



# Leading Lights

Rani Singh, Special Assignments Editor

## The Flying Chef Patron for whom the Sky's the Limit!

44-year old Chef-Patron Sabbir Karim has created two acclaimed Indian restaurants in London, Salaam Namaste and Namaaste Kitchen. Sabbir is a consultant, humanitarian and activist. Uniquely, he is also a Purser for British Airways' cabin crew. A British Bengali, he features in the 2013 British Bengali Who's Who.

Sabbir Karim took a Business Studies diploma at Southgate College, As cabin crew, Sabbir experienced lots of different dining situations. Travelling to Delhi, Bombay, Karachi, Lahore, Bangladesh, Mauritius and the far east, he became fascinated with the cuisine and culture of each territory he worked.

Sabbir's culinary arts are all self-taught though he did do a two-week crash course in cuisine with the chef at Delhi's historic Imperial Hotel. In London, he worked at the Red Fort and Chutney Mary restaurants. "In



Sabbir Karim

those days," he told me, he was "front of house and now I like to be much more face to face with customers."

By 2005, Sabbir knew enough of the culinary

world to open his own restaurant, Salaam Namaste. He devised the menu and the recipes but employed chefs- one of whom I met the night he was presented with Asian

and Oriental Innovative Chef of the Year 2013 at the Asian Curry Awards. In 2012, he was named Asian and Oriental Chef of the Year at the same event.

The success of this 'new sensation in Indian dining' gave Sabbir the confidence to open his second restaurant, Namaaste Kitchen, in 2010. Recently, the restaurant was named 'Best Newcomer.'

The combination of Sabbir's innovative stunning food, and the appointment of a team committed to top-notch customer service saw Namaaste Kitchen gain instant fame and recognition in the first year of opening. A raft of rave reviews appeared in ES Magazine, The Guardian, and Time Out. Legendary critics Matthew Norman and Fay Maschler loved it, with the latter claiming she was happy to pick up a personal tab!

The restaurant was acknowledged as the 'Critics Favourite - newly and critically acclaimed' and, in 2011, was nominated as a finalist for the 'Best Newcomer' at the prestigious British Curry Awards. In 2012, Sabbir introduced a 'regional food festival', presenting the finest dishes from a different Indian state each month to diners at both

Namaaste Kitchen and Salaam Namaste. The media took great interest, with glowing reviews emerging regularly.

Sabbir's restaurants really took off after they started receiving attention from critics. Food reviewers like the Guardian's Matthew Norman gave a nine out ten rating. The paper called Sabbir 'A maestro of modern and traditional Indian cooking' "This motivated me," said Sabbir, and so he

**"A maestro of modern and traditional Indian cooking" (The Guardian)**

started to focus more on the marination and cooking. Sabbir's gorgeous wife, Aneela, has a Pakistani background and this adds richness to Sabbir's culinary world. "I discuss a lot with Aneela," he told me. "This opens up another dimension."

But multi-skilled Sabbir is still flying with British Airways, and is the only flying chef patron I know. Every six weeks he takes two or three flights, but when the opportunity arises he likes to concentrate on his burgeoning restaurant group. London mayor Boris Johnson, councillors, and famous

faces are regularly to be seen at Sabbir's establishments.

Sabbir has been interviewed for international television and radio on, for instance, the BBC. The recipe for Sabbir's 'Peshawari lamb chops' appeared in the Sunday Telegraph alongside Prince William's wedding menu in the exclusive collectors' version of the publication. Last year's Olympics brought him lots of attention.

The chef is also involved with a number of charity projects. With BA, Sabbir was a UNICEF champion. He has worked with the Sreepur Project in Dhaka, and lends the support of both his restaurants to Action Against Hunger and Find your Feet's 'Curry for Change' campaign. He explained to me that he would like to introduce apprenticeship into his industry, and open a free school or institute for disadvantaged youngsters in Bangladesh.

Passionate about customer service and cooking, he would love to use his expertise to be a consultant to airlines, advising on menus and cooking. He certainly has enough experience to have become an in demand expert by now and will likely continue to soar as far as his ambition will take him.

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