

BAPU HOSPITALITY, GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

Adding Ethnic Ingredients to the Menu

Introduction

BAPU Hospitality is a leading provider of Indian cuisine in Glasgow. With three restaurants in the city offering North Indian cuisine (The Dhabba), South Indian cuisine (Dakhin) and Asian Fusion Tapas (The Gate and Secret Garden), Bapu Hospitality offers guests a wide range of culinary choices. Both the Dhabba and Dakhin have received the Cultural Cuisine Excellence Award from the Scottish Tourist Board as well as awards from Toptable and the List Eating and Drinking Guide.

Since Nav Basi set up Bapu Hospitality in December 2002, his vision was to bring authentic Indian food and experience to diners in Glasgow. The three restaurants offer diners modern stylish décor with food cooked from fresh natural ingredients without artificial colours or flavourings. Food critics have lavished praise upon the authentic nature of the restaurants and the quality of the food. They describe a warm welcoming environment with high quality service from unobtrusive staff who are available to offer valuable advice and suggestions on menu choices. A recent initiative has been the BAPU Royalty Card offering diners 10% discount at all three restaurants and the opportunity to collect and redeem points for further discounts.

This case study examines the challenges faced by Nav Basi and BAPU Hospitality in recruiting restaurant staff from India. It explores the importance of staffing strategies in creating an authentic experience for customers. Difficulties in relation to work permits and home office regulations will be discussed. Two interviews were conducted with Nav Basi, Managing Director of BAPU Hospitality, and Joseph, Manager at the Dhabba and Dhakin. Both interviews were carried out at the Dhabba restaurant and lasted 45 minutes each.

Creating the Authentic Dining Experience: The Importance of Recruitment Strategies

For Nav Basi, creating an authentic dining experience required the hiring of chefs and waiting staff from across India. Indeed, Nav was concerned about whether Glasgow diners were ready for authentic Indian cuisine and whether this would lead to a successful business model. Nav notes that:

We were one of the first guys in Scotland to bring chefs from India to Glasgow, if not the first guys. It was already happening in London and we were looking for good top quality Indian chefs – it was a bit of a gamble as peoples' perceptions of Indian food was what they were used to, but something that you say is authentic may not be what the customers want. It may be that they want what they are used to. But people did like the authentic aspect to it and it has worked very well for us.

To resource all three restaurants, Nav recruits many of his staff directly from India. Having close links to particular hospitality networks and personal contacts is critically important in sourcing high quality skilled staff for the restaurants. Asked about the effectiveness of local recruitment outlets, Nav responds:

Recruitment comes through myself and staff members. Word of mouth is the best route – especially in the Indian restaurant field. You don't get any recruitment agency out there that caters for Indian restaurants – they are just catering recruiters – typically they are not very good. Monster.com are rubbish for us. S1 Jobs are rubbish for us. So, if you are looking for an Indian chef, you're not going to get a guy who's going to put his CV on Monster.com. It'll literally be word of mouth.

Adaptability, personality, language skills and positive working attitude are key traits looked for when interviewing new staff. A high level of English language proficiency is also important. Restaurant manager, Joseph profiles the employees recruited by BAPU Hospitality in the following terms:

We handpick staff in India. All the full-time members of staff are hand picked from India and hold at least 5 to 6 years experience with five star hotels. They are also all graduates from the Indian Institute of Hotel Management. The[ir] degree covers all different departments such as housekeeping, book keeping etc. It is difficult to recruit people of that pedigree here in the UK.

Language issues do not pose problems as the staff are fluent in English and most have previously been employed in 5 star hotels in India which cater to foreign guests. However, the overriding emphasis in the recruitment process is in looking for the best staff we can get, with particular emphasis placed upon experience. The success of this recruitment process can be seen in the fact that turnover is very small and there is a very stable permanent staff working in the business. As Nav pointed out, many staff have been with the business since it opened. Likewise Joseph pointed out that the people recruited by BAPU Hospitality in India remain loyal to the business and BAPU Hospitality enjoys a high level of customer retention and repeat business.

One challenge affecting the future of BAPU Hospitality has been changes to the Home Office regulations that apply to non-European nationals. Such changes could challenge the level of authenticity associated with the Dhabba and Dhakin in particular. As Nav points out:

The Home Office are becoming a lot more strict in the way they vet people. They are tarnishing everyone with the same brush – they have had issues with people abusing the system. However, as a business, we have an ideal structure to bring people in – but our expansion plans will depend upon the resources available to us – we cannot expand aggressively unless we can be assured we can get the staff we need quickly and easily. Its impossible unless this work permit thing gets sorted out.

Conclusion

This case study examines the challenges faced when recruiting staff from overseas. Creating an authentic dining experience has been central to the success of BAPU Hospitality and this success has been underpinned by recruiting chefs and waiting staff directly from India. Currently, BAPU Hospitality benefits from its ability to hire highly-qualified and highly-experienced staff and this has resulted in a high level of customer service and customer retention. Future growth and development at BAPU Hospitality will depend upon the continued ability to source highly qualified Indian staff. However, changes to Home Office rules on immigration means that BAPU Hospitality face some difficult challenges moving forward and expanding.

