

Being paid to travel the world eating fancy food and drinking wine: The story of Maria Massoura

The story of Maria Massoura is one of perseverance, the constant need to push the bar higher and higher, of never being content staying in the same spot in life and so always on the hunt for new limits to break. A specialist, journalist, writer, and consultant in the sophisticated field of wine, Maria is thriving in an industry many would dream of breaking into. Despite having both a bachelor's degree in linguistics from the University of Lancaster and a master's in arts management from the City University of London, she is still continuing her education with the infamously tough WSET level 4, the Wine Spirit and Education Trust qualification is something highly sought after in the world of wine, and something she is most proud of, further collecting qualifications like they're going out of fashion.

As Maria enters the lecture room, she exudes an air of confidence; there's no space for hesitation nor apprehension. Dressed in double denim, sporting khaki green shoes and an apple watch, she sits by the desk and regales with tales of her life.

To those with even a small interest in wines and spirits, perhaps considering delving into the world of the cosmopolitan connoisseur, Maria is one to follow, an example of success through years of late nights, hard work, and the building of a reputation in a field which many struggle to enter.

Maria claimed to have always drunk wine with food, and so the career choice she entered into became sort of a vocational choice, with her parents giving her the freedom to be whoever she wanted to be. This humble beginning in her thriving career has spawned different favourite wine and food pairings like shiraz with dark chocolate or what may be considered quirky by some, champagne and triple fried fries, showing that even people in highly regarded stations such as hers, there is space for a whimsical nature.

Many may want to learn more about the world of wines and spirits, but it is a daunting industrial giant that may put some off just by the thought. Maria helpfully had some tips for the novice connoisseur; for example, for someone wanting to learn how to develop a penchant for tasting, she suggests not brushing one's teeth or eating egg or asparagus before tasting wines or spirits, as this can interfere with the flavour profiles. Also, should one wish to get into wine tasting, start with simple dry wines and get yourself used to the smells and tastes, then progress from there. Any talent, no matter how small in the start, grows through small steps and nurturing.

Maria has been in the travel, food, wine, and spirits writing industry since 2006. She worked for two years as a journalist doing lifestyle interviews, and then for nearly nine years, she worked co-editing travel guides for Time Out Cyprus. After leaving her job as a co-editor, Maria started a blog named The Wonder Notes, where, to this day, she discusses food, wine, and travel.

In 2018, she was recruited by Vassos Eliades Ltd as a wine specialist and developer. Vassos Eliades is a big name for those interested in wine and spirits, being one of the largest companies in Cyprus with a history spanning 120 years and a constantly developing wine section, boasting 16 wineries in Greece, Italy, Cyprus, and France. Maria spoke about how Vassos Eliades found her through her work in different publications, such as Taste Magazine, of which she worked as editor-in-chief from 2015-2016. Working as a writer for these different publications, even working freelance for two years, helped to spread her image as one knowledgeable in the world of wines and food.

Maria claims her job is her hobby, and it's easy to see why, being constantly flown to different destinations around the world, being paid to eat and drink the finest cuisines and then write about them, it is a position many would desire and one that does not come easily. As Maria mentioned

when asked about the skills involved, one must be good at writing and blogging to be considered. She reminisced on the other amazing experiences she has had a part in, like being flown to Scotland to review high-quality scotches like Glenfiddich and Glengoyne. You need to have a certain level of talent in both tasting and writing to do something like that. As well as being a skilled writer, she also mentioned how she had to train her taste palate over the years. She was not born an anatomical 'super taster' as some are born with denser taste buds, and so she had to hone her skills over years of practice, learning to taste and assess the qualities of different wines.

Being someone who has travelled the world, written travel guides, consulted for the UN, and is known in restaurants and wineries across the globe, Maria has two places she loves above the rest: New York and India. Maria spoke about how, in New York, everything is there; the concrete jungle is often reputed for being the centre of Western civilisation, and for someone as well-travelled as Maria, it's a no-brainer to be a favourite. When it comes to India, Maria spoke about the massive culture shock. While she loves the country, she spoke about many of the things she would see there that were shocking to the eyes, like how many people made a living as beggars and would sometimes break their own bones in order to look more convincing.

Maria Massoura is the prime example of a life led by success, described by acquaintances as knowledgeable and by friends as caring; she believes that both a strength and weakness of her personality is that she is a perfectionist. Which perhaps has guided many of the decisions in her life, leading her to the desirable one she is in now. In the future, she wishes to continue with her WSET to attain a level of qualification only held by a fraction of the population. She also stated that she could maybe see herself one day moving to Madrid, whilst there perhaps opening a bar, but she sees that as more of a hypothetical pipe dream than an actual aspiration. She also wishes to develop her palate further and mentioned how she would like to get into trying more experimental wines. The level of life and career success Maria has ground to through years of nurturing a growing reputation is one to admire. As she said herself in regard to the many achievements she has made, 'it doesn't happen unless you make it happen'.

18/01/22