



THE INSPIRING WOMAN

BEHIND SRI LANKA'S FIRST AUTHENTIC FRENCH BAKERY,

BAGUETTE FRENCH BAKERY; WHERE FRENCH TRADITION, FEARLESS REINVENTION, AND UNWAVERING RESILIENCE RISE TOGETHER IN EVERY LOAF

On International Women's Day, we celebrate women who do not simply follow opportunity but create it. Women who leave comfort behind, cross borders, and build something meaningful from vision alone. Nathalie Pujolle, founder of Baguette French Bakery in 2016, embodies that spirit of courage and reinvention. Raised in Nîmes, in the South of France, Nathalie grew up in a family where food was sacred. Meals were not rushed, they were gatherings. Fresh produce came from the family garden. Grapes were harvested for wine. Dishes like *garden de taureau* (bull wine stew) and *boillabaisse* (rockfish soup) were prepared days ahead for celebrations that stretched from noon into the evening.

”



Nathalie Pujolle
Founding Director
Baguette (Pvt) Ltd

Exquisite Jewellery by Raddella Jewellers



Yet her professional path began far from the kitchen.

For two decades, Nathalie built a corporate career in finance in Tokyo, a global culinary capital where service and innovation are unequalled elsewhere. The structure, discipline, and exposure to international business shaped her strategic thinking. But despite stability and achievement, she felt something missing. One morning, looking at herself in the mirror before work, she realised she could no longer trade passion for security. In her forties, she made a decision many fear to make: she chose to begin again. She enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu, a French culinary school established in 1895, immersing herself in the precision of French pastry. It was humbling to shift from executive to student, yet it reignited her creativity and reconnected her to her roots.

In 2015, she arrived in Sri Lanka determined to establish the country's first authentic French bakery. The early years were intensely challenging. Sourdough bread, with its crusty exterior and natural fermentation, was unfamiliar to customers used to softer loaves. Pure butter croissants were sometimes perceived as overbaked, because authentic butter produces a deep golden colour. Nathalie understood she was not just introducing products, but educating a market.

She built the business from scratch: creating supply

chains, hiring local staff able to handle French techniques, testing recipes repeatedly, and listening carefully to customer feedback without compromising authenticity. Starting with just two employees, Baguette French Bakery gradually grew into a team of over thirty, including franchise outlets. Nathalie credits her early production team, especially her first hired baker, for standing by her during uncertain years and for still working at Baguette French Bakery today. Their loyalty became the backbone of the brand. Also Nathalie is blessed to have immensely helpful and supportive Sri Lankan friends who have always been there throughout her journey. The love of food has brought her wonderful human experiences and lifetime friendships.

Her leadership style is collaborative and performance focused. She works closely with her team, setting high standards while remaining approachable. Integrity, innovation, and accountability guide her decisions. She believes a business is only as strong as the people within it.

Importantly, Nathalie has built Baguette French Bakery as a space where women are respected, valued, equally treated and remunerated, and encouraged to grow. Female employees are given opportunities to learn, lead, and advance. At Baguette French Bakery, growth comes from commitment and consistency. Those

who show dedication, take ownership of their responsibilities, and demonstrate loyalty to the vision are the ones who rise. Gender does not determine opportunity, effort and commitment do.

For Nathalie, economic independence is a powerful tool for women. She understands that when a woman earns, she gains not just income but dignity, security, and a stronger voice within her family and community. She fosters an environment where women feel safe, heard, and professionally respected, supporting them with flexibility and fairness, especially when balancing work and family.

As a foreign entrepreneur in a male-dominated industry, Nathalie faced unique challenges. She often felt seen first as an outsider before being recognised as a businesswoman, yet she never allowed that to define her. Over time, as the brand gained recognition and trust, respect followed. The pandemic tested her resilience deeply. When lockdowns restricted movement, she personally delivered bread across Colombo. It was more about honouring commitment than maintaining revenues.

Word of mouth strengthened the brand during this period, and many customers still remember those deliveries with gratitude.

Today, success means something very different to Nathalie than it did during her corporate years. It means self-financing expansion, and being invited for collaborations. Most importantly, it means watching Sri Lankan customers embrace authentic French quality, a high sense of customer experience and service. Looking ahead, her vision remains clear: she wants more people across the island to experience traditional French bakery craftsmanship while staying true to the values that built her brand.

On this Women's Day, Nathalie reflects on the power of work in shaping women's independence. She honours her mother, who survived wartime hardship, raised three children while working full time, and later became an entrepreneur. She also admires courageous French women like Lucie Aubrac or Marcelle Henry, whose bravery during the Resistance symbolised quiet but unshakeable strength.

Her message to Sri Lanka is sincere: educate daughters and encourage them to work. Economic independence strengthens families and society.

Baguette French Bakery is more than a bakery. It is the story of a woman who dared to reinvent herself, who built a business through discipline and heart, and who continues to uplift women as she rises.

By Raviesha Ranathunge

Bonjour

Baguette

French Bakery & Café

Est. 2016

Authentic Artisan French Bakery

Sourdough Bread & Pastry Specialist

Sourdough Benefits

Blood glucose regulation thanks to natural fermentation

Better digestibility

Prebiotics & gut health

Better absorption of vitamins and minerals

A better choice for diabetics especially brown sourdough bread

French Pastry

100% Pure butter

All hand made

31 Queens Rd Col 03
011 258 2502
077 730 2922

321 Matara Rd Galle
091 223 9675
077 172 3234

We supply businesses in Colombo and Galle area.

www.baguette.lk

Nathalie Pujolle
French Founding Director
Baguette Pvt Ltd