

Yummy Cyprus

Two grandmothers draw on their love of cooking, and the rich flavours, culture and history of Cyprus, as they launch their new cookery school

Marina and Rena look like ordinary sixty-something grandmothers, greeting me at the door with welcoming smiles, offers of cake and clean aprons. As I followed the fragrant aroma of home cooking which led me into Rena's kitchen, however, I noticed the discreetly embroidered 'Yummy Cyprus' on their aprons.

"We love cooking," smiled Rena, as she stirred the mixture for stuffed vine leaves simmering on the hob. "Marina and I have spent a lifetime absorbing our country's flavours and we hope to pass on our knowledge to others, whether foreigners or locals, who want to know more about how to cook in a way that respects Cyprus' traditions, customs and seasons."

Not content with preparing lovingly and expertly prepared meals for their extended social circle, the long-time friends decided to share their enthusiasm for the cuisine and traditions of Cyprus through organised classes. Their new joint venture – called Yummy Cyprus – is a cookery school which teaches traditional cuisine, and will be launched with a series of workshops hosted by the French Institute of Cyprus.

Currently in preparation for their first course which begins next week, Marina and Rena also hope to extend their cookery school's scope to include workshops for embassies and hotels. "Many hotels are looking for activities for their older guests who are interested in learning more about Cyprus' culture," Marina explained, "and they've been very positive about the idea of using the services of Yummy Cyprus to provide an informative and useful cooking introduction."

Rena and Marina share a history spanning decades, beginning when they both attended Nicosia's English School. "We've been friends for a long time," Rena explained with a smile and a warm shared look with Marina. "And we complement each other, both in terms of our characters and in the kitchen!"

Having lived in the UK for many years, both women felt the need to keep their ties to Cyprus strong. "We missed so much about our country, like the herbs and the wild greens so abundantly available here," Marina said. "But even though it was challenging at times, given the lack of ingredients, we made sure our children were always exposed to the flavours and scents of traditional Cypriot cuisine. These days, even though they live abroad themselves, they prefer to prepare a quick and tasty meal based on our home cooking rather than ordering take-out."

Ardent proponents of the Mediterranean diet, Marina and Rena are always looking for ways to bring healthy staples like fresh greens and pulses to the forefront of family life. "We try to come up with recipes that are easy to prepare on a daily basis," Rena elaborated. "We know that today's busy parents can't make mousaka, kleftiko or dolmades for their children on a work day, but they can lay the foundations for the next generation to adopt and appreciate the healthy traditions of our ancestors, using simple and affordable ingredients that are available on our doorstep."

Rena is happiest in her kitchen, where her creative streak flourishes, producing beautifully - flavoured meals, like her favourite salmon in aspic, or painting scenes inspired by the wealth of history and nature in the Cypriot landscape.

Marina combines cooking with her love of teaching, continuing her career as a Greek language teacher while regularly preparing divine dishes like vegetarian pastitio for friends and family.

One of Marina's prized possessions is her grandfather's old trunk, from his homeland in Greece and now residing in her own home in Ayia Thekla. "It is filled to the brim with my lifetime collection of recipes and notes on cooking," she smiled. "And it represents my deep, abiding love of Cypriot and Greek cuisine – handed down by my



mother – and the traditions of my country."

Rena reiterates the joy she feels in preparing food made from fresh ingredients. "I love knowing that my dishes contain all the goodness inherent in food, and I think it's important to take advantage of the fact that our island is abundant in fresh fruit and vegetables."

The Authentic Cyprus Cooking Course will run on six

consecutive Tuesdays from February 21 to March 27, and will be taught in English.

The workshops are limited to six participants and will include the preparation of a traditional Cyprus starter, main course and dessert.

For more information, contact info@yummysyprus.com or phone 99494399 or 99456816.