

Chef Sperxos from Greece

Posted on

Striving to Honor His Heritage



Chef Sperxos.

From time immemorial, traders have sailed the great seas in search of an island rich in spices. Reminiscent of those journeys, Chef Sperxos has been exploring Sri Lanka's vibrant, aromatic spices, savoring the island's timeless flavors.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

He loves his Kiribath (milk rice) with Lunu Miris (ground onion with chili flakes), the kind slow-cooked in rich coconut milk and prepared by the loving hands of a woman in a village kitchen. Chef Sperxos (real name Alexandros Pavlopoulos), an award-winning Greek celebrity chef who grew up learning and savoring the art of slow cooking the traditional way, is an expert in Greek gastronomy. He also knows a great deal about Sri Lankan cuisine, not merely the dishes served in the grand interiors of Colombo's restaurants, but the food lovingly prepared in the home kitchens of Sri Lankans. These everyday dishes reflect not only the island's palate but also generations of culinary traditions, the careful use of ingredients and spices, and the stories and unhurried cooking practices that bring out the best in every dish.



Chef Sperxos experiences the warmth of Sri Lankan hospitality and the island's rich culinary traditions.

Whenever Chef Sperxos speaks of his journey to becoming a chef specializing in Greek cuisine, he delves into his roots in Kalavryta, a small mountainous town in the Peloponnese, and the profound influence of his grandmother. He watched as she carefully selected the ripest and most delicious fruits and vegetables from their organic farm. He grew up surrounded by farm animals, their sounds and smells, and vegetable plots where he could pick a carrot and eat it fresh from the ground. Making their own yogurt and cheeses was part of everyday life. These memories shaped the rest of his professional and personal life. It was like “seeing” and “hearing” the age-old Greek traditions come alive in the fields and through the abundance of organic produce. It was during those formative years that he realized he wanted to place Greek culinary traditions on the world map someday.

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When his family set up a small restaurant business at the age of 12, it added another dimension to his experience. It was a family affair, with everyone involved in preparing food, while young Sperxos peeled potatoes, served customers, and gained his first experience of working closely with a kitchen preparing meals for patrons. At 17, he moved to Athens to attend culinary school, eventually making his way to Dubai in 2015. For the past decade, he has devoted himself to promoting and showcasing the richness, exquisite flavors, and culinary heritage of Greek cuisine, which has often remained underrepresented on the global gastronomic map.



Connecting with local communities.

It was his grandmother and mother who taught him the value of respecting heritage flavors rather than dismissing them as archaic in favor of modern ingredients and tastes. Adding to his budding journey towards the world stage was his great-grandmother's book of traditional Greek recipes, which his grandmother continued to use. Chef Sperxos loved everything about the age-old flavors he grew up savoring and eagerly learned the traditions behind them. In honoring his family and the authenticity of Greek cuisine, he continues to prepare some of these traditional recipes exactly as they were handed down, preserving history and carrying forward a culinary legacy for posterity.



Learning the art of traditional food preparation alongside Sri Lankan village women, embracing the island's age-old culinary practices.

Today, as a celebrated chef, he has introduced and popularized Greek flavors in Dubai's vibrant culinary scene. His initial visit to Dubai was for just seven days to showcase authentic Greek cuisine. And what more could an emerging chef ask for than an invitation from one of Dubai's finest and most exclusive hotels, the One&Only Royal Mirage? Just two days into his seven-day stay, the hotel management offered him a contract.



Chef Sperxos gains firsthand experience of Sri Lanka's rich culinary traditions.

As a young chef, he also inspires younger generations to appreciate these age-old flavors, ensuring that traditional dishes continue to be cherished and their legacy lives on.

Even as he stepped into his new role in Dubai, where Greek cuisine was yet to gain widespread popularity, he recognized the similarities between the two cultures. In both Greece and Dubai, family holds a special place, and food is about bringing families together. There is not only history and tenderness in the preparation of their dishes, but food is also integral to family gatherings and conversations. Both cultures respect their elders and cherish their traditions, points out Chef Sperxos. He draws on these similarities when promoting Greek cuisine in Dubai, preparing food with the same love and care that characterized earlier generations' practices. As a young chef, he also inspires younger generations to appreciate these age-old flavors, ensuring that traditional dishes continue to be cherished and their legacy lives on.

Even today, he respects the ingredients and produce he uses, just as his grandmother and mother taught him. "I continue to use the same ingredients that my grandmother used in her cooking, and I prepare them in the same way, because I believe food is all about how you respect your family and understand how your ancestors brought those flavors together."

Since then, his journey has extended far beyond Dubai, taking him to many places, including Sri Lanka, which he has visited more than 20 times. It is an island he has fallen in love with, as he continues to explore its flavors in the home kitchens of its villages. He loves every flavor the island has to offer, embracing the rich spices and spiciness of Sri Lankan cuisine.

"When they cooked kiribath, they fed me with their hands, which reminded me of home, because that is how I grew up, too. The people are the reason I have kept coming back to Sri Lanka. Sri Lankans are blessed, just like the people of my village in Greece."

He keeps returning to Sri Lanka for its ingredients, food, flavors, and tastes, which he describes as truly amazing. He sees a deep connection between food and

culture, one that brings back cherished memories of his own home. Sri Lanka, he says, is like a second home to him, a place where he would one day love to settle. He travels to lesser-visited places, where facilities may be basic, but where people extend genuine love and care. It is in these humble village kitchens that he watches women grind lunu miris for milk rice on a traditional grinding stone, carefully combining the ingredients without taking shortcuts, preparing dishes with love and warmth.

His love for Sri Lanka goes into the heart of the country, where traditions and age-old practices remain alive, and Chef Sperxos discovers the true warmth of humanity and the depth of its culinary heritage. While savoring the authentic tastes and hospitality of Sri Lankan villages, he has also cooked alongside the women he has met, enriching his experience and deepening his knowledge of the island's cuisine.

Reflecting on his more than 20 visits to Sri Lanka, Chef Sperxos believes the island possesses a unique soul and energy. His curiosity about the country was first sparked by his interactions with Sri Lankan colleagues at work. He developed a yearning to explore Sri Lankan culture, believing that understanding their traditions and way of life would help him better appreciate and respect his Sri Lankan team members. And so, with the encouragement and assistance of his Sri Lankan friends in Dubai, he embarked on his first journey to Asia, choosing Sri Lanka as his destination. All he wanted was to discover the soul of the island, deep in the interior of the country, in its villages, in humble mud-thatched houses, and through the people's way of living, cooking, and eating. Encouraged by a Sri Lankan colleague, he chose to stay with a family in Elahera, who, he fondly recalls, treated him as one of their own.

Chef Sperxos was in Sri Lanka recently for a culinary collaboration with The Avenue Colombo, bringing together traditional Greek recipes and Sri Lankan ingredients, a combination he had previously experimented with in Dubai with excellent results. "By using Sri Lankan products, I intend to bring back memories and pay tribute to every single grandmother, grandfather, and family I met in Sri Lanka, and bring a part of them into the dishes." During his visit, he created several Greek dishes infused with Sri Lankan flavors and influences, celebrating the culinary traditions of both cultures.

Chef Sperxos is also a successful entrepreneur, having founded the EFZIN Group, under which he has developed several culinary concepts, including THE DISH by Chef Sperxos, EFZIN Private Dining, and EFZIN Fresh. He leads a team of

approximately 150 employees, nearly 50 percent of whom are Sri Lankans. THE DISH by Chef Sperxos is a modern restaurant concept in Dubai that blends ancient Greek culinary traditions with contemporary gastronomy. EFZIN Private Dining is a luxury private chef and bespoke catering service offering customized menus, elegant table styling, and themed dining experiences for private villas, yachts, homes, embassies, and high-profile corporate events. EFZIN Fresh, meanwhile, is a health-focused Mediterranean café, delicatessen, and restaurant chain operating across multiple locations in the UAE, offering low-carb, nutrient-rich, farm-to-kitchen meals, cold-pressed juices, and gourmet Greek retail products.

His exploration in Sri Lanka has helped him discover ingredients he cherishes, such as kithul treacle, which he uses as a topping for his dishes. He loves cinnamon too, describing Sri Lanka as the island of cinnamon. For Chef Sperxos, Sri Lankan ingredients must be preserved and treasured, and he believes they should not be replaced by modern alternatives, as often happens. These traditional ingredients must continue to be used for their intended purposes, while also inspiring local chefs to explore new culinary creations.

A typical working day for Chef Sperxos stretches to 15 hours, and he emphasizes that those long hours are not spent looking for quick fixes, as is often portrayed on television and social media. When he arrived in Dubai, he proudly brought with him a legacy of slow cooking, imbued with the stories and traditions of his ancestors. Preparing these dishes was an art in itself, requiring patience, dedication, and respect for the process. He sees the same traditions in Sri Lanka. He does not believe in shortcuts. If a dish requires scraping coconut, then it must be done, he insists, because only by following the traditional process do the true intended flavors emerge.



Chef Sperxos brings his passion for authentic flavors and culinary traditions to life.

For Chef Sperxos, cooking is about bringing people together, while sharing a meal is an expression of fellowship. It is an experience that calls for care and thoughtfulness, where food becomes the heart of joyful conversations, cherished memories, and nostalgia.