



FOODIVA

39-year-old Samantha Wood launched her restaurant review blog in 2011.

When did you first begin to think of yourself as a foodie? I've always been passionate about food thanks to my parents' jobs in the hospitality industry. I then had a career in hospitality PR, developing a good sense for what makes or breaks a dining experience, and I always search out a good restaurant to the point that my life is meaningless without great food!

What prompted you to write a food blog? I felt there was a gap in Dubai for an online resource dedicated to impartial restaurant reviews. I pay my own way, refuse freebies and hope to have now narrowed that gap!

Do you have a favourite Dubai restaurant? Can I have two please? La Petite Maison at DIFC ticks all the boxes – food, location, interior and atmosphere. It's pricey but worth every dirham. At the other end of the scale, Bu'Qtair, a hidden beach shack, serves the most exquisite fresh fish cooked Keralan style. Cheap, cheerful and clean.

Do you have a pet hate when it comes to the eating out experience? Two! Nagging, over-attentive or submissive service and removing one or two diner's plates before the whole table have finished their meal.

How do you deal with getting recognised in restaurants? My reviews tend to focus on newly opened restaurants so it's rare, but if I do get recognised, I make it clear in the review that my cover's been blown so my readers can make their own informed decision.

What would you like to see more of on Dubai's food scene? Dubai restaurants invest in the highest calibre of chefs, knowledgeable sommeliers and no-expense-spared decor, but sadly, service is an ongoing challenge with poor menu knowledge, inconsistency and constant upselling, not helped by a lack of sufficient training. There are only a handful of restaurants here that get this right.

Do you cook a lot at home and, if so, what sort of food do you most enjoy cooking? I cook at home a couple of times a week and am a sucker for trying out new recipes. Because I eat out a lot, my home cooking tends to be reasonably healthy and carb free. Recently, I've fallen in love with concocting Moroccan tagines.

What three ingredients are always in your fridge? Free-range eggs, a selection of cheese, Greek yoghurt and I really need a fourth... bubbles, of course!

What's your biggest culinary guilty pleasure? Homemade Swiss cheese fondue.