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Photography by Carlie Pipe



# ma - ma

Giuse Ferri, known as "Mama" to most customers, and her son Max, dish out the secret to great pizza, going gluten-free and why freshness is the "mother of all flavour".

**M People:** What's Mama Mia's secret to success?

**Giuse Ferri:** High quality and traditional Italian food at reasonable prices! The Mama Mia concept is, going to eat like you would at your mom's... a place where you know the food is good, there's always something new and it feels like home. We wanted to recreate the atmosphere of a traditional Italian restaurant but one that is affordable; this is what keeps bringing back our customers time and time again.

**MP:** Where did Mama learn to cook?

**Max Ferri:** Mama learnt how to cook really well from a young age, taught by her mama and grand-mama. She's the brainchild of the recipes and the food at Mama Mia. Now it's been passed on in our family to me.

**MP:** What's Mama's secret to amazing pizza?

**GF:** Fresh sauce, fresh herbs, extra virgin olive oil and fresh mozzarella cheese. We make traditional Italian, thin crust large pizza baked in a stone oven. It's also about how you prepare the pizza dough, how you stretch it, turn it and load the pizza in the oven. These are all part of a very Italian artisan skill, which is the secret to our amazing pizza.

**MF:** Our local pizza makers have undergone a six-month training period with experienced Italian pizza men, to learn this art. We are very proud that we have had our staff, local Barbadians, learn an artisan and traditional Italian skill.

**MP:** What are your menu favourites?

**GF:** My favourite is Amatriciana, which is a traditional Italian food plate with pork and pecorino cheese. Funnily enough, I learned Amatriciana from my husband, so every time he cooks for me at home I ask him to make Amatriciana! We also do a lot of cooking at home.

**MF:** I love the sandwiches as I'm often in a rush so my favourite is the Moon (#13). Although I do love the spicy pizzas too!

**MP:** What are the other hot menu items?

**MF:** Lasagna is a big seller. We offer it daily as a lunch special and people love it. We are also about to launch the "Mama Mia Family Deal Lasagna". It is a half-cooked lasagna for a family of four and very reasonably priced. Customers can pick it up from the restaurant, cook it in the oven for 15 mins, and dinner is ready!

We're also the only restaurant on the island to our knowledge that has gluten-free pizza. All of our pizzas are available this way. Pastas and lasagna are also available gluten-free.

**MP:** What has been the response to the gluten-free options?

**GF:** Excellent. So much so that we are dedicating the whole of next year to improving the range of our gluten-free items and

we are looking to add more options.

**MP:** Where are you taking Mama Mia in the future?

**MF:** We want to improve the experience for our busier customers by serving pre-packaged fresh food products, prepared fresh every morning and ready to be collected. The idea is that customers can pop in to buy a sandwich and head out the door in less than 5 minutes - it's the perfect lunch or quick dinner option for someone on the move.

There is also a bigger plan in the works, and we plan to commence pizza deliveries to key locations across the island very soon. We are currently building a website that will allow our customers to create an account, set up their details and their favourite pizzas, and order directly from the internet for either pick-up or take-away. Customers will also be able to access the website on their smartphones. They can relax at home, watch a movie, order a pizza and get it delivered to their door within 45 minutes.

**MP:** You've certainly changed the face of pizza in Barbados already! Do you see yourself being able to take it to the next stage now?

**GF:** Ten years ago this type of food was difficult to find and some of our produce was not easy to source. However Barbados has changed a lot over the years and so have the food choices of many Bajans. Our most proud achievement is to have secured a large, local, Barbadian clientele who come in year after year. Over the next few years, we see ourselves reaching out to an even wider clientele, especially on the pizza front. It's what our customers love us for!

**MP:** So where do you see Mama Mia in 10 years?

**MF:** Ten years from now we hopefully see more locations, not only in Barbados but throughout the Caribbean. We want to bring a slice of Italy also to other Caribbean shores.

**MP:** What can we look forward to the next time we "come to Mama"?

**MF:** Mama's Secret Dinner every Monday night, it's a new dining concept for many but goes again back to Italian roots. In many off-the-beaten path places in Italy, the restaurant has only one thing on the menu each day. This is what we have sought to replicate. The approach is that you don't know what you are getting when you go in - it's like going to eat at your mom's house... you know she's cooked something, you don't know what it is, but you know it's going to be good!

Also if you want to stay in contact and get daily specials, customers can like us on Facebook - there is a Fan of the Week weekly prize draw and the winner gets a free pizza!

Mama Mia Italian Deli gained its Certificate of Excellence 2012 from Trip Advisor with 4.5 stars. For its freshness, flavour and family feeling...we give it 5 out of 5.

