



## Chef Fidaa Abuhamdiya

Cherishing and Preserving Our Indigenous Food Heritage and Culture



I was born in 1982 in Hebron, where I grew up and went to school. Because I have loved delicious food ever since I can remember, I decided to become a professional cook. After finishing high school, I attended the Notre Dame of Jerusalem cooking school and then followed my passion for expanding my knowledge about food and traveled to Italy to study at the University of Padua, where I obtained a BA in the science and culture of food and a master's degree in nutrition and food education. Having deepened my knowledge of food, I began to use it as a communication tool to speak about Palestine. I wanted people to know Palestine and Palestinians through food. My project started with my friends and my Italian family.

In Padua, I had the opportunity to work in Le Calandre, a 3-star Michelin restaurant. The job was wonderful despite the difficulties and hard work. Later on, I worked in various places in Italy until 2012, when I decided to return to Palestine. It wasn't easy to start a new life and to find a job, but I continued to write for an Italian web newspaper. In 2016, I published a cookbook of Palestinian food entitled Pop Palestine Cuisine with my friend Silvia Chiarantini. Outlining a food journey that started in Hebron and finished in Jenin, this cookbook describes how to prepare the delicious dishes we enjoyed in homes and restaurants as well as from street vendors. Each chapter is dedicated to one of the cities we visited along the way.

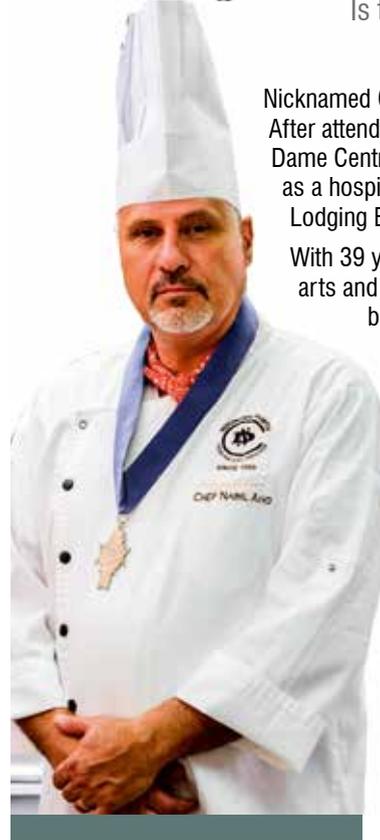
Today, I teach a variety of subjects to future chefs at Hebron's Smart College for Modern Education, including Introduction to the World of Food (an anthropology of food).

I hope to see a generation that cares about food culture, is proud of its roots, and preserves the knowledge of Indigenous food – before we lose these recipes because the dishes have moved into new cultures and lost their connection to this land.



## Chef Nabil Marcos Aho

Celebrating Food with Family and Friends Is the Greatest Joy of All



Nicknamed CHE, I was born and grew up in Jerusalem. After attending a four-year apprenticeship program at Notre Dame Centre of Jerusalem (NDC) I obtained a certificate as a hospitality educator from the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute in Orlando, Florida.

With 39 years of professional experience in the culinary arts and food sciences, and 31 years of teaching, I have been head chef instructor at NDC's Professional Hospitality Promotion section since 1990.

In addition, I taught classes at Bethlehem University's Institute of Hotel Management, served as executive chef at NDC, provided consultancy in culinary services, helped in the opening of five restaurants, and am a co-founder and active member of Chefs for Peace.

For ten years, I wrote a weekly column about the history of food for Al-Quds Newspaper (in Arabic). Also, I published a glossary of kitchen and food terms in English and Arabic and a booklet in English about local Jerusalemite food.

During the visits to the Holy Land of His Holiness Pope Benedict in 2009 and His Holiness Pope Francis in 2014, I had the great honor to be one of the chefs who prepared the gala dinners.

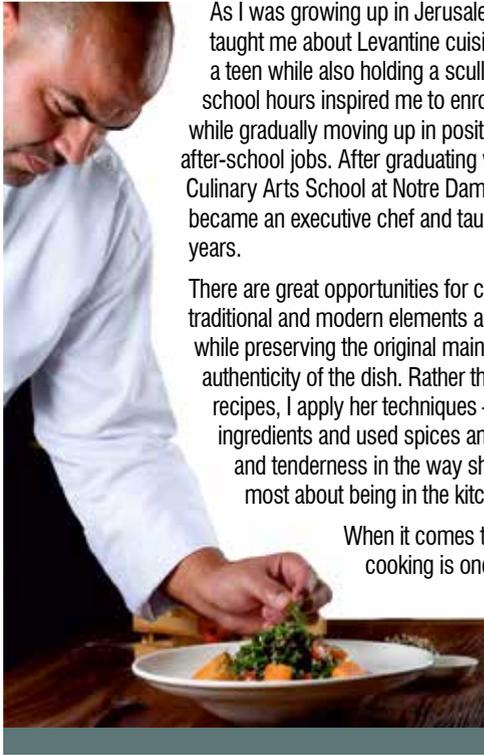
My favorite dish is himseh garoneh, a Syriac dish made of chickpeas, tomato sauce, lamb broth, and cracked wheat that was my grandmother's favorite recipe, which she passed on to me. My true passion is to cook for family and friends. Seeing everyone gather around the table, enjoying a great meal and having a wonderful time is pure joy and a celebration of companionship, food culture, and life.

I have taught cooks who now have successful careers and am proud to know many former cooks who now are successful chefs, locally and in various countries around the world. Teaching is in my blood and provides a boundless learning experience for both me and my students, as we expand our knowledge of the amazing food Palestine has to offer. I strongly believe that sharing this knowledge and broadening the public's culinary experiences and knowledge creates some of the most blissful moments in life.



## Chef Elias Akroush

Caressing the Senses with Every Bite



As I was growing up in Jerusalem, my Syrian grandmother taught me about Levantine cuisine. Helping in the kitchen as a teen while also holding a scullery position at a hotel after school hours inspired me to enroll in hotel management courses while gradually moving up in positions at hotels in Jerusalem as after-school jobs. After graduating with honors from Jerusalem's Culinary Arts School at Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, I became an executive chef and taught at Notre Dame for eight years.

There are great opportunities for creativity in the kitchen: mixing traditional and modern elements and trying out various herbs while preserving the original main ingredients, and thus, the authenticity of the dish. Rather than following my grandmother's recipes, I apply her techniques – the way she handled ingredients and used spices and herbs. There was intimacy and tenderness in the way she cooked, and it's what I loved most about being in the kitchen with her and my mother.

When it comes to passion, I believe that cooking is one of the most intimate

occupations in the world. You need to enjoy what you're doing! When I cook, I use all my senses and pour my heart into every dish. In Arabic, we say, "One cooks with her/his

soul" because we believe that cooking is a spiritual practice. I am known for my meat recipes; they are my signature dishes. I use only small amounts of a few spices to preserve the original flavors of the meat and the earthy touch of the herbs I add.

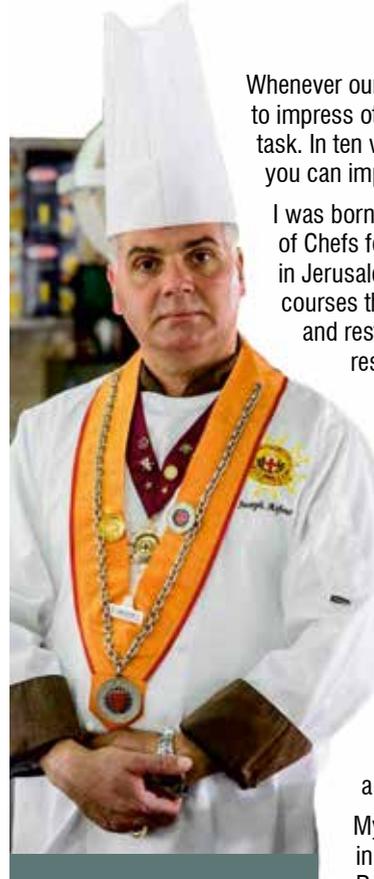
At a turning point in my journey, I realized that my passion reaches beyond cooking to building the perfect kitchen, restaurant, and even hotel. I discovered this while working at a modest local restaurant, managing to change the venue's entire setting to attract people with a taste for excellence.

My dream will soon become a reality, as I am building a one-of-a-kind catering center in Jerusalem, where I can create my masterpieces, pamper my ingredients, and pour my heart and soul into every dish. My secret lies in the ability to prepare a homecooked-style meal on a larger scale while keeping its essence and full taste. I sincerely hope as well that restaurant owners will realize the importance of hiring professional, specialized cooks because eating out is less about the profit than the sensual experience.



## Chef Joseph Asfour

A Master Chef for Peace



Whenever our instincts perform impulsively or compulsively to impress others, we take extreme measures to fulfill that task. In ten words or less: "Through good food and drink you can impress almost everyone."

I was born in Jerusalem in 1965 and have been a member of Chefs for Peace since 1999. Raised and educated in Jerusalem, I gained my knowledge through training courses that range from quality management for hotels and restaurants to marketing management, human resource development, and courses in food and beverage, where I developed my own style. Currently, I am executive chef at the Legacy Hotel in Nazareth.

Having gained knowledge of Irish, German, French, Palestinian, and other cuisines and developed a special style in the preparation and delivery of food, I treat cooking as an art. This has paved the road for me to be an executive chef who has cooked for many world leaders, including the late President Yasser Arafat, current President Mahmoud Abbas, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Pope John Paul II, and a countless number of dignitaries and VIPs.

My expertise helped me to found Darna Restaurant in Ramallah, work for Angelo's Restaurant, the Red Crescent Society, Ashtar theater in Ramallah, the French restaurant at Notre Dame of Jerusalem

Center, and Rossini's Restaurant near Jaffa Gate before I moved on to seek a more challenging environment and train cooks. I have taught the art of cooking at Notre Dame for more than two decades, and also work at King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The cooks whom I trained are a diverse group that range from those who served the president to former prisoners from Israeli prisons.

My travels in the Middle East, Europe, North America, Australia, and Canada have shaped my many unique means and methods of preparation and delivery of food and beverage. I hope to leave a stamp of my own and be recognized as a chef who made a difference in the food industry and improved the standards of both cooks and food preparation.

My favorite dish is *beit-al-kila* (loin and filet of lamb), stuffed with minced meat and a variety of herbs.



## Chef Ahmad Ashayer

Passion and Dedication



As a professional executive chef who specializes in Middle Eastern cuisine, my experience has taught me how to successfully run a kitchen. My journey started from home; my passion for cooking was fostered from a young age by a family of executive chefs. I started by earning my certificate from The Young Chefs of Israel Association in 1992, after which I graduated from Herzliya's Tadmor Hotelier School.

During my 33 years of experience directing kitchens as an executive chef, I had the honor of opening several restaurants, such as the ones in Legacy Hotel - Jerusalem, National Hotel - Jerusalem, and Ambassador Boutique in Jerusalem. I was also the executive chef at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Jerusalem and the Intercontinental in Jericho.

Today, I am the executive chef at the Ambassador Hotels Collection. My scope of work includes designing all menus and changing offerings frequently to keep the dining experience fresh. My main signature dish is the traditional Palestinian sayadiyeh with fish and other seafood served on

rice. I also love working with dough, making fresh bread, pasta, and more. The menus I create continue to have a few of my signature dishes, but items change at least monthly to keep guests returning for the latest dishes I create with my staff – all prepared with the freshest of ingredients in kitchens with the highest standards of hygiene.

Part of my job is also to supervise a team of dedicated kitchen staff, ensuring that we work well together to prepare food stations, dishes, and appetizers. My kitchen is always well-run and consistently delivers high-quality meals in a timely and cost-effective manner to keep guests satisfied.

Being a great chef is more than being able to cook. It starts with a passion and leads to dedication to customers and their overall enjoyment. I hope one day to open my own restaurant, and I look forward to serving you amazing food.



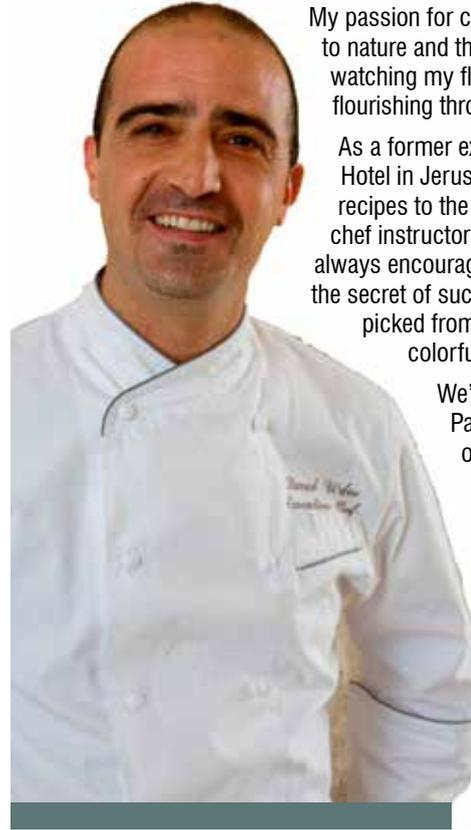
## Chef David Dides

Respect for the Earth

Ever since I was a child, when my mother served us delicious food at table, I was the first of my siblings to smell the food before starting to eat. As I grew up, I started to understand more about the concept of food and cooking; how ingredients blend together.

My passion for cooking fit well with my connection to nature and the earth. I started gardening and watching my flowers, fruits, and herbs blooming and flourishing throughout all the seasons.

As a former executive chef at the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem, I was asked to add organic recipes to the menu according to seasonality. As a chef instructor at Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, I always encouraged young cooks and taught them that the secret of success is to present food with produce picked from the garden and served fresh and colorfully.



We're lucky that the seasons here in Palestine offer chefs a vast variety of fruits, vegetables, and meats to add to their menu. Summer, for instance, offers refreshing fruits and herbs such as French figs with green za'atar. Winter offers root vegetables such as beetroot, which goes perfectly with a touch of smoked salmon. Green lentils and spinach blend perfectly with citrus fruits.

My dream is to convince and try to teach people to get back to the earth, to protect and respect it.

My goal is to open a small gourmet restaurant that seats only 25 people and offer organic products – simple, colorful, and tasty.



## Chef Johnny Goric

Fusing Traditional Palestinian Cuisine with World Food

I'm Aramaic and was born and raised in the Old City of Jerusalem. I speak eight languages and enjoy playing percussion. My life's passion, however, is cooking. From 2009 until 2021, I was executive chef of the Legacy Hotel chain with venues in Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Haifa.

My concept is to fuse our local cuisine with new techniques and elements of cuisines from around the world to offer a high-quality, unique dining experience. I like to cook with one ingredient, presenting it in different textures. For instance, one of my dishes is a five-texture eggplant carpaccio. My passion for cooking stems from the fulfillment it gives me to serve people food and drink and share my life story and experience with them.

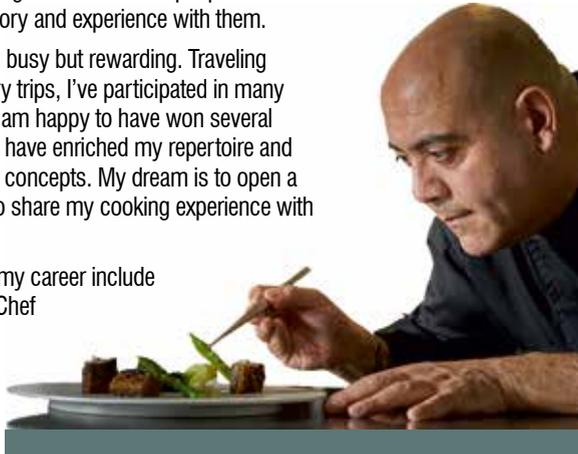
My career has been busy but rewarding. Traveling the world on culinary trips, I've participated in many competitions – and am happy to have won several awards. These trips have enriched my repertoire and exposed me to new concepts. My dream is to open a cooking academy to share my cooking experience with young students.

Some highlights of my career include obtaining a Master Chef Diploma and medal from England, establishing and heading the Culinary Hospitality

Academy in Ramallah, and being guest judge at the TOP CHEF program in Dubai.

I was executive chef at Jericho's Intercontinental Hotel and Resort, am a member of the prestigious international Chaîne des Rôtisseurs association, was part of the Chefs for Peace team, and participated in many international culinary competitions. In May 2013, I won the silver and bronze medals in the Ultimate Chef Challenge in Thailand. In September 2012, I participated in the American Culinary Diplomacy Program, an initiative of Michele Obama. At the 10th Gastronomy Festival in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2012, I won the silver medal in the individual competition and the bronze medal in the team category. Other competitions where I won medals include the Villeroy and Boch Culinary World Cup in Luxembourg, the open-air cooking competition in Bucharest, Romania, and the second Palestinian culinary arts cooking competition. I also represented Palestine and took first prize at the 2007 World Couscous Festival.

I am humbled to have cooked for kings and leaders of the world, including King Abdullah of Jordan, President Arafat, President Rabin, Shimon Peres, President Clinton, President Chirac, Prince William, President George W. Bush, and many more.



## Chef Haig Hagopian

Culture, the Art of Cooking, Food Science, and Social Gatherings: A Daily Necessity?

Ever since my younger years, I have had a passion for exploring various gourmet cuisines. My journey started when I obtained a four-year cooking and hospitality degree in Cyprus that was also associated with practical experience in the hospitality sector. This was followed by a two-year advanced degree in San Francisco.

Upon my return home, it seemed that destiny landed me at the Armenian Patriarchate where I was entrusted with the task of reorganizing the dwindling food and beverages operation for clergy, seminarians, pilgrims, and tourists.

It was a challenge that was well worth the effort, as this period also helped me gain considerable experience in the local hospitality market. Private catering along with restaurant consultation are also part of my acquired skills.

Three years ago, I was invited to Chartres, France, for a food exhibition organized by the French Chefs' Association, where I had to introduce an authentic Armenian dish. ԹԹՎԻԿ (topig), a complex vegetarian roulade that is very popular during Christmas and Easter, was my choice: pine nuts, onions, and currants in a tahini sauce are served in a wrap made

of garbanzo beans and drizzled with lemon juice. During the preparation process, I was struck by the hard-to-ignore artistic capabilities and perfectionism of two young men. Being an instructor at the Notre Dame Academy and an accredited food critic, I could clearly see the gap between international students and our own students at home when it comes to passionate cooking.

I have participated as an Armenian culinary ambassador in several international events and competitions to present our cuisine to the outside world.

I believe that our Ministry of Education should invest more in the hospitality sector to support the people who have chosen this very refined career. In a country where tourism provides a key income, we need optimal results. The preservation of our proud and rich Palestinian cuisine, with its vast variety of ingredients, requires more proactive and systematic investment in the future generation. Unfortunately, the art of cooking in this country does not receive the respect it deserves.





## Chef Fadi Kattan

Celebrating Local Products, Honoring Nature's Abundance

Growing up in Bethlehem, I fell in love with cooking in the kitchen of Julia, my late maternal grandmother, and around the table at the house of Nakhleh, my paternal grandfather. At home, my parents gave me the chance to learn the art of hospitality and the appreciation of good food that I cherish not only at home but also abroad.

I started my restaurant Fawda in the attempt to modernize Palestinian cuisine while celebrating the beauty of our local produce and sharing a very personal take on our dishes. My passion is for local products: the khobeizeh and moloukhiyeh of Jericho, the awassi lamb and the laban jameed of Hebron, the olive oil of Beit Jala, and the freekeh of Jenin! I have heard that a rumor circulates that I always travel with a bit of sumac on me...

I don't have a particular dish that fills me with pride. I am proud every time customers leave their dining table feeling happy; I am proud every time someone watches my YouTube series Teta's Kitchen and reaches

out with his/her grandmother's story; I am proud each time I see my mother and father's eyes shining with happiness over a new dish I've created. I take pride in every dish that makes a guest discover our Palestinian cuisine, every episode of Teta's Kitchen that made a viewer long for Palestine, every recipe in an article published in This Week in Palestine that inspires someone to start cooking Palestinian flavors.

My dream is to find that Palestinian food is celebrated everywhere, in harmony with its roots, its stories, and the fabulous artisans that make it possible every day. My dream is to see Palestinian chefs honor our local terroir here and abroad, simultaneously celebrating the local produce of where they are and Palestinian flavors. My dream is to witness the development of a broad awareness within the Palestinian hospitality industry regarding food waste and to see us craftspeople in the field be the pioneers who tackle this issue together.



## Chef Abdelkarim Shamasneh

Creativity and Innovation

I was born in 1966 into a family that can boast of many professionals in the culinary field. Numerous members of my extended family have worked in or still are heads of kitchens in restaurants and hotels throughout Palestine. I made my professional debut in 1985 at the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem.

During my career, I took cooking courses both locally and in Switzerland and Italy. I am proud to have won first prize at the Chef of Palestine competition in 2006 and to have been chosen to participate in representing Palestine in food festivals in Italy, Britain, and Austria.

I consider culinary skills a profession that combines art with the sense of taste. This creative craft also involves the pleasure of making others happy by offering a variety of well-presented dishes in artistic ways that satisfy the taste of our guests beyond their expectations. As cooking is my passion, I take pleasure in spending time in the kitchen to work with my hands and follow up on every little detail, which includes quality control, cleanliness, and ensuring diversity in what is offered in dishes that include appetizers, salads, soups, main courses, and desserts. Creativity and innovation are essential in my work. I engage with full attention and passion to make all my dishes special. My signature lies in creativity and presentation. I do what I love and love what I do.

I consider the event that took place in Austria in which I represented Palestine and prepared a menu for 250 ambassadors to be a milestone in my career. I'm very proud of this gala dinner, particularly because it was a smashing success at all levels.

Finally, my dream is not personal but rather relates to the general profession that in my opinion does not receive what it deserves in terms of support and encouragement. For example, I wish that our government authorities would take the initiative to better support the culinary arts and food science profession and do a proper classification.





## Chef Agustin Shomali

A World Master Chef

I am a Palestinian-Spanish chef. My career in the gastronomy industry started upon my graduation from Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center. I then went on to spread my passion for cooking through hosting several radio and television cooking shows at local Palestinian media outlets, while I was also teaching the art of cooking at various schools and universities. I took

my passion for cooking to work at several restaurants and institutions in Palestine and the Canary Islands, my mother's homeland. I am currently the food and beverage manager and executive chef at Ararat Hotel in Bethlehem.

My diverse background led me to integrate this East-West diversity into my cuisine and into the techniques that I use, which include a fusion of traditional Palestinian cuisine with various global techniques and flavors. My food palette has been greatly enhanced by the cooking courses that I took in countries such as Italy and France that added an international twist.

The highlights of my career include cooking for many high-profile people, such as Pope Francis and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. And I am humbled to be the first Palestinian member of the World Master Chefs Society.

Through my work in the gastronomy industry, I aspire to spread awareness of the richness of Palestinian cuisine throughout the world while also playing a role in enhancing the standards of the cuisine globally.



## Chef Tareq Taha

Combining Tradition and Modernity

I was born and raised in Jerusalem in a house where preparing food is an expression of love. I'm the son of a dedicated mother whose food is nothing less than divine and a father who's a second-generation hummus maker.

Growing up, I never thought of cooking as a future profession. I always wanted to be a designer or an artist. After finishing high school, a coincidence led me to Bethlehem University, and in 2010 I graduated with a degree in hotel management. During my studies, I remember how I fell in love with cooking and pastry arts, and from that moment I decided to take this to the next level. I started following my dream to become a professional chef. I applied to Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center culinary school to get professional training. I started my first job in pastry then moved to the kitchen and worked as a cook for a few years followed by professional cooking and pastry courses in Jerusalem and France. A series of random experiences from teaching to consulting to menu development helped me develop my skills. At the age of 28, I got my first job as a head chef.

Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to work alongside some respected chefs such as Ibrahim Abu Seir, Johnny Goric, and Joseph Asfour. My passion for cooking has mixed with my pastry skills, and I've developed a style of cooking that combines tradition and modernity, highlighting vegetarian and vegan Palestinian dishes. One of my

signature dishes is fried kubbeh topped with lemon caviar; another is crispy tabbouleh served over puffed rice paper.

This year I participated as a contestant in Top Chef, one of the biggest cooking shows in the Arab World, and I took third place.

My dream as a chef is to put modern Palestinian cuisine on the culinary world map. On a personal level, I dream to travel the world.