

Chef Ritu Dalmia

Chef Ritu Dalmia needs little introduction. With her insatiable appetite for constant innovation in the kitchen and the finest collection of wines in her cellar, she has warmed many a hungry soul. All the specialty kitchens and team members share her distinct self-involved style, as also her panache for creativity and excellence.

Ritu Dalmia, the owner of Diva - one of Delhi's finest Italian restaurants, has interestingly not undergone any professional training to become a Chef. She cooked her first meal at the tender age of nine and till date trusts her instincts when it comes to cooking. Ritu believes cooking is an art, guided by a natural sense of taste and talent.

Born in Kolkata to a Marwari business family, Ritu joined her father's marble business at the age of sixteen. She often travelled to Italy for work and it was then she fell in love with its cuisine. Interestingly, her love for cooking also led her to try non-vegetarian food, coming from an all vegetarian household.

At the age of twenty-one she started her first restaurant Mezzaluna, in Delhi, offering Mediterranean cuisine with an Italian accent. Established in 1993, it was the first chef-run restaurant in the country. The cuisine, however, was way ahead of its time. It was in her words 'a wonderful disaster' and so after three years she closed shop and moved to London, where she opened the acclaimed Indian restaurant Vama with a partner, Andy Verma. Vama, a roaring success, taught her all about running a restaurant professionally and gave her the confidence she needed. Frequent customers at Vama included the likes of Bryan Adams, Maggie Smith, Bryan Ferry, amongst others. Her heart, however, longed to return to India.

She came back to Delhi in 2000, but with unsure plans of what lay ahead. The food scene in Delhi had changed drastically since Mezzaluna; ingredients were easily available and the audience had been exposed to international cuisines. It was then that in partnership with her friend Gita Bhalla, Diva opened a few months later, and there has been no looking back since. Diva, having completed 11 successful years, is a huge hit among the clientele of Delhi and is one of the most recommended Italian restaurants in the country, also popular for its handpicked yet extensive wine list.

She also runs the highly successful Café at the Italian Culture Centre, and Italian diplomats strongly prefer Diva when it comes to an authentic Italian restaurant in Delhi. She now owns six restaurants as part of Diva restaurants, each unique and interesting in its own way, as well as her own catering business. These include Café Diva in Greater Kailash I, Latitude 28 in collaboration with Goodearth in Khan Market, Diva Italian at Greater Kailash II and Diva Spiced, the latest addition, in Meherchand Market. She is a host of two immensely popular cookery shows on national television – Italian Khana and Travelling Diva on NDTV Good Times; Ritu is also the author of the two cookbooks by the same name - Italian Khana and Travelling Diva – Recipes from around the world. Her most important tip – use the freshest of ingredients, and you cannot go wrong. Her latest cookbook, Diva Green: A Vegetarian Cookbook is perfect for

those wishing to reacquaint themselves with vegetables in all their flavour, colour and goodness.

After 15 years of being one of the frontrunners in Italian cuisine with 6 restaurants, 2 well-loved television shows and 3 cook books, the queen of Italian cooking is ready to shake things up with her latest endeavor Diva Spiced! Ritu Dalmia introduces '**DIVA Spiced**' situated at Meherchand market, is an all-day dining café offering *Modern Asian Cuisine*. Reflecting Ritu's signature style of fresh and wholesome ingredients, the café introduces an enormous menu to attract its patrons to indulge while on the go or just chill with friends over a quick bite.

Recognition

Diva has won the Hindustan Times' HT City Award for the last four years and The Times of India's Times Food Award for the last two years. Ritu also runs the extremely popular café at the Italian Cultural Centre. She was also awarded the prestigious Order of the Star of Italian Solidarity.