



## Maria's Cheesecakes A Taste of Business for Transformation

**Maria Perdue is an American who loves to bake. But she never imagined she would become a successful businesswoman in Istanbul. Now she makes cheesecakes based on her mum's recipe and customers travel for hours to visit her shop.**

Istanbul is a huge, sprawling city with a lot of charm. It has a fascinating history (even the Vikings were here!) and it is beautifully situated at the Bosphorus. I took the ferry across the continents, from Europe to Asia, and from there a noisy bus to the very outskirts of the 12 million people strong city. An hour and a half later we arrived in the village where Maria lives and works.

Technically Turkey is a secular state and many parts of Istanbul certainly have a Western European feel, albeit with an oriental touch. But the Islamic influence is nevertheless real and tangible. The village where Maria has her café is relatively Muslim and conservative.

“In the beginning some were suspicious, wondering who we were and what we were up to. Some even tried to chase us and our customers away”, says Maria.

A neighbouring shop even had a sign up warning people to not buy any cheesecakes “from the evil missionary”. But Maria kept running the café. Her kindness, integrity, professionalism and – of course – her tasty products made her gradually accepted and now she is respected part of the community.

Sure, Maria is a follower of Jesus – she has never tried to hide that fact. But she is a businesswoman with a passion to serve her customers and suppliers, her staff and the community where she lives.

She has three women employees, all dressed conservatively and covered. Maria is considering hiring a fourth woman. Her business is thriving.

“I speak openly and frankly with my staff, telling them I have two hats: On the one hand I am a friend and colleague. But I also need to put on the other hat at times; the businesswoman and CEO. You need both to be able to both care for staff but also succeed as a business”, says Maria. “And if the company doesn't prosper it will be detrimental also for my employees.”

The small and cosy cafe has an interior design which is quite exquisite. It is also very clean! Her business has three main revenue sources: the biggest is take-out; the second is other bakeries selling her products and thirdly people eating in.

Turkish media has recognised her products and cafe. Just before my visit a Turkish TV-team had been there. The large Turkish daily *Hürriyet* wrote: *With her cheesecakes Maria uses all natural products, no additives, leaving you as light in the head as the creation itself. The cherries and strawberries from their own garden make each bite sublime and the sauces are the stuff of Black Sea lore.*

Maria's Cheesecakes is a respected brand name which gradually is becoming more known. The bulk of her customers travel from afar to buy her delicious cakes. The influx of people also benefits other businesses in the village.

