

# SHISHA MASTERS

THE EUROPEAN SHISHA COMMUNITY ALLIANCE MAGAZINE



**MINA FATIH FAKIR**  
OWNER OF MARIINSKI  
LOUNGE

**REINA DEL SUR**  
ANDALUSIAN SHISHA

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**Shisha lounges have always been at the heart of shisha history and culture. They are places where people gather to relax, catch up with friends and to meet new people. This month we speak to Mina Fatih Fakir, owner of Mariinski Lounge in Fuengirola, and one of the few female lounge owners in Spain.**

**Tell me about your early life. Where did you grow up?** I was born and raised in Morocco and at the age of 18 I moved to Syria.

**When did you move to Spain and why?** I came to Spain when I was 22 years old in 1987. My passport was about to expire, so I wanted to make the most of it and go abroad, to look for a better and more peaceful life, with more opportunities as a woman.

**Do you remember the first shisha flavour or product that you ever tried?** I was in a family meeting in Syria the first time I tried shisha. I cannot remember the exact flavour as it was a long time ago, but I believe it was a sweet and fruity flavour.

**How do you decide what type of shisha you will order?** It varies according to the season but currently I am more drawn to sweet and fruity flavoured shisha.

**What is your favourite shisha flavour and why?** Shisha can be mixed with so many different flavours. Therefore, I don't have a permanent favourite shisha flavour but I love menthol, so we use blends like "a mixed salad", to make them fresher. Our menu is made with our own flavours using blends.

**When and why did you decide to get into the shisha business?** Actually, it was a spontaneous decision due to the growth in popularity of shisha in 2016.



**How would your colleagues or employees describe your business and management style?** We always say that we consider ourselves a big family and welcome our clients as if they were at home.

**How did you manage to survive the pandemic?** Unfortunately, I didn't survive it as well as I would have liked. I was forced to close one of my two businesses due to the crisis which was extremely difficult for me.

**If you could choose any company or business person in the world, which one do you admire the most? And why?** There are countless people and companies that I admire for their dedication and hard work. I really admire young people, like my 23-year-old son, who is studying his degree and has also started his own business. He is the spark for new ideas, about flavours and new creations.

**What are your goals in your personal life?**

To grow as a person and to make life easier for my family.

**What challenges have you faced when setting up your business?** On a daily basis I face several adversities that hindered the growth of the business, among others the absurd laws regarding shisha use in Spain. Hookah is frowned upon by a large part of the population, there is a lot of ignorance, they confuse shisha with a joint or alcohol and often politicians are not informed and legislate wrongly.

**“WE ALWAYS SAY THAT WE CONSIDER OURSELVES A BIG FAMILY AND WELCOME OUR CLIENTS AS IF THEY WERE AT HOME”**

**What is the secret to being successful in the shisha world?** This applies across the board but being disciplined in everything we do. In particular, it is crucial to maintain very high standards and be consistent with our work. It's so important to learn and improve everyday.

**What would you recommend to someone who wants to get started in the shisha business?** My biggest advice would be to be very cautious with the basic rules of the business. Understand the law and get expert help if you need it.

**What changes have you made to your business strategy over the last few years?** We are constantly developing and innovating to offer the best possible customer experience.

**What is unique about your business?**

We offer a very relaxed atmosphere with a big typical Andalusian patio.

**What qualities do you look for in new employees?**

Discipline, punctuality and great customer service skills. All are key to being a good employee which is crucial for building a great and successful business.

**What is the secret to building loyalty with your regular customers?** Treat them as they deserve, be transparent and offer loyalty cards, make them feel special and they will be loyal and come back to you.

**Why do you think shisha has become so popular?** Because it is a beautiful exotic tradition brought from the East with a great deal of culture and history.

**What three things you can't miss in your life?** Shisha, charcoal and tobacco molasses are essentials.

**What has been your most satisfying moment in the business?** When my customers are satisfied and I see them leaving with a smile on their faces. Our goal is that our customers have a good time with their friends and family. Seeing them return is when we know we're doing a great job.

**Why did you choose the name Mariinski Lounge for your business?** Next to me there is a Russian hotel, which was the former town hall. I was inspired and I thought about the Mariinsky theatre in St. Petersburg.

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**ESCA works to promote shisha and to educate the public and political leaders about the tradition of shisha and those who use it.**

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