

Interview for Sayidaty Magazine

Each beginning has a story. When did your passion for cooking begin? Was there a specific incident?

My passion for cooking started 6 years ago. I was struggling with my health and decided to change my diet to plant-based. I had always been a foodie before then but wasn't confident in the kitchen to experiment and improvise. The moment I switched to a vegetarian plant-based diet; I realized my true passion was cooking and showing people how to cook delicious plant-based meals.

Your page shows the merging of more than a culture in cooking. What cultures do you refer to when it comes to creating your dishes?

Before moving to New Zealand, I've travelled to about 30 countries and lived in 4 countries. Food has always been very important for my family, so when we travelled, we enjoyed local cuisines.

I love cooking Mediterranean cuisine inspired dishes but not only. Since I've also lived in Vietnam, I love experimenting with Southeast Asian flavours. I also believe it's good to merge different cuisines while maintaining the respect for their origins.

How do you come up with your vegetarian recipes?

I consider myself a very creative person and my recipes are the reflection of who I am and what cultures and cuisines I've experienced so far. I believe everything we taste creates a flavour and aroma memory and I happen to be pretty good at combining those into exciting flavourful dishes.

What is the nature of Polish cuisine, does it have a history, or is it a collection of European recipes?

Polish cuisine is rather meat based, earthy and hearty and has been greatly influenced by the country's very rich history. We can clearly see influence from German, Jewish, French, and Eastern, such as Tatar-Turkish cuisines.

What do you rely on when serving your table, bread or rice? What kinds of bread do you make in Poland?

Bread and potatoes are the staples of Polish cuisine. Traditional Polish bread is a rye and wheat sourdough. I remember my lovely auntie always made a few large loaves of beautifully baked rye wheat sourdough every time we visited.

You live in New Zealand. What is special about their cuisine?

Hāngī. It's a traditional New Zealand Māori method of cooking food using heated rocks buried in a pit oven. This cooking style is still commonly practiced throughout New Zealand until today. Traditionally the food was wrapped in flax leaves, but a modern Hāngī uses mutton cloth, aluminum foil, or wire baskets.

What are the rituals of Polish women in cooking and preparing supplies?

In traditional Polish homes, the woman would always prepare 2 courses for a family Sunday lunch - Chicken soup and the main course containing meat, potatoes, and salad. Ideally this should be followed by a dessert, such as apple pie.

In terms of supplies, Polish cuisine contains a lot of pickles and fruit and vegetable preserves which women would prepare in summer and store for wintertime.

Is there a participation of the Polish man in the kitchen?

Back in the day it was the woman's role only, these days men actively participate in house chores and cooking.

Authentic Polish cuisine is known to be rich in fat, calories can't be counted, right? What about the new generation, did such habits change?

Luckily, new generations are much more aware and conscious of the environmental and health impacts that such a hearty meat-based diet has, and many Poles decide to change their dietary habits. According to reports from 2021 10% of adult Poles are vegetarians and 6% are vegans and these numbers are only going up.

What are the ingredients that must be available in your kitchen?

My plant-based kitchen staples are legumes, cereal, grains, nuts, seeds, fresh vegetables, and fruits. Clean and natural ingredients are what I base my recipes on.

Is there any clash with any other culture about the history of a dish? like for example, all Arab countries attribute the hummus dish to themselves?

No, Poland shares similar dishes with its neighbouring countries such as different variations of dumplings and beetroot soups, but luckily, we don't clash over their origins.

Do you have an idea about Arabic food? What dishes have you tried to bring to your kitchen?

I absolutely love Arabic cuisines. Growing up my family and I would often spend our holidays in the Middle East and from a young age I was always fascinated by fresh and aromatic dishes from Arabic countries. I've shared many Arabic cuisines-inspired recipes. Recently shared Muhammara-inspired hummus recipe was a great success. It was a very courageous combination of Muhammara and hummus, maintaining the sweetness of muhammara and the creaminess of the hummus. My audience received this dish extremely well.

Will the new generation preserve the origins of Polish cuisine? Or is it something they wouldn't care about at all?

Polish cuisine has evolved but while Poles enjoy all cuisines of the world on a daily basis, I believe Christmas and Easter traditional dishes will remain unchanged.

Do you serve the previous day's meal in your kitchen? Do you reintroduce it in a new way? Yes, some dishes are meant to be prepared the day before so that the flavours have the time to combine and develop and/or the texture set.

What are the most important practical tips that you see women in the kitchen are not aware of? Perhaps your secrets!

I believe the key to a successful dish is to follow mise en place: read the entire recipe beforehand, plan, prepare all the ingredients and tools you will need, and then start cooking. Also, make sure you season the food and have fun. I think having fun in the kitchen is the best recipe for a delicious meal 😊

Can you share the funniest situation that happened to you on Instagram, perhaps during shooting, or from a follower?

Sometimes people message me and call me Kai. It always makes me smile. My name is Aga, and Kai means food in te reo Māori, (Maori language of New Zealand) The name of my page translates to Green Food and it's a combination of English and Maori. I always enjoy when it happens because I get to educate them on what the name actually means 😊