

MammaG's

PIZZA AND PASTA CAFÉ

A friendly, family restaurant with excellent food, alfresco dining and a great atmosphere; MammaG's in Ballito is the talk of the town. Having opened only four months ago, MammaG's has already served more than 8 000 pizzas to locals and holidaymakers alike and the orders just keep rolling in!

When owner Hugo Palacio, his wife Carla and their three children moved to Ballito a year and a half ago, they had no idea that they would open what was to become one of the busiest and most talked about pizza and pasta spots on the North Coast. But that is exactly what they did.

The history

Born in Argentina, Hugo moved to South Africa in 1989 when he was 21. With only \$80 in his pocket and not knowing a word of English, Hugo took up a job as a "pizzaiolo" or pizza-maker at an Italian restaurant in Pretoria. He soon became one of the most sought-after pizzaiolo's in town. "I would put on a show for people, throwing the dough in the air, and my seafood pizza and lunchtime paninis were very popular." Hugo moved to Johannesburg in 1991, where he spent the next four years working in different Italian restaurants. He took up the position of general manager at the Fish Monger in Bedfordview in 1995, where he spent the next nine years. It was here that Hugo met his wife Carla. The couple was married in 1999. In 2006 Hugo became a shareholder in Doppio Zero, one of the most popular Italian restaurants in Johannesburg.

A year later, after toying with the idea of immigrating to Spain, the couple decided to relocate to Ballito, where they had spent many family holidays. Hugo opened the Latta Lounge at NK Interiors in December 2007 but soon realized it wasn't right for him. MammaG's opened in January 2009, and they haven't looked back since! Asked why he decided to open a pizza and pasta café, Hugo says he just knows the industry so well. "I spent most of my career in Italian restaurants." He also says that he and Carla and their three children, Lorenzo (9), Lucciano (8) and Giovanna (4) live a

very 'continental' lifestyle. "We live a very European lifestyle in terms of the way we eat, dress and live. Food is also a very important part of our lives, and we love eating together as a family."

The food

Having worked in so many restaurants over the years, Hugo says the most important thing he has learnt is that you cannot compromise on quality. You have to only fresh, a-grade ingredients and that's exactly what Hugo does. The portions are big and hearty and everything is prepared fresh every time you order. With a wide selection of gourmet pizzas, salads, pastas and paninis it's hard to know what to order. Look out for these pizza favourites: Augustino - with bacon, feta, baby spinach, olives and avocado; the Zule-Zule - with bacon, ham, salami and onions; and the Moz and-Biki - with peri-peri grilled chicken, pepperdew, coriander and avocado. The exquisite pasta selection is very popular. Try the Penne Con Follo - with chicken, mushrooms, cream and Napoletana sauce; Mateo's - with grilled beef, wild mushroom, pepper and cream; and the Primo - with olive oil, rosa tomatoes, haloumi, basil, sage and garlic. Yum! Kids' pizzas are quick and easy, and for just R35 they get to choose their two favourite toppings! And the pizzas are not small! For a light meal, try one of Hugo's incredible Paninis on homemade Ciabatta bread or a scrumptious salad.

The vibe

Family comes first in the Palacio family and the name MammaG's is actually Hugo's dedication to the two women in his life - his wife Carla (the mamma) and 'G' for his only daughter, Giovanna. "We always go out together as a family and we wanted to create a place where people can relax, enjoy great food and alfresco dining and let the kids run free." MammaG's was initially intended to be just a small takeaway place with only two tables. After building the double

mouth wood burning pizza oven the restaurant started to take shape and Hugo saw the potential to have more tables. "We thought we'd increase it to 12 tables, now we have 20 and we need more on busy days!" The restaurant has a wonderful open, continental atmosphere and it's become somewhat of a "meeting spot" for locals. "We have to thank our local customers, who have made this business successful. It's great to see everyone walking around, chatting to different tables." Hugo says

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MammaG's is open Monday to Thursday from 11am to 9pm, Fridays and Saturdays until 9.30pm and Sundays and public holidays until 8pm and is situated at the Ballito Junction. Contact number: 032 946 2214.



LINGUINE CON POLLO AND CAJUN PASTA

(serves one portion)

Ingredients

1 x 150g chicken breast fillet
50ml Olive oil
A knob of butter
½ teaspoon Cajun spices
½ teaspoon fresh chopped garlic
Black pepper to taste
150ml fresh cream
200g linguini pasta
50g grana padano

Method

Boil water and cook the pasta first. Cut chicken breast fillet in strips and add Cajun spices. Put olive oil in a pan, warm to medium heat, add butter and garlic and after a few seconds add chicken strips and black pepper. Seal until brown and crispy. Add fresh cream and let it reduce for five minutes on a low heat. Add a touch of Cajun spices to the cream. Once cooked add pasta into the pan and toss with cream for another two minutes. Add a pinch of salt, black pepper and grated grana padano.

