocal.

Li Jianmin, 39, one of the almost 800 Chinese living in Malta, has always been interested in Western culture.

"I used to study English in China but wanted to continue improving it for international business translation. So I started doing some research online and saw that Malta was very good for learning English, and the tuition fee was reasonable too. I also applied to read for an MBA in Malta and was keen to learn more about the West - Malta was the perfect combination."

Once in Malta, Li felt so comfortable in the Maltese community that he decided to stay here. He has now been living in Malta for 11 years, is married to Xhe and has two children, both born in Malta - an eight-year-old boy and a six-month-old girl.

"After I graduated, I started a small business in Malta and registered a trading company and a translation company. I was doing translations for India and for the United Nations.

"I remember how once, my salesman left a box with some samples on the pavement. By the time we realised what had happened, the box had disappeared, but I left a note with my contact details. Three days later, someone returned the box with all the items in it. I told my wife that this wouldn't have happened in any other country, and that we should live here."

Li, who works with an Austrian communications company, still keeps close

ties with China and travels frequently there.

"China is very different now. Because of economic reform, people have more freedom. And it's developing very fast - if you buy a map of Shanghai today, by next year, it will be of no use as the city would have changed," he says.

Li, the youngest child in a family of six children, was brought up in the countryside and worked hard to go to university.

"Nowadays, even childhood is very competitive. My childhood was very different. We used to play a lot in the countryside, catching fish and crabs - we learned how to 'learn'. Nowadays, children are stuck to their computers, learning ready-made knowledge."

Li has made a lot of friends in Malta.

"I met Li when he had a little shop in Floriana selling Chinese memorabilia," says Chrissie Davies, a friend of Li.

"I used to call on my way to Valletta and have a chat with Li and his wife. Then last year, they asked me whether I would like to help their son Jiarun in improving his English. I accepted because they are a wonderful family - Malta is lucky to have such people living here."

Li believes in good behaviour.

"As a Buddhist, I believe in being kind and doing good so that I benefit in the next life cycle. I try and maintain balance - even when stuck in traffic, I accept that I cannot do anything about it and so do a kind gesture, like giving way, instead of getting nervous. I have also applied to do volunteer work at Mater Dei hospital.

I want to contribute to Maltese society and be kind to a country that has been kind to me." •



Recipe

Chinese dumplings

Chinese dumplings are a symbol of family union.

You will need: 140gr plain flour • Salt • Water • 110gr minced beef • 50gr mushroom • 70gr radish • 1 tsp ground garlic • ½ tbs dark soy sauce • ½ tbs light soy sauce.

Method: Knead the flour, salt and water to make a dough. Leave to rest for 10 minutes. For the stuffing, fry the beef with the radish, garlic, mushroom and soy sauce. Roll out the dough and cut into small patties. Stuff and close tightly, in the shape of old Chinese money. Boil the dumplings and then garnish with sesame oil, garlic and ginger. *Makes around 18 dumplings.*

A song of praise

Deborah Harrison-Rössner has travelled the world and found a second home in Malta.

“More than anything else, I’m a gypsy,” says Deborah Harrison-Rössner.

And she is, because Deborah, a jazz performer, has been around the world many times over. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio. She began her performing career in Europe, singing classical and jazz music from Berlin and Vienna to Dubai. She then fulfilled her desire to be a business woman, working in Russia, Germany and Poland as a marketing executive.

“I’ve always been attracted to adventure,

ever since I was a little girl,” she says. “As a child growing up in Cleveland, I used to be fascinated with different cultures – a lot of Germans, Poles and Hungarians lived in our neighbourhood and they used to organise a lot of festivals.”

When she was 26, Deborah made it to Europe, which attracted her because of its antiquity. “When I finished my classical music studies in Chicago, I decided to go to Vienna to read for a doctorate,” Deborah, who is also a business graduate, says.

This fascination with other places is also inspired by Deborah’s ancestry – her forefathers sailed from England to America, while another ancestor, Henry Clay, ran for American president.

Her great-great-grandmother on her mother’s side was a Cherokee Indian.

Eventually, Deborah met her German husband, Reinhold, in Dubai. She was attracted to his adventurous spirit – an engineer, he travelled around the world and was in love with sailing.

While in Malta on holiday 10 years ago, Reinhold bought a boat and decided to keep it here – this meant that the couple visited Malta frequently to sail.

“When I retired,” says Reinhold, “I wanted to settle down in a safe, warm country where I could sail to my heart’s content. And so we chose Malta.”

Deborah and Reinhold have now been in Malta for seven years – for Deborah, it’s the eighth country she’s lived in.

“I have integrated well,” she says. “A lot of it has to do with my ability to adapt. I’ve been in Europe for so many years that I now feel more European than American.

“Malta is also a very tolerant country – I am very pleased

with the reception I’ve had.”

Deborah gives back to the country that welcomed her.

“When I settled down in Malta, I was very keen to get back to singing and performing. I did my first performance at St James Cavalier and eventually found a room at St Patrick’s Church in Sliema, where I could practise. I also started teaching music. In exchange of letting me use the room, I decided to do a classical Christmas concert at St Patrick’s. I’ve also organised a charity concert for The Rotary Foundation – I was a Rotary scholar and have always wanted to give something back. And recently, I’ve organised another concert for Ċentru Tbebbix – it’s my way of helping people and thanking Malta.” •

“Malta is also a very tolerant country – I am very pleased with the reception I’ve had.”



Recipe

Banana walnut muffins with cranberries

A healthy muffin using genuine ingredients.

Mix the following wet ingredients: 2 eggs • 3 ripe bananas, pureed • ¼ cup oil • ¼ cup buttermilk (yoghurt) • 1 tsp vanilla.

And mix the following dry ingredients in a separate bowl: 1½ cup spelt flour • ½ cup millet flakes • ¾ cup unrefined brown sugar • 1 tbs baking powder • ½ tsp baking soda • ½ tsp salt • ½ tsp cinnamon • ¼ tsp nutmeg.

Method: Mix with the other ingredients just enough to blend until moist. Stir in half a cup of cranberries and half a cup of chopped walnuts. Place a quarter cup of batter into each paper-lined muffin tin. Bake at 160°C for 30 minutes.

Makes 12 muffins.



It's all about determination

Rasha El-Nahhal loved Malta from afar. So when her aunt invited her to Malta, she couldn't refuse.

“I knew about Malta before I came here,” says Rasha El-Nahhal, a 25-year-old girl from Rafah, a city in the South of Gaza.

“My aunt Sanaa, who lives in Malta, used to tell me about Malta and how much the Maltese support the Palestinian cause. I grew to love the Maltese from afar. Then when my aunt invited me to come to Malta and I met the Maltese, I grew to love them even more,” she says.

Having graduated in English language and literature from Gaza University, Rasha was invited by her aunt to come to Malta so that she could improve her spoken English.

“I was so happy when my aunt invited me to Malta – apart from improving my English, it was also an opportunity to visit a new country and learn about a different culture. I prepared everything very quickly and came to Malta.”

Rasha has now been in Malta for more than a year yet



I want to be strong for my country. I want to be alive and that is what makes me strong.



she is aware of the ongoing tensions in Palestine.

“I feel very sad when I see what is happening in Gaza. But I want to be strong for my country. I want to be alive and that is what makes me strong,” she says.

Nathalie Grima, a close friend of Rasha and of her aunt Sanaa, says that Rasha is a very

determined girl.

“She is a very positive girl,” Nathalie says. “She is so full of life and that helped her to integrate very quickly.”

“My parents did everything they could so that my brothers, sisters and I could be safe,” says Rasha, who has three sisters and two brothers. “My relatives also give me a lot of encouragement. Also, the experience of living in Gaza alone with my cousin for four years, until I completed my studies, made me stronger,” she says.

“If you want, you can do anything. If you want to make your future, and if you are prepared to suffer for it, then you can achieve whatever you want.” •



Recipe

Basbousa

Basbousa, meaning one kiss, is a traditional Palestinian sweet.

You will need: 5 eggs • 125gr sugar • 125gr flour • 125gr milk • 125gr semolina • 1 tbs baking powder • Vanilla • 125gr grated coconut.

Method: Whisk the sugar with the eggs until they turn creamy. Then add the flour and whisk. Add the milk and semolina, and then continue whisking until everything is well combined. Add the vanilla together with one spoon of baking powder and mix well. Finally, add the grated coconut and mix well.

Leave it all to rest for 30 minutes and then bake at 180°C for approximately 30 minutes. Make a syrup with 125gr of sugar, 190gr of water and some lemon juice. Pour the syrup over the basbousa when it is still hot. Leave the basbousa to absorb all the syrup before serving. *Serves 20.*



From left: Rasha El-Nahhal, Zoumorrod Jarboue and Sanaa El-Nahhal.



Sisters in arms

Zoumorrod Jarboue found a home, and a loving sister, in Malta.

Zoumorrod Jarboue, 49, was born and raised in Syria in a family of six children. Then, when she was 11 years old, her mother died.

“I love my father, and he took great care of me. When he remarried, his new wife was also very fond of me.”

Zoumorrod left Syria when she was 20 years old and lived with her husband in Libya. They have four children – two girls and two boys – who were all born in Libya. Then, when her eldest daughter married and came to live in Malta, Zoumorrod – a name which in Syrian means ‘precious stones from the sea’ – joined her. Her other children all attended the Libyan school in Ta’ Giorni.

Zoumorrod, who is now a grandmother,

has been living in Malta since 2000.

“Communicating was rather difficult at first,” says Zoumorrod, who since then has learned to understand Maltese and tries to speak it as much as possible. “But my

which makes people love her – we first met 11 years ago, and the moment I met her, I loved her. We’re always together – even when I was consulting for the film *World War Z* on Arabic costumes and culture, Zoumorrod

“**Communicating was rather difficult at first.**”

daughters and my friend Sanaa helped me a lot.”

Sanaa El-Nahhal, a Palestinian woman who has been living in Malta for more than two decades, is Zoumorrod’s closest friend.

“We are like sisters,” says Sanaa, who teaches Arabic and is also President of the Arabic Culture Information Society.

“Zoumorrod has something in her

was with me and worked as an extra on the film. She even met Brad Pitt.

“When Zoumorrod first came to Malta, people couldn’t understand her – they didn’t even know where Syria was. I went through the same situation and would have to explain to people where Palestine is. But Zoumorrod’s eldest daughter, who was already living in Malta, helped her a lot and nowadays, Zoumorrod feels at home and has a lot of Maltese friends.” ●



Recipe

Syrian salad

Cold comfort for a hot day.

You will need: Tomatoes • Onion • Parsley • Cucumber • Lemon • Peppers • Oil • Salt and pepper to taste • Bread, toasted.

Method: Start off by chopping the parsley, cucumber, tomato, peppers and onion. Mix everything together. Then add a squeeze of lemon, salt, pepper and oil. Finally, add the toasted bread, mix well and serve.

Falafel

A quick, tasty snack.

You will need: Chickpeas • Onion • Parsley • Garlic • Black pepper • Hararat • Cumin • Salt • Bicarbonate of soda.

Method: Mince everything together. Add the spices and form the mix into patties. Deep-fry the patties. Serves 15.

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Malta was very safe for my two young children and so we decided to settle here.



A full course

Vanja Miljkovic remembers Serbia by cooking a traditional meal.

During the harsh and bitter conflict in former Yugoslavia in the late 1990s, a lot of Serbians found refuge in Malta and settled here. Nowadays, the Serbian community in Malta numbers almost 3,000.

“My husband first came to Malta as he had found a job in the IT industry,” says Vanja Miljkovic, 40. “I had a very good job in Serbia and the plan was that my husband would work in Malta while I would work and stay in Serbia, together with our children.

“Then, when I came to visit him, I just fell in love with Malta – I found the country to be pleasant, the people friendly and the weather fantastic. Moreover, Malta was very safe for my two young children and so we decided to settle here.”

Vanja has now been living in Malta for more than a decade and all the members of the Miljkovic family have settled well.

“My first year in Malta was difficult as I couldn’t speak Maltese or English,” says

Stephanie, Vanja’s daughter.

Stephanie’s parents decided that, because of the language barrier, it would be better if she repeated her third year in primary school.

“Then, on my ninth birthday, I wanted to ask my classmates over for a party. The only problem was that I couldn’t tell them myself, as I couldn’t communicate with them. My father had to come to school and invite them himself.”

From that day onwards, Stephanie started communicating with her class-

mates and learning the language. Nowadays, she speaks Maltese, is studying at Junior College and dreams of becoming a speech therapist.

Stephanie’s younger brother, Nikola, was only four when the family settled down in Malta.

“I started attending kindergarten at St Paul’s Bay, where a lot of children were also foreign. I also knew a little bit of English so I could communicate with my classmates and made lots of friends.” ●



Recipe

Proja

A starter of Serbian corn flour bread.

You will need: 3 eggs • 3 cups plain flour • 500gr projia flour • 1 sachet baking powder • 3½ cups sparkling water • 2 cups sunflower oil • A pinch of salt • Hard cheese.

Method: Whisk the water and oil with the eggs. Add the flours and whisk. Add a pinch of salt together with the baking powder and whisk. Crumble the cheese and mix in. Bake on 220°C for 40 minutes.

Beans with smoked ribs

More than four hours of cooking makes for a delicious main course.

You will need: 500gr white beans • 250gr smoked ribs • 1 onion • Red peppers, dried • Water • Bay leaves • Onion, finely chopped • 2 tbsp flour • Paprika.

Method: Boil the beans. When the water starts boiling, change the water, add the bay leaves and salt, and cook for two hours. Add the smoked ribs and then cook for a further two hours. Add the peppers. In a separate pan, heat some oil and brown the onion. Add two spoons of flour and paprika to make a roux. Mix with the beans and ribs and bake in an oven for 30 minutes.

Serbian salad

A colourful accompaniment.

You will need: Red, green, yellow peppers • Tomatoes • Onion • Cucumber.

Method: Chop all the vegetables, add some salt and, if you want, a drizzle of oil. Mix everything together and serve. Serves 4.

Bridging cultures

Laiq Ahmed Atif practises what he preaches – love for all, hatred for none.

“On my flight to Malta from Germany, I prayed a lot – because Malta was a completely new country for me, I prayed that God gives me courage and wisdom to get to know the Maltese people,” says Laiq Ahmed Atif, 30, from Pakistan.

“As soon as I was out of Malta International Airport, I felt comfortable – I knew that Malta would be my second home.”

Atif has been in Malta for four years and is the president of an organisation called Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Malta. He is married to Bushra and they have two children – a boy and a girl.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Malta, with headquarters in the UK, offers solidarity to all peoples from all cultures and religions. The organisation is present in almost 200 countries

and has over 160 million members worldwide.

“There are a lot of branches in Islam. In Ahmadiyya, we believe that the Messiah and Mahdi (guide), who according to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would come to reform Islam, has already come.”

The motto of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Malta is ‘Love for all, hatred for none’.

“When we help people, we help human beings – we don’t look at race, religion or culture,” says Atif.

Atif has worked hard to integrate.

“The Maltese people have a kind heart and that helped me integrate fast,” he says.

Atif has also learned Maltese. “I wanted to learn the language so that I can act as a bridge for cultural diversity and religious harmony in Malta,” he says.

“I remember how, when Atif first came to Malta, he would read all the papers and watch the news so that he could understand the Maltese culture,” says Justin Schembri, who teaches Atif Maltese. “He wanted to learn about the Maltese culture before he actually started participating.

“When I met Atif, there was a connection between us – we were not just teacher and student, but we also became friends.

“Atif managed to integrate so well in Malta because he is a very friendly and respectful man – he seeks friendship with everyone,” Justin says.

“Integration is very important, especially in our globalised world” says Atif.

“We cannot be isolated from others, and we must respect diversity – diversity is what makes the world beautiful.

“As a Muslim, it is my responsibility to love Malta as the country where I live. I do not want to be a burden on this country – rather, I want to be part of it.” ●

“
The Maltese people have a kind heart...
”



Recipe

Chicken haleem

When we eat as a family, we talk and discuss – food brings people together.

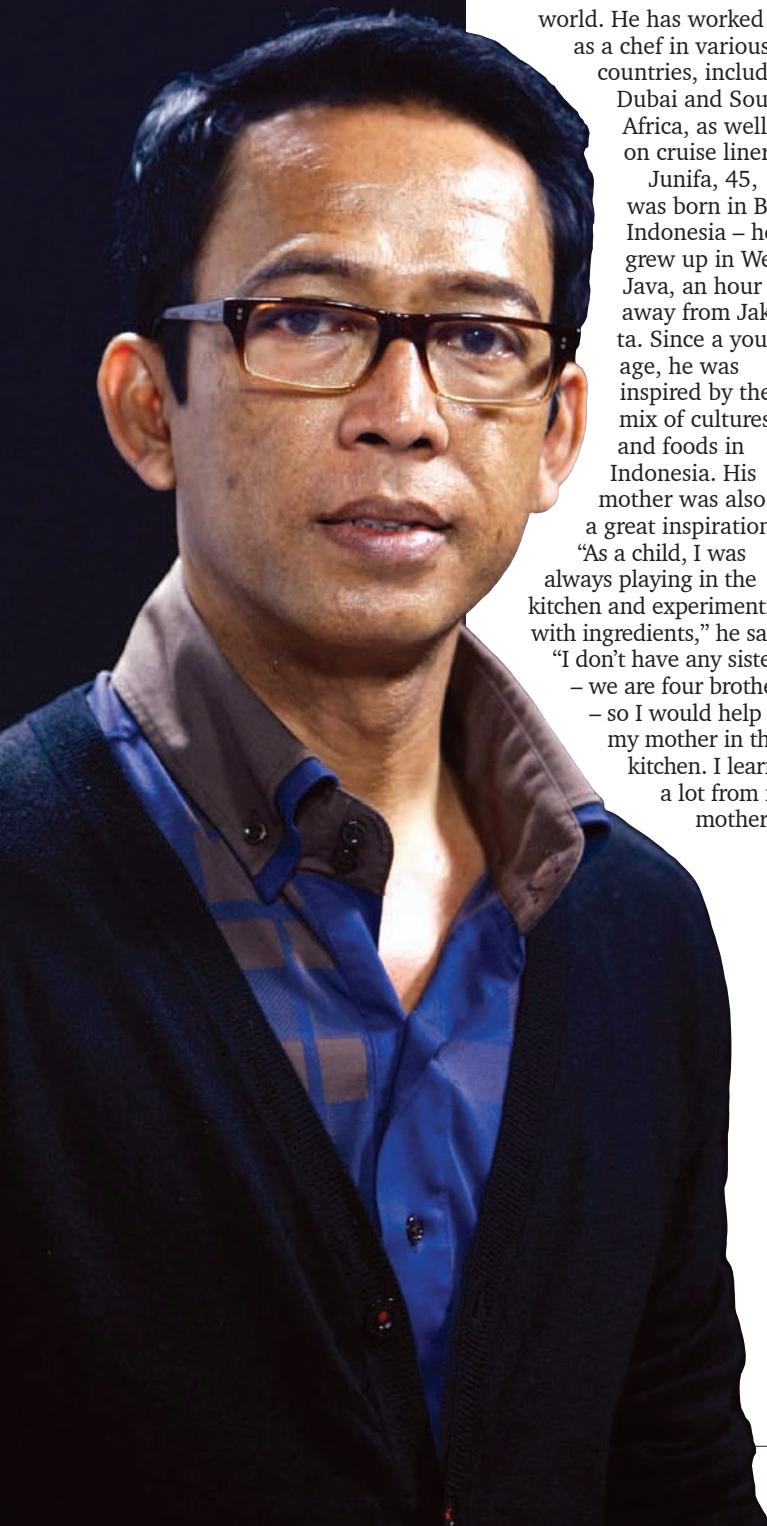
You will need: 350gr chicken • 200gr wheat • 40gr yellow split lentils • 3 onions, sliced • 1 tbs garlic paste • 1 tbs ginger paste • 1 tsp garam masala • 2 tbs red chilli powder • 8 green chillies • 1½ tbs coriander powder • 1 tsp turmeric powder • 1 tsp cumin seeds • Salt to taste • ¼ tsp bicarbonate of soda • 5 tbs oil • Fresh mint • Coriander leaves • 4 lemons, quartered.

Method: Heat the oil in a pan and fry the chicken pieces. Add the garlic, garam masala, red chilli, coriander, turmeric and salt. In a separate pan, boil the wheat in water. Add salt. When the grains are tender, add the bicarbonate of soda. Cook for 15 minutes. Mix the wheat with the chicken. Grind the lentils and add water until it forms a thick paste. Add this to the meat and stir in well. Cook for 30 minutes. Fry the sliced onions until crispy. When the haleem is ready, garnish with the fried onions, mint, coriander leaves and lemon.
Serves 6.



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I come from a mixed family – my father is Hindu, my mother is Muslim and one of my brothers is Catholic.



The right ingredients

Junifa Sundajana I Dewa Made has the recipe for integration.

Junifa Sundajana I Dewa Made is in love with cooking – for him, it’s not a job but a passion which he follows all around the world. He has worked

as a chef in various countries, including Dubai and South Africa, as well as on cruise liners.

Junifa, 45, was born in Bali, Indonesia – he grew up in West Java, an hour away from Jakarta. Since a young age, he was inspired by the mix of cultures and foods in Indonesia. His mother was also a great inspiration. “As a child, I was always playing in the kitchen and experimenting with ingredients,” he says. “I don’t have any sisters – we are four brothers – so I would help my mother in the kitchen. I learned a lot from my mother.”

Junifa left his family home when he was 21 years old to work in hotels. Then, when he was 32, he left Indonesia to work abroad.

“It’s hard to be away from my family,” he says. “But I had the opportunity to work with great chefs –

in Dubai, for instance, I worked with Gordon Ramsay.”

When he was working in Dubai, he saw an advert for an Indonesian chef in Malta.

“I applied and five minutes later, I received confirmation by SMS. I sent all my details and started doing some research on Malta. I found some information and photos online and was immediately attracted to the island.”

Junifa has now been in Malta for nine years and has integrated well.

“I feel comfortable in Malta. I have improved my English and made a lot of Maltese friends. Some of them have even travelled to Indonesia with me.”

Jonathan Hampson has known Junifa since 2003.

“Junifa is a very outgoing person and is fun to work with,” says Jonathan. “At first, there was the language barrier as his English wasn’t very good – we used to communicate using signals – but now we get on very well.”

Tarcisio Rapa, another of Junifa’s friends, agrees.

“Junifa has taught me a lot about food – we work a lot together and I always enjoy my time with him in the kitchen.”

Junifa, a Muslim, believes that people from different cultures and religions can still integrate.

“I come from a mixed family – my father is Hindu, my mother is Muslim and one of my brothers is Catholic. Such a mix of religions has never been a problem.”

Every year, Junifa travels back to his home country and spends a month there.

“I am not running away from home. I travel a lot and spend months working abroad, but I always return home.” ●



Recipe

Mung bean soup with pork

An Indonesian delicacy.

You will need:

1 ox tongue • 1 onion, 2 cloves of garlic, ginger, clove, nutmeg and pepper blended into a paste • Soy sauce • 125gr mung beans • 2 pork fillets, chopped • 2 spring onions, chopped • 2 carrots • 4 tomatoes, chopped • 1 onion, chopped • 50gr snow peas • Garlic • Soy and tapioca flour crackers • Ginger • Water • Rice • Salt.

Method:

Make the soup. Fry the garlic. Add the pork, tomatoes, onion, and spring onions. Fry everything together. Add the mung beans and water. Simmer for one hour. In a separate pan, fry the paste then add the onion and tomatoes. Add the tongue, soy sauce, water and salt. Boil the snow peas and fry the crackers. Boil the carrots. Fry some ginger and garlic, then add the boiled snow peas, carrots, salt and sugar. Serve with jasmine rice.

Serves 4.

Love notes from a small island

For Russian **Anastasia Lesnikova**, Malta is safe, tolerant and stable. And the traffic is nothing compared to Moscow.

For Anastasia Lesnikova, 36, Malta is home. “When I go abroad, I miss it and I am eager to return,” she says.

It was Anastasia’s husband Maxim, a computer programmer, who first came to Malta to learn English.

“Originally, he planned to stay for two months. Then he extended his stay and suggested that I join him in Malta for some months until he finished his course. When the course ended, he found a job that was an exact fit to his line of work. We felt so comfortable in Malta that we decided to buy an apartment and settle down here.”

Anastasia, originally from Moscow, has now been living in Malta for 12 years. She runs a travel agency which caters especially for Russian tourists.

Anastasia and her husband have integrated well in Malta – one factor which has helped is the similarity between Russian and Maltese cultures.

“Despite appearances, both cultures are similar, especially in the importance they give to family values,” Anastasia says. “There are, obviously, some differences – Russians, for instance, are a bit more reserved than Mediterranean people. But living in Malta has made me become more open.”

Anastasia appreciates that Malta is safe, stable and tolerant – she is Russian Orthodox and can practise her religion freely.

“I find Maltese traditions and the culture very interesting,” she says. “And I love Maltese food, especially *braġjoli*, which I’ve learned to cook.

“There are also a lot of advantages to living in a small country,” she says. “The traffic, for instance, is one

“*We felt so comfortable in Malta that we decided to buy an apartment and settle down here.*”



of them. Back in Moscow, my husband and I would spend hours commuting. When people complain about traffic in Malta, I have to smile because it’s nothing compared to the traffic back home.”

Anastasia, who is pregnant with her first child, is also very active in helping other Russians integrate in Malta and in bringing the Russian community in Malta together.

“We organise a lot of events, such as Russian Christmas and carnival,” she says. “The aim is to introduce a bit of Russian culture to Malta. There are also a lot of marriages between Russians and Maltese – these events help in bringing the couples’ families together.”

Anastasia also helps in publishing a newsletter that includes valuable and practical information about Malta – this helps Russians in Malta understand the country better.

One thing which Anastasia still hasn’t managed to learn is the Maltese language. “The fact that people in Malta speak so many languages makes foreigners lazy to learn Maltese,” she says. “I can understand it, but now I want to learn to speak it.” •



Recipe

Russian salad

A traditional Russian dish that is as tasty as it is easy to prepare.

You will need: Carrots and potatoes, boiled • 200gr beef or ham, boiled • 1 onion • 4 hard-boiled eggs • 100gr canned green peas • 3 pickles • Salt and pepper to taste • Mayonnaise.

Method: Peel the potatoes and carrots. Chop the potatoes, carrots, meat, onion, eggs and pickles into small cubes. Drain the green peas and add to the salad. Add salt, pepper, and mayonnaise. Mix well. You can also use boiled chicken breast instead of beef or ham, and fresh apple instead of boiled carrots.

Serves 3 to 4.

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Having a positive character helped me a lot – I am very sociable and get on well with people.



A recipe for integration

Asmaa Saleh dreams of one day opening an Egyptian restaurant in Malta.

Asmaa Saleh, 28, has lived in Malta for the past 16 months together with her husband, Mohammed. They have a daughter and a baby boy who was born in Malta.

Asmaa was born in Egypt yet grew up in Saudi Arabia. After 17 years in Saudi Arabia, she moved back to Egypt to study at university and four years ago, she married Mohammed.

“My parents, both doctors, still live in Saudi Arabia,” she says.

Then Asmaa and her husband moved to Malta.

“We arrived in Malta just one week before Christmas. At first, I felt uncomfortable as Malta is very different from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. But now, I have settled down well – the Maltese people are lovely and I have made many friends. I have also met and befriended other Egyptians in Malta.

“My daughter is also doing very well at school – she goes to a Catholic school and, even though



we are Muslim, she has never had any problems and has made many friends.”

Asmaa teaches her daughter the Quran and every Friday they go to the mosque in Paola to pray.

Asmaa herself has integrated well in Malta and is even learning Maltese.

“Having a positive character has helped me a lot – I am very sociable and get on well with people. I’m like my mother – we both love to cook and to watch other people eat the food we prepare.”

Asmaa, a science graduate, loves beautiful things, especially make-up. “It all started when I was living in Saudi

Arabia – there, women love make-up. I even did the wedding make-up for my brother’s wife and for my cousin.”

Asmaa is also passionate about food, especially sweets, and dreams of one day opening an Egyptian restaurant in Malta. She is also studying cake decorating.

“I started cooking when I was in secondary school. My mother would be at work and so I would prepare the food for the family. My mother taught me a lot about cooking. I also learned a lot when I was living in Saudi Arabia – there are so many different cultures there and all prepare different foods. I experimented with Lebanese and Saudi ingredients and cooking methods.”

Asmaa’s husband was born in Malta. His father was a doctor working in Malta and Mohammed lived in Malta until he was seven years old. His two sisters were also born in Malta.

“My family still talk a lot about Malta – they remember it fondly. I decided to return to Malta because of the opportunities it offers. It was difficult to integrate at first and I miss my family a lot. But I have a determined character and a strong wife and together, we have managed.” ●

Recipe

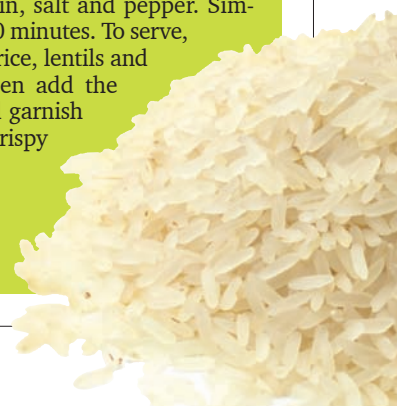
Kushari

A traditional Egyptian dish of rice, lentils and pasta, kushari is so popular that it is often referred to as Egypt’s national dish.

You will need: 130gr short-grain rice • 130gr macaroni • 130gr black lentils • Oil • 3 onions, chopped finely • Garlic, minced • Tomatoes • Tomato paste • Salt and pepper to taste • Cumin • White vinegar.

Method: Fry one onion until brown and crispy. Boil the pasta, rice and lentils separately. Fry the remaining onions with the garlic. Grate the tomatoes and add. Stir in the tomato paste and some vinegar. Season with cumin, salt and pepper. Simmer for 10 minutes. To serve, plate the rice, lentils and pasta. Then add the sauce and garnish with the crispy onion.

Serves 6.



After the revolution

Munir Atigia will one day return to Libya, but he will always keep Malta close to his heart.

When Munir Atigia, 38, remembers his childhood, it is always as a little boy kicking a ball and dreaming of one day becoming a footballer. “We had nothing else to do,” he says. “All we had was a one-channel TV. But it was still a happy childhood – maybe because as a child, I couldn’t understand what was going on around me.”

But Munir was also business-minded – he used to buy pigeons and watches and sell them at school.

Munir was born in Misurata, Libya’s third largest city, but his family moved to Tripoli, where he was brought up together with his brother and two sisters. Eventually, he started his own oil service company.

“That’s all gone now,” Munir says. “I have lost everything.”

In November, 2010, Munir decided to come to Malta with his wife, Nzouha, and their three children. He already had a close connection with Malta – his father used to bring him to Malta on holidays. Two of Munir’s children were also born in Malta, as Munir and his wife preferred Malta’s hospitals to those in Libya, so he would bring Nzouha to give birth here.

“Late in 2010, we could feel the pressure building up in Libya and we decided to come to Malta,” Munir says. “It all happened very fast – we packed up everything in two weeks and came here.”

“The move to Malta was hard, especially because of our children,” says Nzouha. “Yet I agreed with Munir that we should move to Malta.”

Munir’s wife was born in Tripoli. When she finished school, she joined her parents in Canada when she was 15 years old – she lived in Canada for seven years, where she also completed her studies.

Munir and his family settled down well in Malta.

“We feel at home,” says Nzouha. “We like the people and the country. Even at school, the teachers are very nice to my children. The fact that my husband integrated so well also helped.”

Munir agrees. “Libya and Malta are culturally close – both peoples are friendly and nurture a great love for family,” he says. “Also, acting in a positive way helped me integrate quickly.”

“Acting in a positive way helped me integrate very quickly.”



Recipe

Grouper with couscous

The kick of the hot peppers combines well with the tender fish and couscous.

You will need: 1½kg grouper, cut into pieces • Green and red chilli peppers • Garlic, crushed • Couscous • Tomato paste • Olive oil for frying • Coriander • Cumin • Mixed herbs • Salt and pepper to taste.

Method: Fry the peppers in olive oil. When they start to crisp, remove. Fry the spices in the same oil and then add the tomato paste. Simmer for 40 minutes. Add the fish and cook for 20 minutes. Add the garlic. In the meantime, steam the couscous. When the fish is ready, mix the sauce with the couscous and serve.

Serves 6.

“

I am in Malta both to help my family and for my future.

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A caring mission

For **Lovelee Manalo**, caring for people is her mission.

The first thing that Lovelee Manalo, 30, noticed when she arrived in Malta was the weather.

“In the Philippines, it’s summer all year round. We do have rain – but when it rains, the temperatures are hotter. In Malta, however, it gets cold in winter and I wasn’t used to that.”



Lovelee comes from a big family – she has three brothers and two sisters. Her father’s side of the family mostly live in Manila, while her other relatives live in the provinces, where she was born and raised. Her mother used to teach at the same primary school that Lovelee attended.

When she was 18 years old, Lovelee went to study business management for four years at a college in Manila.

“Then after two years, I decided to change job and started looking for other opportunities. A friend of my aunt, who lives in Malta, told me of an opportunity here and I packed my bags and bought a ticket to Malta.”

For Lovelee, her journey to Malta was the first time she had boarded a plane and travelled outside the Philippines.

“I was a bit nervous, but I’m not one to be discouraged easily. God is with me so I never give up.”

Lovelee has now been living in Malta for six years and takes care of Rita and Kevin Vella, who are both wheelchair users. Lovelee started caring for Rita and Kevin ever since they got married six years ago.

“My responsibility is to make Rita and Kevin happy,” she says.

“For us, Lovelee is family,” Rita says. “We involve her a lot and even when we go out, we make sure that she is happy with our plans.”

“Lovelee has a quiet and pleasant personality and takes good care of us. We feel safe with her,” Rita says. “And even when she misses her family, she makes sure that this is not a burden.”

“Thanks to Lovelee, we can lead a comfortable life,” Kevin adds.

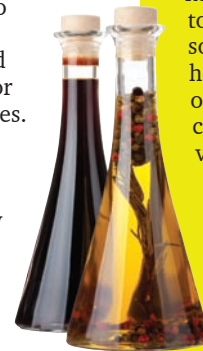
“For me, family is very important and I dream of one day raising a family of my own,” Lovelee says. “I always help my family and am thinking of them all the time. I am in Malta both to help my family and for my future.” ●

Recipe

Chicken adobo

A spicy dish from the Philippines with a hint of Spain.

You will need: 1kg chicken pieces • 4 potatoes, cubed • 4 tbsp soy sauce • 1 garlic head, chopped • 1 onion, chopped • 2 cups water • ½ cup vinegar • 2 tbsp oil • 2 bay leaves • Pepper to taste.



Method: Boil the chicken for 15 minutes. Mix all the ingredients in a pan and cook for approximately one hour. Serve with rice.

Serves 4.