

Curry life

www.currylife.uk

A night of celebration
to remember

A festive feast

**AN ICONIC
INSTITUTION**

Curry industry is an inspiration



**CURRYLIFE
A·W·A·R·D·S**



2022

SUNDAY

9th OCTOBER 2022

The Great Room

Grosvenor House London

86-90 Park Lane, London W1K 7TL

BIGGEST EVER CURRYLIFE AWARDS

Experience the most spectacular night in the British Curry Calendar !

Curry Life Awards and Gala dinner is the most important annual event of the Curry Industry. Excellence deserves recognition.

Don't forget to send a nomination for the Curry Life Awards 2022. Winning award could put you or your business in the national spotlight!

Send your nominations through WhatsApp now

CATEGORIES

EDITOR'S CHOICE

BEST RESTAURANT

BEST CURRY CHEF

BEST TAKEAWAY

BEST SUPPLIER

Name

Business Name

Address.....

.....Post Code.....

Mobile.....Email.....

For further details visit our website or send email : info@currylife.uk

Tel: 07956 588 777 or 07956 439 458

www.currylifeawards.com



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Celebrating industry achievements

The Curry Life Awards took place in October 2021, featuring an evening of celebration, entertainment and networking, alongside some delicious food and canapés. We've got some of the best pictures from the evening, a list of all the winners and a round-up of the best highlights from the event



04

Christmas Cheer

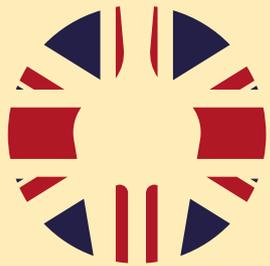
A number of Michelin-starred Indian restaurants are offering sumptuous feasts to mark the Christmas and New Year, with dishes including lobster flamed with cognac, Tandoori Masala Lamb Chop, clove-flavoured goose and slow braised lamb shoulder. Diners can also enjoy seasonal additions such as Scottish Blue Lobster



24

Past, present and future

Dilchad, located in the City of London, is celebrating its 60th anniversary next year. Restaurant owners the Choudhury family explain why the business is still going strong and recall the venue's political ties, its colourful history and the changing locale. They also highlight exciting plans for the future



BRITISH CURRY FESTIVAL 2022

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British Curry Festival 2022

The British Curry Festival is returning to Dhaka in Bangladesh, after 12 years with a five-day event showcasing a range of dishes from top chefs. The event will take place at the five-star InterContinental Dhaka, formerly known as Sheraton, in the last week of February 2022. A 'Michelin Laureate' chef will showcase the 'Best of British Regional Dishes' while fellow British Asian chefs will focus on recreating favourite curry dishes from Britain's high streets.



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World Curry Expo highlights

The World Curry Expo took place in October, running alongside the Curry Life Awards at the Royal Lancaster London. Our round-up features what visitors experienced on the day, feedback from suppliers and some of the best photos from the event.



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A passion for cooking

Jafor Solim Uddin has been a curry chef for more than three decades and loves creating new dishes and experimenting with the latest trends. He tells Curry Life how he is making his mark on The Fat Buddha restaurant and what continues to inspire him



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Bringing Bangladesh to London

Sonargaon restaurant in Whitechapel, east London is not just a place to enjoy traditional Bengali fare. The restaurant has established a reputation as the place to go to for catching up with friends or to unwind after some shopping in the local area. Its owners explain the restaurant's growing appeal

Curry life

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If you want to tell the world about your food, restaurant or success story in business, let us know. We will send our reporter and a photographer to feature this in any of our three publications, Curry Life, Curry Chef (Bengali) and World Food Life. Just send your name, restaurant name with contact

details. All our journals are distributed Free to 20,000 restaurants and takeaways across the UK. We aim to keep everyone in touch with new developments and best practice in the hospitality sectors - and provide a voice for the people who work in the food industry, i.e. restaurant owners to food suppliers and chefs. We can also let you know about our advertising opportunities in magazines from one-off ads to advertorial features.

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Resilience is key

As 2021 draws to a close, we are in a much stronger position than this time last year. With an ongoing drive with regards to booster jabs in the UK, and a high take-up of the vaccine, there is hope that the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic is behind us. The emergence of the Omicron variant, however, has taught us that we must always be prepared and that in the hospitality industry, nothing can be taken for granted.

As businesses gear up for the Christmas holiday season - traditionally the busiest time of the year, this new variant has already cast a shadow over festivities. As Curry Life went to press, figures were emerging pointing to how dining out in the UK is at its lowest level since May, when lockdown restrictions were easing. Data reported by the Office of National Statistics, using information from restaurant booking platform Open Table, show that the seven-day average estimate of UK seated diners fell by six percentage points in the week to 29 November 2021, to 111% of the level in the equivalent week of 2019; this is the lowest this figure has been since the week ending 17 May 2021.

Restaurants are also reporting a rise in cancellations for dine-ins and Christmas parties, as people exercise caution by opting not to socialise in large groups for the present time. It's a further blow for the hospitality industry, which is already under threat from staff shortages and rising inflation, while others say that Government support with regards to business rates does not go far enough.

Resilience is therefore key and as we head into 2022, the hospitality industry will need to demonstrate this now more than ever. We have learnt many lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic, but as this is such a fast-moving situation, flexibility and being able to adapt will also be crucial for businesses to survive next year and beyond.

Awards celebration

In October we had the opportunity to host the Curry Life Awards once again, after a two-year gap. It marked the second event we have been able to host this year, having previously held the Culinary Workshop in July. Hundreds from the industry joined us for a fantastic evening, where we were able to network once again face-to-face and celebrate some of the best restaurants and chefs in the curry industry.

We look forward to hosting the Awards in 2022 and we will be announcing some exciting changes to the existing format in the coming weeks, so watch this space! If you weren't able to join us on the night, you can read all about the Awards in this issue and enjoy some photographic highlights, as well as finding out about the World Curry Expo, which was held prior to the Awards. The Expo shone a light on suppliers and gave them the opportunity to network with industry colleagues once again. Feedback from this event has been very positive too and we welcome any further views our readers may have, so please get in touch if you have any suggestions!

Diversity is still a pressing issue

In our last issue, we reported on our disappointment at the lack of diversity in the newly-established Hospitality Council, which has not one single representative from the curry/ Indian/Bangladeshi restaurant industry. We wrote to Business Minister Paul Scully to express our disappointment and despite hearing back from a Government representative, we will continue to lobby for more diverse representation. The curry industry has a vital part to play in the UK economy and it is crucial that we are better represented, both now and in the future.



A Happy New Year to all our supporters

At Curry Life, we wish all our supporters a very merry Christmas and we hope that we can all enjoy a prosperous new year. We look forward to working with as many of you as possible in 2022.

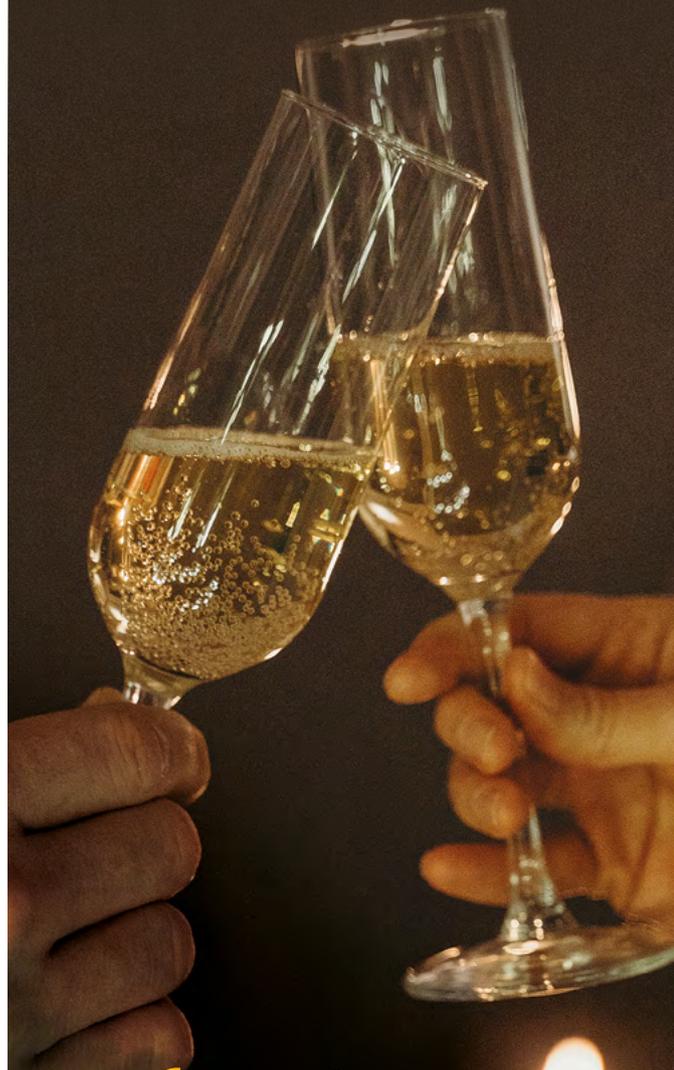
This time last year, we were hopeful of an end in sight with regards to the pandemic, but it goes without saying that 2021 has presented our industry with more than its fair share of challenges. And as we head into 2022, uncertainty around the pandemic continues to affect our sector and our lives.

But we are also looking back on this year with a sense of optimism. We have continued to champion the curry industry, shining a light on those restaurants, industry players and suppliers who contribute to such a vibrant sector. We were able to host not one, but three events - our Culinary Workshop, our Awards and the Curry Life Expo.

It was wonderful to see so many from the industry at these events - and many of Curry Life's supporters, and being able to meet once again in person. In the face of these adverse and uncertain times, we want to thank our supporters over the last year, and wish each and everyone of you a happy new year. We can't wait to work with as many of you as possible in 2022, and continue to champion excellence and innovation in the curry sector.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all of us at the Curry Life editorial team.





A festive Feast

Michelin-starred Indian restaurants are adding some seasonal cheer with indulgent Christmas and New Year's Eve menus

Benares in London's Mayfair is opening its doors for the first time on Christmas Day in 18 years, offering a Christmas Day Tasting Menu. The Michelin-starred feast, created by executive chef Sameer Taneja, features poppadoms, street snacks, winter truffle shorba, citrus marinated hand dived Scottish scallop tartlet, tawa masala wild halibut, mutton momo with winter vegetable, tandoori muntjac with garlic yoghurt and chilli chutney, iced sherbet and sealed and baked turkey biryani. If you have room for more after that, the dessert features rasmalai and petit fours.

Vivek Singh's The Cinnamon Club's Christmas Day menu offers a range of starters, with a sample example including king oyster mushroom, Kerala-style lobster flamed with cognac and char-grilled organic kingfish with carom seed and carambola pickle. For mains, choose from tasting of aubergine with sesame, tamarind and peanut, char-grilled wild Spencer Gulf king prawns, Alleppey curry sauce, pandan leaf rice. There's also Kokum crusted



Trishna Restaurant

halibut fillet, mangalore-style sauce and stir-fried broccoli and Tandoori chicken breast, stir-fried morels and smoked Hyderabad korma sauce. For Christmas with a twist, try the clove flavoured goose breast, Chettinad sauce and brussel sprout poriyal or slow braised lamb shoulder, nutmeg and peppercorn sauce, masala braised potato.

The 95-year old Veeraswamy



in Mayfair is offering three courses from the à la carte menu. This features dishes such as Spicy quail Kerala style, Lamb gilafi, sheekh kebab and Goan roast duck vindaloo. Sister restaurant Amaya, is open for lunch and supper on Christmas Day, offering a choice of eight menu items from the à la carte menu.

Michelin-starred chef Atul Kochhar, who was previously at Benares, is offering a New Year's Eve menu at Kanishka.

"The pandemic remains an ongoing threat to the industry but as a team we have been listening to our customers to deliver what will help them in this 'new normal'," he says. "This has meant focussing our efforts on experiences that bring people safely together to celebrate special occasions with family and friends."

With Kanishka focusing on the unexplored



Chef Atul Kochhar

cuisine from the 'Sister States' of India, which have their own legacy of rich culture and traditions, Kochhar believes special celebratory menus are an ideal way to showcase the dishes.

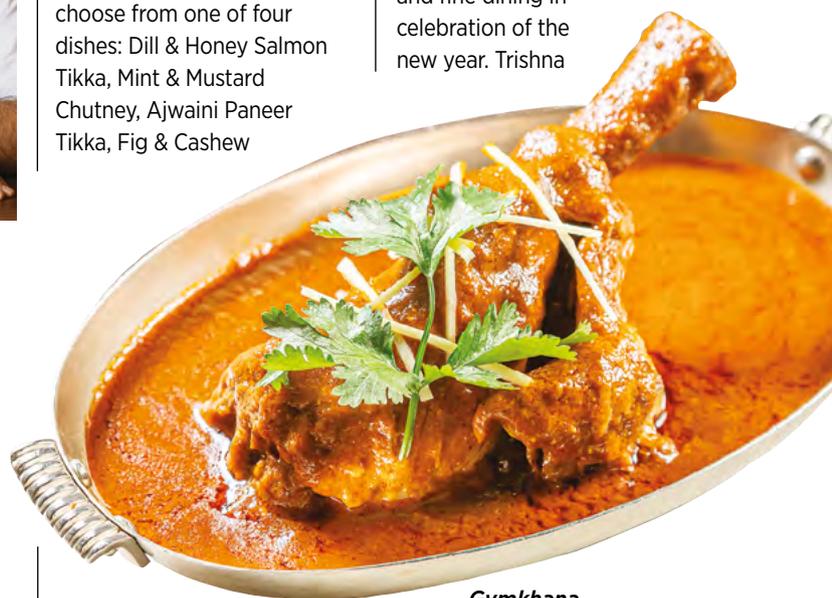
"These are places that are quite underrated, especially in terms of culinary skills," he says. "It's fascinating to dive into cooking styles and exquisite tastes because there are no end of surprises in the array of fresh flavours and ingredients from this stunning part of India."

Gymkhana and Trishna, both part of JKS Restaurants,

are offering New Year's Eve menus. The former's is a six-course tasting menu from executive chef Sid Ahuja, featuring Pappadum Selection, Shrimp Sorpotel & Nimbu Achaari Raita and Amritsari Lobster, Shrimps & Queenies, Dill Raita as starters. Diners can then choose from one of four dishes: Dill & Honey Salmon Tikka, Mint & Mustard Chutney, Ajwaini Paneer Tikka, Fig & Cashew

Mutter Korma. At Trishna, diners can indulge in Mallard Chutney Seekh, Tandoori Lamb Chops, Scottish Blue Lobster Cafreal and Cashew & Pepper Chicken.

JKS Restaurants said: "Gymkhana will host an evening of high society and fine dining in celebration of the new year. Trishna

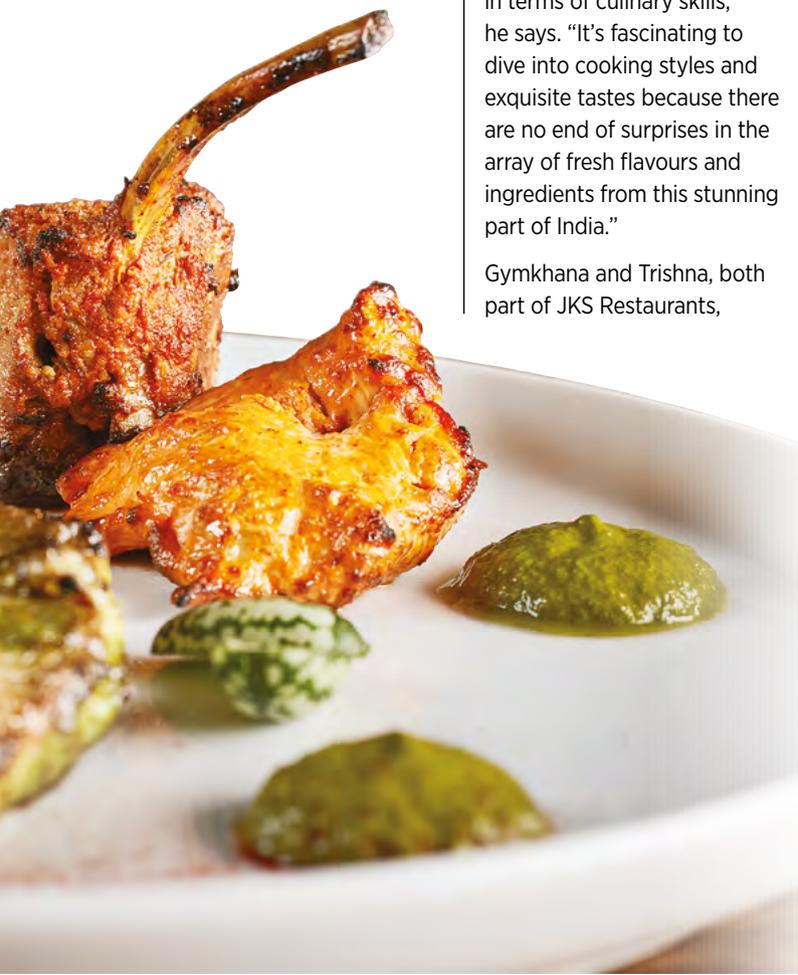


Gymkhana

Nut, Corn Chat, Tandoori Masala Lamb Chop, Kasundi Mustard & Mooli or Truffle Masala Bhaji, Pao.

For the next course there is Bhuna Muntjac Adraki or Chicken Butter Masalaor Kathal Biryani, Cucumber & Cumin Raita or Zafrani Guchi

is the perfect spot for an intimate dinner with friends to celebrate this festive season. Guests will choose from a selection of classics including Nandu Varuval and Tandoori Lamb Chops, with seasonal additions such as Scottish Blue Lobster Cafrea."



	Christmas	New Year's Eve
Amaya	£95	
Benares	£132	
Cinnamon Club	£125	
Gymkhana		£115
Kanishka		£60-£90
Trishna		£90-£100
Veeraswamy	£75-£95	

Christmas and NYE's menus: how the restaurants rank in terms of menu cost

Government responds to Curry Life query on Hospitality Council



Paul Scully MP
Business Minister

Last month, Curry Life contacted Business Minister Paul Scully to express our disappointment at the lack of diversity within the recently-established Hospitality Council, which aims to help England's pubs, restaurants and cafes recover from the impact of the pandemic.

The Council says it is made up of experts who represent a cross-section of the sector,

but despite the fact that the curry sector is worth more than £5bn to the UK economy, no representative from the curry, Indian or Bangladeshi restaurant industry has been included as a council member or consulted about the initiative.

In response to Curry Life's request, a government spokesperson said: "The government has been hearing directly from small businesses throughout the pandemic to understand the opportunities and challenges they face and continues to do so. Members of the Council have been appointed because of their particular experience and expertise, so collectively they are able to contribute on issues covering the diversity of the hospitality sector. Their membership will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it takes account of changing priorities."

The spokesperson added that at the first meeting of the Council, held on 29 September 2021, members agreed the importance of ensuring SMEs are represented within the Council. As a result, the Council is considering the best approach to bringing in representation from smaller independent businesses who can help deliver the priorities of the Hospitality Strategy. This was discussed further at the second Council meeting which took place on 27 October 2021.

At Curry Life, we are eagerly awaiting any proposed changes and will continue to lobby the Business Minister with our views. If you would like to put forward a request to the Business Minister, please email us at info@currylife.uk

Tripadvisor site: almost one million fake reviews in 2020

Close to one million reviews submitted to Tripadvisor's site in the last year were fake, according to the travel platform's 2021 Review Transparency Report.

The report, published at the end of October, analyzed a full year of data on reviews submitted by the global travel community. In 2020, travellers submitted more than 26 million reviews, of which more than 12 million were for restaurants, more than eight million for hotels and more than four million for experiences. Tripadvisor rejected or removed over two million of these reviews, representing 8.6% of all submissions, that did not comply with the platform's community standards.



In total, 3.6% of all review submissions last year were identified as fake, with the majority being rejected before they were posted to the Tripadvisor site.

There are a number of reasons why Tripadvisor rejects or removes reviews, ranging from community standards violations, such as the use of profanity, to fake review activity.

Becky Foley, head of Trust and Safety at Tripadvisor, said: "Knowing that you can rely on trusted guidance from travelers who have been there before has never been more important. As we continue the work to earn the trust travelers place in our business, we take the enforcement of our community standards incredibly seriously as we use the best in technology and human moderation practices to fight fraud. Today's report demonstrates how effective our team, tactics and technology are at maintaining those standards."

This is Tripadvisor's second Review Transparency Report, with the previous one released in 2019.

A year to remember for Kingfisher beer and Peacock Cider

The past year has seen everyone having to adapt to the “new normal”; with a tough start to the year the industry is now gaining back what it deserves. Customers have now returned, and business has resumed. Kingfisher has shown its support for the industry throughout the year with stock promotions, campaigns, a 24/7 restaurant helpline and new product launches.

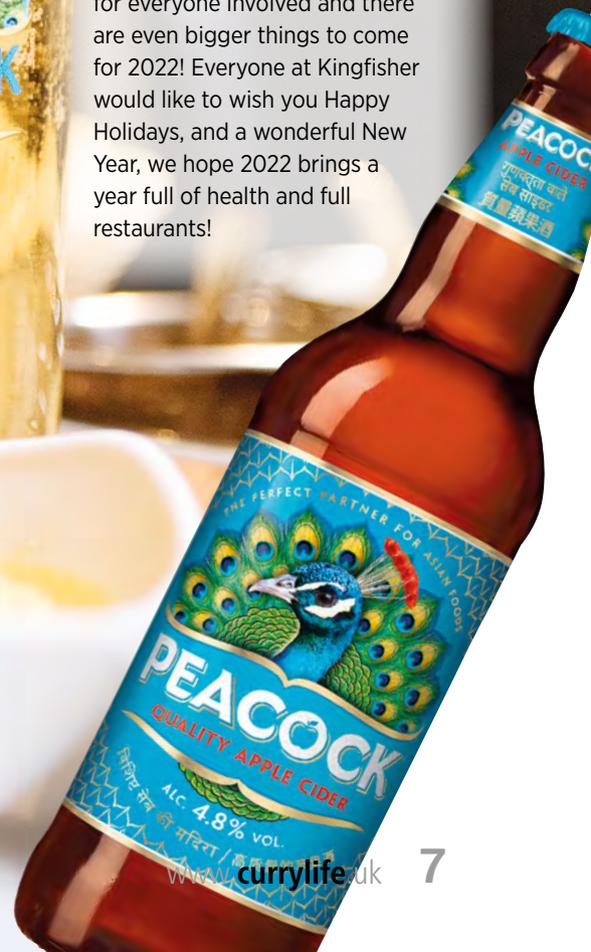
In the summer, Kingfisher ran its Curry Comeback campaign on social media, launched to encourage the public to return to restaurants and to celebrate the reopening of hospitality. The reach from this activity was just over 1 million. Kingfisher was offering a prize of a party for 50 people with all food, drink and entertainment included. The party took place at Masala Zone in Camden, the room was filled with the winner’s friends and family. They all enjoyed some food and Kingfisher beer. Elite Drummers (@elitedrummers) provided entertainment for the event with a modern spin on Dhol drumming which was enjoyed by all.

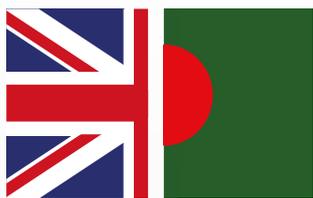
Peacock Cider saw a new flavour launch in 2021, Lychee & Lime, adding a third flavour to the Peacock range. Lychee & Lime sits alongside Mango & Lime and Classic Apple. The Peacock range was created to complement Asian cuisine, the fruit cider flatters the spiciest of dishes and refreshes the palate. Until the end of December, 25p from all Lychee & Lime sales will be given to several charity partners, including Hospitality Action, Only a Pavement Away and Hospitality Health. Keep an eye out on @peacockcider for some exciting giveaways over Christmas.

This year’s National Curry Week went down a storm, with an abundance of

giveaways, cooking tips and curry competitions. Social media saw an overhaul of images from the public celebrating in their local curry houses with a refreshing pint of Kingfisher. National Curry Week was supported by Southampton FC with a curry cook-off with some of their players and head chef. Howdah and Feastbox, long-running partners of Kingfisher, also joined in with the celebrations. Celebrity chef Anjula Devi spoke to several media outlets about the importance of National Curry Week and educated the public on the healthier side of curry.

It’s been a busy and exciting year for everyone involved and there are even bigger things to come for 2022! Everyone at Kingfisher would like to wish you Happy Holidays, and a wonderful New Year, we hope 2022 brings a year full of health and full restaurants!





Curry life

BRITISH CURRY FESTIVAL 2022

DHAKA - BANGLADESH



To celebrate the culinary diversity of the United Kingdom, the British Curry Festival will be returning to Dhaka, Bangladesh, to showcase the Best of British Cuisine in a top five-star luxury hotel setting.

Suppose you are a chef or restaurateur; in that case, this is a unique opportunity to experience a culinary journey to enrich your culinary skills with hands-on demonstration, savour new creations, and one of the most delicious must-visit food destinations. A food safari in the old city is a deep dive into the charming city's history and culture.

To participate or find out full details of the programme and packages please call or send a message to:

07956 439 458 or 07956 588 777

Places are limited and must book in advance.



CURRYLIFE AWARDS 2021

A night of Celebration to REMEMBER

The Curry Life Awards returned in 2021, crowning the industry's best chefs and restaurants



▲ CURRYLIFE AWARDS



▲ Ashuka Restaurant, Guildford



▲ Westbourne Tandoori, Bournemouth

▼ Cafe Spice, Darlington



Curry and food industry professionals, politicians and special guests gathered together for the Curry Life Awards 2021, which took place this year on 10 October at the Royal Lancaster Hotel London. The glittering awards ceremony, which was last held in 2019, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, took place following the World Curry Expo, also held at the hotel, with both events marking the end of National Curry Week.

The Curry Life Awards celebrate the unique fusion cuisine of Indian food in the UK and are part of a wider organisation that organises the British Curry Festival around the world. Close to 700 guests attended the event, which was

jointly hosted by BBC breakfast sports presenter Mike Bushell and veteran broadcaster and journalist Angela Rippon.

The evening began with a tribute to those from the industry who have sadly passed away in the last year during the pandemic, before the awards were announced. A total of 46 awards were given, with restaurants and chefs recognised in a number of categories, including Best Editor's Choice of the Year, Best Curry Chefs of the Year, Best Curry Restaurants of the Year, Best Curry Takeaways of the Year, Best Customer's Choice of the Year and Best Curry House Supplier of the Year.

The event also paid special tribute to the founding father of Bangladesh, to mark the Mujib Centenary and Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh. The UK's leading Bangladeshi artist and Freedom Fighter Himangshu Goswami dedicated 'Shono Ekti Mujiborer Theke' to mark the Mujib centenary tribute.

The audience heard from headline sponsor Just Eat, Lord Karan Bilimoria, ▶



▲ *Baabzi Takeaway, Warwick*



▲ *Barton Bangla Brasserie, Preston*



▲ *Bombay Quay, Northwich*



▲ *Haweli, Ealing*



▲ *Village Indian Dining*



▲ *Tarleton Tandoori*



▲ *Paprika Club, Leamington Spa*



▲ *Shozna, Rochester*



▲ *Biggles Lounge, Biggleswade*



▲ *Deshi Spice, Bedford*



▲ *Chandini, Bishop Stortford*

▶ *Fat Buddha Berkhamsted*



◀ *Aroma of Wilmslow*





▲ Zyka Reading



▲ Three Spices, Nottingham



▲ Blue Tiffin Stoke on Trent



▲ Chilli Green Westcliff-on-sea



▲ Spice Club, Bridgewater

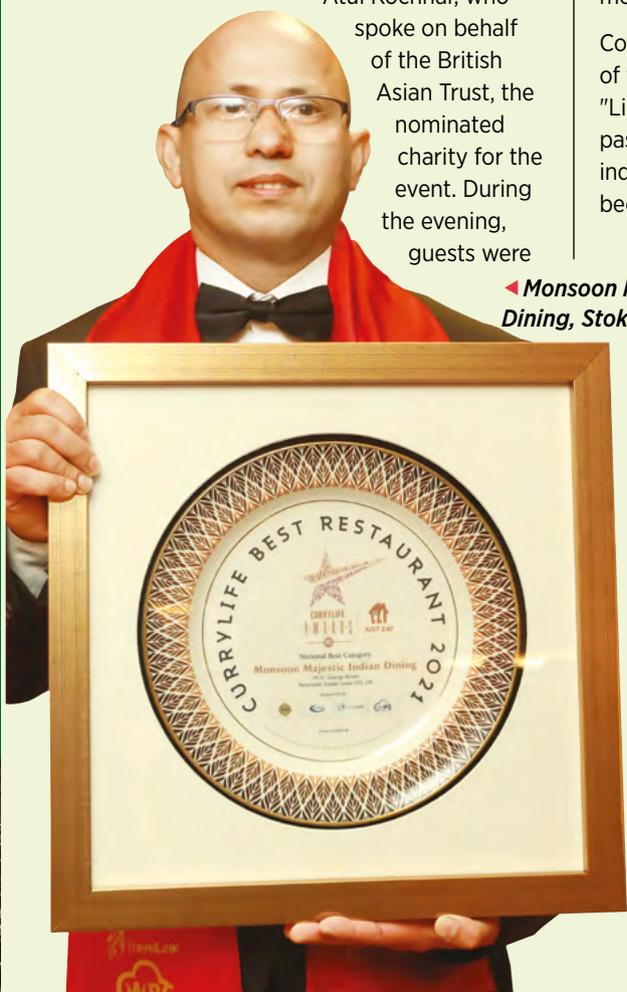
the chairman of Cobra Beer and president of the CBI and twice Michelin-starred chef Atul Kochhar, who spoke on behalf of the British Asian Trust, the nominated charity for the event. During the evening, guests were

also entertained by performances from the Bollywood Dance School and enjoyed a delicious Indian-themed menu provided by Madhu's.

Commenting on the importance of the Awards, Lord Bilimoria said: "Like many business sectors over the past couple of years, the hospitality industry has been through the ringer because of the Covid pandemic.

"It is great to see it not only emerging from this dark period but also leading the way for other business sectors. Now that the economy is gathering momentum, it is truly heart-warming and instructive to hear of some of the stories of innovation, and pure hard work, emerging from this year's Curry Life Awards. Well done to Curry Life for once again throwing a spotlight onto these examples of best practice and ▶

◀ Monsoon Majestic Dining, Stoke on Trent



▲ Bengal Brasserie, Leeds



▲ Fat Buddha Maidenhead



▲ *Taste of India, Hatfield*



▲ *Blue Tiffin Merseyside*

the brilliant people behind them."

The editor of Curry Life magazine, Syed Belal Ahmed, said: "Over the years we have been staging the awards, we have seen a major stepping up of standards and quality being offered to customers-to the point where several restaurants are in a position to challenge for accolades such as Michelin stars.

"One of the major aims of the awards has always been to highlight best practice going on across the country – so that everyone has the opportunity to learn from the best - and that indeed has always been a driving principle behind Curry Life itself."

Matt Bushby, the UK Marketing Director for Just Eat, added: "We are thrilled to sponsor the Curry Life Awards, celebrating one

of our most treasured and iconic industries; one that has helped so many communities in so many ways over the last 18 months. We are delighted to play a part in showcasing the hard work and imagination of chefs and owners who continue to improve and impress in producing fantastic, value-for-money and



▲ *Bombay 8, Warrington*



▲ *Mya's Spicery, Morpeth*



▲ *iNaga Restaurant, Bromley*

▼ *Radhuni Restaurant, Princes Risborough*





▲ Little India, Bolton



▲ Indian Ocean, Cambridge



▲ Chutney Express, Birmingham



▲ Everest Abercon, Stanmore



▲ Bombay Spice, Edinburgh

creative cooking. Our congratulations go to all of those who have won awards. You fully deserve them for standing out in this excitingly crowded and competitive industry."

Other guests at the event included Gagan Mohindra MP, Aaron Bell MP, Greg Smith MP, Charlotte Nichols MP, Wes Streeting MP, chef Dominic Chapman and cookery author Mridula Baljekar.

This year's Award Ceremony and Gala Dinner raised more than £2,000 for the British Asian Trust.



▼ Mahfuz Sardar

► Hastings Spice



Winners are:

Best Editor's Choice of the year

- Chandini Sawbridgeworth
- Radhuni, Princes Risborough
- Indian Ocean, Histon, Cambridge
- The Everest Abercorn, Middlesex

Best Curry Chefs of the year

- Chef Jafor Solim Uddin, The Fat Buddha, Maidenhead, Berks
- Chef Majadur Rahim, Blue Tiffin, Merseyside
- Chef Mohammed Raj, Village Indian Dining, Upminster
- Chef Kabir Uddin, Hastings Spice, Sussex
- Chef Abdul Malik, Little India, Bolton
- Chef Shaz Rahman, Blue Tiffin, Stoke
- Chef Nazrul Islam, Biggles Lounge, Beds
- Chef Atikur Rahman, Chilli Green, Westcliff-on-Sea, Southend

Best Curry Restaurants of the year

- Bombay 8, Warrington 8, Cheshire
- Bombay Quay, Northwich, Cheshire
- INAGA, Westwickham, Bromley
- Westbourne Tandoori, Bournemouth
- The Fat Buddha, Berkhamsted
- Bengal Brasserie, Burley, Leeds
- Shozna, Rochester, Kent
- Monsoon Majestic, Newcastle-Under-Lyme
- Zyka, Tilehurst, Reading
- Café Spice, Darlington
- Deshi Spice, Bedford
- Taste of India, Old Hatfield, Herts
- Barton Bangla Brasserie, Preston
- Kushboo Restaurant, Barton Latimer, Kettering
- Ashuka Guildford, Surrey
- Spice Club, Bridgewater, Somerset
- Mahaan, Worthing, West Sussex
- Village Indiya, South Woodford, London
- Taj Mahal, Chippenham, Wiltshire
- Paprika Club, Leamington Spa
- Sonargaon, Whitechapel, London



▲ Fusion Foods, Markyate



▲ Sonargaon, Tower Hamlets



▲ Mahaan, Worthing



▲ Pink Chilliz, Canvey Island



▲ Kushboo, Barton Latimer



◀ Village Indiya, South Woodford



▲ Himalaya Bridgenorth



▲ Love Curry, Cardiff



▲ Monsoon, Stoke on Trent

Best Curry Takeaways of the year

- Love Curry, Cardiff
- Tarleton, Preston
- Fusion Foods, Markate, St Alabans
- Mya's Spicery, Morpeth, Northumberland
- Bombay Spice, Bonnyrigg, Scotland
- Aroma, Wilmslow, Cheshire
- Baabzi, Warwick
- Pink Chilliz, Canvey Island, Essex
- Chutney Express, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham

Best Customer's Choice of the year

- Himalaya, Bridgnorth, Shropshire
- Three Spices, Ruddington, Nottingham
- Haweli, Ealing, London

Best Curry House Supplier of the year

- Sardar Food Products
Reading Berkshire

► Taj Mahal, Chippenham



CURRYLIFE AWARDS 2021 IN PICTURES



▲ Gala Dinner



▲ John Biggs, Wes Streeting and Syed Pasha



▲ Guests



▲ JUST EAT Guests



▲ Guests of Mahaan Restaurant



▲ Curry Life family members



▲ Lord Billimoria



▲ Mark Finch



▲ Atul Kochhar



▲ Syed Belal Ahmed



▲ Syed Nahas Pasha



▲ Himangshu Goswami



▲ Bollywood Dance Group



▲ Guests



▲ Dabirul Chowdhury with Toast master



▲ Angela Rippon and Mike Bushell with guests, above and dancing (right)



▲ Guests of Westbourne Tandoori

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British Curry Festival returns to Dhaka

The British Curry Festival is returning to Dhaka in Bangladesh, with a five-day event showcasing a range of dishes from top chefs.

The event will take place at the five-star InterContinental Dhaka in the last week of February 2022, with highly-acclaimed Michelin-starred chefs who are experts in the British culinary scene joining the British Curry Festival team. A 'Michelin Laureate' chef will showcase the 'Best of British Regional Dishes' while fellow chefs will focus on recreating favourite curry dishes from Britain's high streets.

The choice of Dhaka marks a 'homecoming' for the Festival - the first such one was held at the same venue in 2002 when the hotel was called Dhaka Sheraton, and it has been nearly ten years since the Festival last took place in Dhaka. Curry Life developed the concept of the British Curry Festival in the UK, where curry is one of the most popular foods, considered akin to the national cuisine. The event aims to showcase British curry as a brand with the help of talented curry chefs and leading hotels, and support from the British High Commission/Embassy and sponsors. The Festival plays a vital role in Curry Life magazine's aim to promote British Bangladeshi chefs' artistic and culinary skills, highlighting their leading role in ensuring curry's popularity in the UK and beyond. The event is truly international. Over the last decade, it has promoted the best British curry in continents as diverse as Europe and Asia, helping further chefs' careers by showcasing British curry cuisine on a global stage. Festival founder and editor of Curry Life magazine Syed Belal Ahmed said: "We are delighted to bring the British Curry Festival back to its roots in Dhaka where the curry trail



2002



2011



2022

started. People of Bangladeshi origin are historically known to have invented Britain's most loved national dish of 'Chicken Tikka Masala.'

"Hopefully, this festival will create the opportunity not only to showcase the best of British curry cuisine but also help our curry chefs bring fresh ideas to their menus here in the UK. by working alongside the culinary masters of Bangladesh."

The event was previously known as the British Fusion Food Festival, later adapted to Taste of Britain Curry Festival and most recently the British Curry Festival.

Curry is famous all over the world and originated from the Indian sub-

continent. The spice trade between the Indian sub-continent and Europe is often cited as the primary catalyst for curry houses or Indian restaurants in every major European city, including London. Curry now outsells most European foods, with the curry industry reportedly making a turnover of several billion pounds sterling annually.

It is estimated that there are 12,000 curry houses in Britain, and over 90% of them are run and operated by people of Bangladeshi origin.

For those who wish to join this exciting culinary journey, there are a limited number of places still available. If you are interested, please call or message Syed Ahmed on 07956 439458.



A photo from festival at the Dhaka Sheraton (InterContinental now) in 2007.

From left chef Mohan Miah, Shahidur Rahman, Syed Zohorul Islam, Jamal Uddin Ahmed and Atikur Rahman.

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লেকল্যান্ড ডেইরিজ আপনার প্রিয় সিঙ্গেল ক্রীম এর নেপথ্যে অনেক বছর ডেইরি বিশেষজ্ঞ ছিল, কিন্তু এখন তা পরিবর্তন হয়েছে।

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অপূর্ব ডেইরি স্বাদ

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প্রজন্ম থেকে যে একই ক্রীম আপনি ভালবাসেন তা ব্যবহার করুন

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Curry industry is an INSPIRATION says Cobra's Karan Bilimoria



Karan Bilimoria, the founder of Cobra Beer and president of the CBI, says the curry industry has been 'an inspiration' in times of adversity, and that he is grateful for the support his business has received from the sector.

Bilimoria also recently attended the Curry Life Awards 2021, held in October. He said:

"I was pinching myself at the

Awards, thinking, was this event really happening after the nightmare we have been through for over 18 months? [Are] 750 members of our industry from all around the UK in-person together? There was such a wonderful atmosphere, and it also highlighted the huge sacrifice made and the amazing compassion shown by our restaurants to their local communities, including the NHS. It was of course also a time to

remember the tragic loss of loved ones that many of us have experienced."

Bilimoria also commented how, as President of the CBI, he was privileged to chair the Business 7 (B7) summit in May prior to the UK hosting the G7 in June.

"At the B7, Dr Gita Gopinath, chief economist of the IMF, predicted that the UK would bounce back quickly and strongly from the pandemic because of the £400 billion given by the government to support businesses and our economy, as well as our world-leading vaccination programme," he said. "In reality we have seen since this summer an energy crisis, fuel crisis, supply chain challenges, labour shortages and the pandemic. Moreover our tax burden in this country is now at its highest level in seven decades. Inflation has already hit 4.2% and there is the prospect of rising interest rates from an all-time low. The recovery is fragile."

However, Bilimoria acknowledged that we now are seeing demand coming back. "I believe that we are beating Covid with our continuing strong vaccination programme including boosters, the free availability of lateral flow tests with regular testing proving conclusively very effective," he said. "The recent success of Pfizer's anti-viral treatment, tablets for Covid where the trials showed a reduction for hospitalisations and deaths by 89% - this is a game changer."

Bilimoria said that as long as the hospitality industry continues to show the spirit of resilience and adaptation and in particular continues to be innovative, it will succeed as an industry.

"At Cobra our innovations of King Cobra, our beer double fermented like champagne, produced in Belgium, and our Malabar Blonde IPA are examples of how one can continually innovate successfully. I am so grateful for the support we have received from the curry industry particularly in times of acute adversity - you are an inspiration to the whole country."

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Dilchad Restaurant was established sixty years ago by first-generation immigrant Abdul Matlib Choudhury. It has survived in the same family's hands, and now it is run by his youngest son Hamidur and grandson Moshiur. From left, Moshiur Rahman Choudhury, Shafiqur Rahman Choudhury and Hamidur Rahman Choudhury.

FROM ARCHIVE



Sheikh Hasina at Dilchad in 2002



Former finance minister A M A Muhith, late Mushtaq Qureshi and Shafiqur Rahman Choudhury

Today, ties between the restaurant and the politics of Bangladesh are just as strong. Abdul had five sons, Matiur Rahman Choudhury, Ataur Rahman Choudhury, Azizur Rahman Choudhury, Shafiqur Rahman Choudhury and Hamidur Rahman Choudhury, all of whom have worked at the restaurant at different stages since its opening. Shafiqur now spends most of his time in Bangladesh and was elected as the first British Bangladeshi MP in Bangladesh, in 2009. He is currently an influential politician and acting president of the ruling Awami League's Sylhet region. Shafiqur was also once a community activist, and a well-known face in the community as well as a former leader of several organisations in the UK, including the Bangladesh Welfare Association. Other members of the Choudhury family live in the UK and regularly visit those in London .

“My father started Dilchad Restaurant in 1962 and also had ties to the Bangladesh Caterers Association in the UK, as well as being a community leader,” Shafiqur says. “This restaurant

was not only a place for business lunches, it was for the community too, with many political meetings held here, particularly during the 1969 uprising in East Pakistan”.

Dilchad also served as a meeting place during the movement for independence in Bangladesh, no doubt with many heated conversations taking place and important decisions made, in a venue nearly 5,000 miles away from where the action took place. The father of the nation and founder of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, visited Dilchad while his daughter, Sheikh Hasina, the current prime minister

Dilchad Restaurant



of Bangladesh, has also been to the restaurant many times when she was the leader of the opposition.

"It has changed a lot since we first opened," reflects Hamidur, the youngest son of Abdul, who currently runs Dilchad alongside Moshir Rahman Choudhury, the third generation of the Choudhury family. "There used to be very little competition but nowadays you can see so many more Indian restaurants in the area. "Most of the customers were business people during the day and the local community in the evening. It was a place to come for friendship and good food. But gradually over the years, the business clientele has changed - many offices relocated to Canary Wharf in the 1990s, then we had the recessions in the early 2000s and 2010 and the pandemic in the last year, with many people now working from home."

A changing scene

The restaurant has also become smaller - it used to seat around 170 in total but now offers 90 covers. Moshir started working there back in 1994, although between then and now, he spent around 10 years away from the restaurant industry working in the commercial property sector. Moshir acknowledges that it's rare for someone of his generation to want to join the family restaurant business but having visited Dilchad regularly when he was a child, he is keen to keep the tradition and the memories going. For him, the biggest change over the last quarter of a

century has been with diners.

"We used to get mainly men at that time, those working in nearby offices - now we have a mix of men and women and a crowd that is younger," he says, referencing the opening of the nearby Chapter, a building providing accommodation for students, as one driver for this. "The demographic is a lot more diverse - with people from Asia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, it's a different vibe. We still get many businesses dining with us but it's moved away from the traditional finance and insurance backgrounds you would expect - our diners work at start-ups, IT and crypto currency businesses."

In keeping with the tradition of being a meeting place for seismic events and topical subjects, The Crypto Curry Club, a series of networking lunches for blockchain and cryptocurrency experts, held several events at the restaurant this year. Founded by Erica Stanford, the aim of the Club is to share insights and ideas about the crypto currency space, while enjoying Indian cuisine. Fintech Starling Bank has also held events at Dilchad.

This new demographic also has different tastes, preferring lighter,

In keeping with the tradition of being a meeting place for seismic events and topical subjects, The Crypto Curry Club, a series of networking lunches for blockchain and cryptocurrency experts, held several events at the restaurant this year. Founded by Erica Stanford, the aim of the Club is to share insights and ideas about the crypto currency space, while enjoying Indian cuisine. Fintech Starling Bank has also held events at Dilchad.





Dilchad used to organize regular Bangladeshi food festivals. One such festival was in September 2003. Mr. Gomez and Humayun, the Bengali chefs of Pubarni Hotel in Bangladesh were present. Dilchad director Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury is seen on the left, Syed Ashraf Hussain, former MP Oona King (centre) in the picture.

smaller dishes. Dilchad has looked to reduce its menu in recent years, but some of its loyal, older customers prefer the traditional curries. Keeping everyone happy is a delicate balancing act, as Moshiur explains.

“A demand for less ‘heavy’ lunches meant we introduced some lighter dishes such as Chicken Tikka Caesar Salad and Kuchumber Salad. People are still asking for chicken Madras, Vindaloo and Korma so we’ve kept these on the menu. And with more competition in the surrounding area, we need to keep up with the latest trends. We are developing a street food menu in the new year, and more tapas-style sharing dishes.”

Dilchad also has a range of signature dishes, including Katmandu, a fiery curry of chicken or lamb, with Naga chilli blended with fresh green chillies and Scotch bonnets. It’s also expanded its vegan offering, although as Moshiur points out, many Indian dishes are vegan.

Staying on top of tech

To keep moving with the times, Dilchad has worked with several development chefs and sought advice from friends in Bangladesh on new or popular food trends. Ensuring that dishes are ‘instagrammable’ is also important. In

previous years, Dilchad would advertise in publications such The Evening Standard but Moshiur says this is no longer cost effective.

“Now, it’s all about social media marketing, with Facebook and Instagram and we are getting another company to look at how we can best use TikTok - it’s a great platform for showcasing food,” he says.”

Over the years, the lunchtime trade has greatly reduced, reflected in the fact that many of the shops along the nearby Wentworth Street have long since shut their doors. And during the pandemic, the restaurant was closed as there was little demand for takeaways in the surrounding area, particularly with the majority of offices shut. Dilchad used the time wisely, developing different menus and since reopening in May this year, it has tried to ramp up its takeaway offer and says it is doing a lot more of these than it used to.

Its main focus though is on the dine-in trade. To continue to attract a new generation of diners, it’s important to invest in technology.

“I am looking at developing an online ordering facility and online booking system, customers order from these but the established ones now take a massive cut,” says Moshiur. “It’s important to

keep up to speed with channels such as Instagram too - the food has to look stunning and it can be challenging to make a curry look attractive. We’ve got a popular thali dish that lends itself well to this.”

In 2022, Dilchad is marking its 60th anniversary, and plans to celebrate in style with a week-long series of events. The restaurant hopes to stage a charity event, offering menus priced as they would have been in the 1960s, featuring dishes from that era too.

For the present time however, Dilchad’s challenges are in keeping with many other restaurants.

“Christmas time should be one of our busiest periods, but in light of the new Covid-19 variant, we’ve had lots of cancellations for bigger groups,” says Moshiur. “We’ve also seen people dining out more in the earlier part of the week - Wednesdays and Thursdays are very busy but Fridays less so. The going is very tough but I am hopeful we will see a turning point.”

Dilchad Restaurant

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December is always the busiest month of the year and there are plenty of reasons to celebrate, which means more business for you.

Save these key dates





Check your opening hours are right for demand

To check or change your opening hours in Partner Centre:

Restaurant settings > Opening hours > Edit and make your changes > Save

Tip: Don't forget to use the 24-hour clock. For example, 17:30 not 5:30 pm, and check all your changes before you sign out.



Increased orders causing a backlog?

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To change your delivery area in Partner Centre:

Restaurant settings > Delivery area > Change distance limit > Move the sliding bar to adjust > Save



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বছরের ব্যস্ততম সময়ে এসে নিজেকে তৈরি রাখা গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

বছরের ব্যস্ততম সময়ে এসে নিজেকে তৈরি রাখা গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। জাস্ট ইট-এর প্রচুর টুলস ও সুপারিকল্লিগিত সাহায্য আপনার টাইম ম্যানেজ করবে এবং একইসঙ্গে দক্ষতাও বাড়াবে। যা কিনা প্রচন্ড ব্যস্ততার সময়েও আপনার, আপনার স্টাফদের, ড্রাইভার এবং কাস্টমারদের শান্ত থাকতে সহায়তা করবে।

বছরের সবথেকে ব্যস্ততম মাস ডিসেম্বর। উৎসবের, উদযাপনের এই মাস আপনার ব্যবসাতেও আনে সমৃদ্ধি।

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পার্টনার সেন্টারের সঙ্গে ওপেনিং আওয়ার্স দেখতে বা পরিবর্তন করতে হলে

Restaurant settings > Opening hours >
Edit and make your changes > Save

Tip: 24 ঘন্টা হিসেবে টাইম ঠিক করুন। যেমন,
5:30 pm নয়, 17:30 pm. সাইন আউট করার
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করতে হলে

Restaurant settings > Delivery area >
Change distance limit > Move the sliding
bar to adjust > Save



সঙ্গে ছ'টার আগে ডিসকাউন্ট অফার করুন

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পার্টনার সেন্টারের মাধ্যমে আপনি
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Marketing > Offers > Add offer
> Select the customers you
would like to target, the day(s)
and time > Next > Choose the
discount you want to offer >
Save





BANGLA BEER

geared up to support curry houses

It remains a very attractive industry because of the popularity of the cuisine.

“There is no doubt that like others in the wider hospitality sector, curry houses also had to adapt and make lots of adjustments to survive these exceptionally challenging times. There is still a long way to go for full recovery.

Faruque added that success in business is defined by relationships and said that building relationships with suppliers and other strong brands within the industry is important for business growth.

“Bangla Beer has been a very strong beer brand for curry houses,” he said. “I wish to reassure all our loyal restaurateurs and bartenders, that we are available to support, care and assist you for continuously promoting Bangla Beer to curry and beer-loving consumers.”

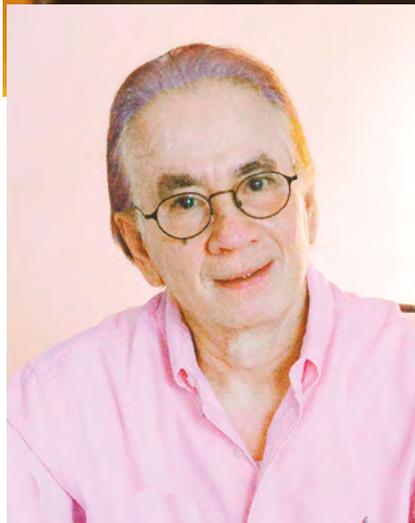
Any existing or new restaurant customers who are looking for support or assistance to boost the sales of Bangla Beer are invited to contact Golam Faruque directly, using the following:

Golam Faruque
Tel: 07812 555436

Email: Faruque.Golam@lwc-drinks.co.uk

The team behind the Bangla Beer brand, LWC Drinks, the UK’s largest independent drinks wholesaler, aims to support all those within the hospitality industry, helping businesses get back on track after months of enforced closures following the pandemic.

In a recent interview with Curry Life magazine, the brand ambassador for Bangla Beer, Golam Faruque, said: “The curry industry experienced the most devastating time on record during the pandemic. Despite ongoing challenges and uncertainties, we are optimistic about post-pandemic recovery in this sector.



▲ Golam Faruque



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VILLAGE INDIYA



VILLAGE INDIYA PEOPLE ARE BIG

HIT

A packed restaurant on a cold, windy Thursday night. Diners queuing for a table. Solid bookings for the foreseeable future.

And all of this on the back of being named the nation's top curry restaurant at the glittering Curry Life Awards - staged recently by this magazine in London's West End.

Clearly owner Abi and his team at the Village Indiya restaurant in South Woodford are doing something right - so what is the secret of their outstanding success?

"Teamwork and listening carefully to our customers," is Abi's swift reply, as if both priorities were an absolute given for any successful restaurant anywhere in the world.

Warming to his theme, Abi adds: "Whether you're talking about people working in the kitchen, or the staff front-of-house, it's vital that you get the right people, with the right qualities.

"In our case our chef, Sayadur Shahin, has more than 15 years' experience working in various restaurants and knows what works and what doesn't. Creating new dishes that people want to eat, and blending fresh home-made ingredients, only comes with experience."



▲ **Village Indiya**

Abi continues: "Equally, our front of house manager, Alamin Khan, is the best I know at listening to customers and tweaking our service so that we're giving them what they want."

He adds that although the recent lockdowns brought many challenges, they possibly reinforced the bond between the restaurant and the community it serves.

"During the lockdown," he says, "like many restaurants in our position, we had to rely heavily on takeaway custom and, while this clearly wasn't as good as being fully open, it enabled us to reach out to a different type of clientele.

"The proof of the pudding really has been in the eating. Clearly people liked what they ate with their takeaways and I can honestly say we've never been busier since we reopened."

That's something borne out by our visit to the restaurant, judging by the reactions of other diners on a packed 50-cover evening, and by our own meal.

We tried to sample a broad range of dishes, with our three-person party selecting a mixture of lamb, chicken and prawn dishes - in the shape of a lamb biryani, chicken dansak and king prawn tikka masala. ▶





▲ **Curry Life editors Syed Nahas Pasha and Syed Belal Ahmed at the restaurant with Village Indiya family.**

Impressed with a fresh take on these traditional dishes, both in terms of presentation and taste, I asked Alamin for a deeper insight into the restaurant's approach to the needs of its customers.

"We value feedback from our customers above all else and this is key to our success. If we are giving them precisely what they want, we know they will come back and also tell their friends about us.

"This in turn feeds through to the way we approach the menu. For example, we have recently introduced some vegan based dishes due to their growing popularity."

Alamin adds: "Also, because we know diners can tell the difference between bought-in ingredients and home-made ones, all of our spices and sauces are home-made, so that we can tweak them for our customers' tastes.

"The same goes for service front of house. We are constantly checking that diners are happy and are giving them what they want."

It's a recipe for success which has been duplicated in other of the group's restaurants in Essex - and has emboldened the Village Indiya team to open a new eatery shortly in nearby

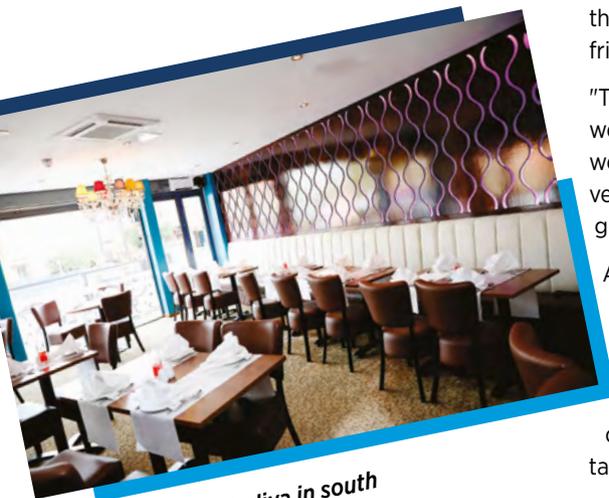
Woodford Broadway.

That is despite competition from established neighbouring Chinese and Italian restaurants.

As Abi sums up: "I can't tell you what a wonderful feeling it is to emerge from such a terrible period as the lockdown to find, if anything, there is a stronger than ever demand for what we do and how we do it.

"The icing on the cake was to win such a prestigious prize as Best Curry Restaurant at this year's Curry Life Awards.

"It means everything to be appreciated in this way and is confirmation that Village Indiya is going from strength to strength."



▶ **Village Indiya in south Woodford**

Village Indiya

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Tel. 020 8505 2727

www.villageindiya-southwoodford.com



Village Ian-diya!

Local MP, and former Conservative Party Leader, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, pops in to add his congratulations on Village Indiya's recent triumph in the Curry Life Awards - where the restaurant was voted one of the country's best curry restaurant.

TV presenter Mike Bushell turns up at Whitechapel's Sonargaon to try the Best of Bangladeshi Cuisine



Tufazzal Alam with Mike Bushell and his daughter Sophie, Curry Life Magazine Chief Editor Syed Nahas Pasha and journalist Mustak Ali Babul.

Popular television presenter Mike Bushell travelled to Whitechapel, Tower Hamlets, to congratulate a Curry Life Award-winning restaurant and try some Bangladeshi delicacies.

The Sonargaon Authentic Bangladeshi Restaurant, based at 199 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DE, was voted one of the best curry houses at the annual Curry Life Awards.

The Whitechapel eatery was among one

of the best 22 curry restaurants from across the country recently given top recognition at a gala dinner and awards ceremony hosted by journalist and broadcaster Angela Rippon and Mike Bushell at London's West End.

The Curry-loving sports TV presenter said: "I was delighted to be able to drop in to try some authentic Bangladeshi Curries with my daughter Sophie. I congratulate Mr Tufazzal Alam, owner of Sonargaon and his team personally for winning this prestigious award.

"This national recognition of a local restaurant will only enhance Tower Hamlets' reputation for good quality Bangladeshi food. To be named as one of the best curry restaurants in the country is a remarkable achievement, and the Sonargaon team should feel very proud."




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World Curry Expo showcases top suppliers



▲ Visitors at Lakeland Dairies stall



▲ Cobra Beer stall



▲ Work Permit Cloud team

The World Curry Expo, held on 10 October at the Royal Lancaster London, featured a range of suppliers to the culinary industry, including Just Eat, Cobra Beer, Work Permit Cloud, Unisoft, Sardar Food Products, Novopay, Super Tuff Menus, Mr Printers, Lakeland Dairies, AB Pest Control and Mahi & Co. Visitors were also able to find out more about the Curry Life Chefs Club from a dedicated stand.

The Expo was held in the afternoon, prior to the Curry Life Awards 2021 and Gala Dinner, with many attending the Expo over the course of the day. There were also plenty of networking opportunities and feedback from the event has been extremely positive, with attendees praising the variety of sectors exhibiting.

“The range of suppliers was excellent and it was great to be able to talk to brands such as Just Eat and Lakeland Dairies, alongside businesses that offer accountancy, payment, printing and legal support,” said Abdul Rahman of Taste of Nawab.



▲ UNISOFT stall



▲ Novopay team



▲ Visitor at Super Tuff Menus stall



▲ Mahi & Co. stall



▲ Michelin Star chef Atul Kochhar (centre) at Curry Life Chef Club stall at the expo



▲ AB Pest Control stall

"It was a very productive afternoon, having many valuable suppliers in one place made it easy to seek out information and to build relationships," said Abdul Ahad of City Spice.

"Once again, it was a fantastic event

and was better than last year. We had lots of people visiting and wanting to know more about our products. For me, I know this will turn into a sale. I am happy", said stall holder Mahfuz Sardar of Sardar foods.

This was the third Curry Life Expo to be held, with the previous one having taken place in 2019, as the event was postponed in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.





A winning FORMULA

Jafor Solim Uddin



▲ *The Fat Buddha front of house staff*

Jafor Solim Uddin has been a curry chef for more than three decades and is using his creativity and his enduring passion for cooking to great effect at **The Fat Buddha**

There's not much that escapes the eye of Jafor Solim Uddin, head chef at The Fat Buddha restaurant in Maidenhead. Curry Life managed to squeeze some time with him just before a mid-week evening service, but he still headed to the kitchen several times during our chat to check on his staff and a number of takeaway orders. Restaurant owner Shorif Ali describes his chef as 'always in control' and says that nothing gets out of the kitchen without the chef seeing it first'. He even jokes that Uddin keeps an eye on the front of house operations too.

Uddin, who prefers to go by his nickname Suhel, was originally born in England and brought up in Bangladesh, before returning to the UK in 1985. He has been at The Fat Buddha in Maidenhead for around 18 months, ever since it opened in March 2020, just prior to the pandemic. Previously, Suhel was at the original outpost of the restaurant (also called The Fat Buddha), in Berkhamsted. This one opened in 2015 and he worked there for around a year.

Suhel's relationship with Ali goes back much further however, with the two having ►



The Fat Buddha Maidenhead and the Fat Buddha Berkhamsted guests after winning awards

known each other for around 25 years - Suhel originally worked as a chef at restaurants owned by Ali's parents. His father was also a chef, but Suhel learnt his trade from working in many other restaurants - around 15 in all before The Fat Buddha, with his longest stint at one restaurant being around 13 years.

A passionate approach

Suhel doesn't describe being a chef as a job - instead he refers to it as a passion; in the same way as people care about the food that they eat, he cares about what goes into the dishes and how they are presented. A typical day will see him arrive at the restaurant around 11am, where he oversees three other chefs, preparing base sauces and main ingredients until mid- afternoon, before getting ready for the evening service.

Suhel's style of cooking is, in his own words, 'not your typical Indian dishes, with food given a twist with unusual ingredients and different spicing to suit people's palates'. Sauces are flavoured with coconut milk, pepper, coriander, garam masala and a range of spices and Suhel also makes a number of fresh chutneys.

Some of his signature and favourite dishes include King Prawn Moglai, grilled king prawns medium spiced with cashew nuts, Buddha Chicken (made with chicken fillet to ensure the meat is tender) and Tandoori Broccoli, served with yoghurt and mango sauce. Lamb Chennai, made with pepper and red chilli topped with coconut milk, is also a standout dish.

"I have tried most of the dishes we serve and if I don't like it, it doesn't get served," he says. "I love cooking - it's hard work and long hours but if you don't enjoy it, you can't be a good chef."

The restaurant is located in an affluent area, with Ali saying that people are keen to not just dine

but to have an experience too. The restaurant has a cocktail bar with its own mixologist, with many people arriving for drinks before moving through to the main restaurant.

Sustainable and inventive

"We refresh the menu every six months and I create new dishes," explains Suhel. "If there are some dishes that are not selling well, or which are difficult to



maintain, we remove them, one example being sea bass as it was too time-consuming to prepare. Quality and maintaining consistency across the board is key to success and even after 35 years, I am not tired of the industry. My biggest challenge is finding good chefs - I've brought my own team with me, people I have known previously and whom I can trust. There is a big need in the curry industry to boost skills."

Suhel also oversees The Fat Buddha's 'Outdoor Tandoor' offer, which provides outdoor catering for corporate events, parties and celebrations, with Suhel providing live cooking. This runs mainly during the warmer, summer months, with a choice of four menus, while indoor event catering is available too, choosing dishes from the menu. The restaurant is also looking to be more sustainable in its approach to food, with Ali sourcing many of the ingredients from local suppliers. Vegans and vegetarians are catered for too, with dishes including Sabzi Bahar (dry mixed vegetables) and Paneer Shashlik, marinated Indian cheese, served with peppers, onions and tomatoes.

Suhel also enjoys being creative in the kitchen - customers often have requests for certain dishes, giving Suhel the chance to be inventive and to experiment with spices.

"I wouldn't want any other job - I enjoy cooking and being in the kitchen. Sometimes you have to be demanding with your staff, sometimes you have to be soft, the important thing is to always communicate with staff and make sure that everything we do is coordinated."



The restaurant also has a thriving takeaway service and on a busy evening (most Fridays and Saturdays) Suhel is in charge of between 90-100 covers. The Fat Buddha tries to ensure a smooth service by inviting people to enjoy drinks in the bar area and ordering a few canapé-style starters, before progressing to the main dining area. It's a place where people like to linger and enjoy their food.

Even after 35 years in the business, and having recently won the 'Best Chef' award at the Curry Life Awards, held in October, Suhel is hungry for another challenge. There is the potential to become executive chef across the two Fat Buddha restaurants, overseeing the kitchens at both. Suhel is also keen to extend his skills and knowledge, and is proud of his membership of Curry Life's Chef's club, a networking organisation for curry chefs.

"The Club is a great opportunity for learning from your peers, it can help to give you ideas to change things, and if I have any issues I want to raise, I can speak to other members," he says.

The one thing Suhel doesn't do is cook at home - he leaves the kitchen and the food firmly in his wife's hands.



Chef Jafor Solim Uddin



THREE BOSSES

Front row L-r Sonargaon owners Misba B S Chowdhury, Tufazzal Alam, Babul Ahmed Chowdhury and their two friends behind.



NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Whitechapel's **Sonargaon** delivers authentic Bangladeshi food buffet-style and provides a place to chat, giving a new meaning to comfort eating

'Adda', which roughly means gossip or a bit of conversation, is a favourite pastime among Bengalis. And you'll see plenty of this at Sonargaon restaurant in Whitechapel, east London. Opened in 2017, on the former site of another Indian establishment, the restaurant has quickly built a reputation as a place where you can happily hangout and catch up with friends and family. With its location by Whitechapel market, there's a steady footfall from people shopping and stopping for a bite to eat.

The restaurant, open from morning through to the night, from 9am until 11pm, is owned by Tufazzal Alam, Babul Ahmed Chowdhury and Misba B S Chowdhury. All three are friends who had already worked together at another restaurant (they also have other business interests including a grocery store, which is located next door

to the restaurant). Their aim is to bring a 'quality Bangladeshi food experience and to ensure this is delivered with perfection.' The restaurant is run buffet-style, helping to reinforce the idea of bringing communities together and sharing good conversation over food.

The dishes, focusing heavily on Bengali fare, are an obvious draw, with 30 items on offer at any one time, usually 25 savoury and five sweet options. You'll find authentic dishes such as paratha with beef bhuna and beef liver curry - popular with Bengalis at breakfast time, and Kala Bhuna (on the bone), a fiery dish of fried meat, onion and shatkora (a bitter citrus fruit), cooked with the chef's own spices. There are also a range of fish dishes, including Mrigal, a fish curry on the bone (using fish flown in from Bangladesh), a choice of homemade chutneys and sweet snacks that are made fresh daily. Buffet concepts often bring to mind food ▶



▲ Journalist Angela Rippon, Tufazzal Alam and TV presenter Mike Bushell



that may not be the freshest, but dishes at Sonargaon are cooked fresh daily, with many ingredients sourced from the grocer's next door.

"The Bengali community likes to gossip - everyone gets to meet and come here for food and some 'adda'," says Alam, who first came to the UK in 2004. "It's become a place for the local community to gather. There are not many restaurants in this area that have such a strong focus on Bengali dishes. Many of the dishes we serve are influenced by those you would find in Sylhet, in north-eastern Bangladesh." Ninety percent of Bangladeshi origin people in the United Kingdom are from that region. Even though the restaurant has yet to celebrate five years in business, it has already built up a loyal customer base; as Alam explains, those who visit Sonargaon feel right at home. The restaurant was also named 'Best Bengali Food Restaurant 2021' at the recent Curry Life Awards 2021. People are welcome to stay for a quick snack or for a more substantial meal, while an upstairs space can host events for around 100 or the entire restaurant can be used for events for up to 200 people. An outside counter also does a brisk takeaway business and was used extensively over the various lockdowns at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. With such space on offer, unsurprisingly Sonargaon is a popular venue choice for weddings and perhaps even more so post-pandemic, with its ability to host sizeable, rather than mass gatherings. It's also in demand as a caterer for external events.



▲ Sonargaon Chefs

Around 95% of customers are Bengali, and they are not only from the surrounding areas, but from much further afield too, while the restaurant is also popular with westerners who would like to try some authentic dishes. Alam also made the unusual move of ensuring that all of his front-of-house staff are women, which lends a welcoming, caring vibe to an Indian restaurant, an environment that is often male-dominated. There are three main chefs and 10 waiters who work different shift patterns and Alam has known his employees for many years. This means that staff turnover at the restaurant is kept to a minimum and Sonargaon is not plagued by staffing issues to the extent that many other restaurants are in the current business climate.

“Our female front of house staff is a strong team and staffing isn’t such a big challenge for us,” says Alam. “We have more issues with the lack of parking available, as so many people make the effort to travel to eat here.”



▲ Sonargaon front of house staff

Access to the restaurant may not be a problem for much longer, with a new station set to open in Whitechapel in 2022 - part of the Elizabeth Line, while a new town hall will be unveiled, also in 2022, on the site of the former Royal London Hospital. It’s a clear sign that the area is changing rapidly and that passing trade is set to grow. To capitalise on the potential for a growing lunch trade, Alam is looking to launch a ‘grab and go’ concept for the outside counter/takeaway side. He is also looking to expand the Sonargaon concept and is toying with the idea of opening a second restaurant. “We want to encourage others in the UK to come to this place and try Bengali food to get inspired and be inspired,” he says “It’s a great place for small meetings, people can enjoy a traditional breakfast or a late night dinner in groups. We offer tradition and value for money too.”

The name Sonargaon is taken from the popular tourist destination in Bangladesh, which was the old capital of Bengal, roughly about 40km from the capital Dhaka. It translates as ‘golden village’ or ‘heritage village’. Alam and his partners have certainly spotted a golden opportunity and made their own restaurant a special place among Whitechapel’s Bengali community. Their next challenge will be taking the concept to a wider audience.



Sonargaon has teamed up with Curry Life to offer a special promotion

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Brick Lane launches food festival to showcase diverse cuisine



▲ *A range of dishes are on offer*

A food festival launched in Brick Lane aims to highlight the area's diverse culture as well as showcasing Bangladeshi cuisine.

The Brick Lane Food Festival, previously known as the Brick Lane Curry Festival, launched in December, and features a range of Bangladeshi and Sylheti dishes from local restaurants.

The festival was launched by Tower Hamlets Council as part of its efforts to help local businesses recover and bounce back from the pandemic. Restaurants taking part include: Masala, Graam Bangla, Brick Lane Brasserie, Standard Balti House, Bengal Village, Preem, Moonlight, Monsoon, Aladin and Sheba.

Speaking to Curry Life magazine, John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets Council said: "This [event] is promoting the Bengali curry industry, this [area] is the heart of the British Bengali community. We identify with the curry business and we'd like the industry to benefit more from promotions and to play a bigger role again in the life of Brick Lane. We want people to come here because the food is excellent. They can connect with the restaurants and see the variety of food on offer."

Biggs added that the festival is being promoted through a range of media, and that the Council is investing in measures to 'clean up Brick Lane and make the area more attractive.'

Motin Uz-Zaman, deputy mayor and cabinet member for Work,

Economic Growth and Faith at Tower Hamlets Council said: "We are looking at how we can support our businesses so they can raise their game. Brick Lane has changed. We want to make sure the food is diverse, and put Brick Lane on the map."

Guljar Khan, chair of the Brick Lane and Banglatown Restaurant Association said: "The problem we have is that 95% of Indian restaurants are owned by Bangladeshis and we want to promote our own food. The festival is an opportunity for English customers to try the food and where else can you try this apart from at Brick Lane, the second home of Bangladeshis."

He added that the festival name change reflected the fact that Brick Lane is not just about curry, with the area having diversified to offer multiple types of cuisine.

"It's not just about curry, it's about food," he said. "If things go well we are hoping to promote this format for the rest of the year too."

For the festival, each restaurant has created a special menu offering Bengali dishes that are not featured on their standard menus. The festival menus will run alongside each restaurant's



▲ *Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets John Biggs at the festival launch*

normal menu, offering an authentic taste of Bangladesh. Dishes on offer include Piazi Chana, Chot Poti, Aloo Bharta, Maas Baza, Boti Kebab, Keema Bora, Vegetable Pakora, Bindi Pakora, Shabji Bhaji, Murgi Shingara, Begoon Bhaja, Kashi Fry and Chicken Pakora.

The food festival, which kicked off on 3 December, is running until 9 January and coincides with the 50th anniversary of Bangladeshi Independence.



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BCA reveals award winners



▲ Sir Keir Starmer with BCA leaders

The Bangladesh Caterers Association has announced the regional winners of both its Restaurant of the Year and Chef of the Year Awards.

The Awards were held at Intercontinental, The O2, London in November and co-hosted by Samantha Simmonds, BBC News presenter and Gary Newbon, Sky Sports presenter. The event was attended by high-profile guests, dignitaries, Members of Parliament and the media.

Entries are judged on a range of competencies from innovation, to food presentation, hygiene standards and



▲ Award winner



▲ Award winner

customer service. The Awards are a celebration of the best of curry houses in the UK and represent how integral Bangladeshi restaurants are to local communities and high-streets.

This year's Awards, now in their 15th year, coincided with the BCA's Diamond Anniversary. BCA has been representing the Bangladeshi curry industry in Britain since 1960. For details of all the winners, visit <https://bca1960.com>.





Meeting staff shortages



As Xmas approaches for the hospitality industry amid shortages of staff, it is a good time to reflect on your needs as an employer.

Those who already hold a sponsor licence to recruit will already be well placed to meet this demand. Those who do not hold a sponsor licence will have limited abilities to recruit non UK or resident staff.

The immigration policy has changed subtly from selecting the most suitable to selecting the best. It is not necessary

for an employer to demonstrate that positions have been advertised in the local market any longer. As long as they are satisfied that the applicant had the minimum skills required, will carry out the job for which they have been sponsored, and that their status is monitored, the employer is free to select the employee of their choice, locally based or abroad. Overall, under the new regulations the employer has much more flexibility in selecting staff than before.

The skill levels for the vacancy are

equivalent to requiring A Levels. Previously the level was graduate and therefore limited the positions that could be occupied.

The employer will still need to demonstrate if necessary that the position is genuine. So for example hiring a relative or friend may indicate that the position is created for a particular person rather than a job and therefore may not be considered to be genuine.

Hiring migrant workers is an expensive business with both employers and employees being required to meet a salary minimum of £25,600 per year in most cases and having to shell out significant fees. However it widens the reach for the employer especially in the positions that are hard to fill.

There are significantly more skilled workers in hospitality in countries including India, Bangladesh and Pakistan where hospitality has a recognised status.

Obtaining a sponsor licence takes several weeks and creates duties and responsibilities. However its advantage is that it puts the employer in the driving seat (almost) allowing them to select the employee they think is the best for their needs.

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Manage all your orders all in one place



Just Eat POS is the only place you can bring all your Just Eat orders and third-party apps together with your own customised website. So you can manage all of your orders all in one place.

Make your menu speak your language

Send orders to the kitchen in any language. Whether your chefs speak Bengali or Punjabi, you can set up a system that works for your team.

Your own website in minutes

We'll create your very own website, branded to your restaurant, for free. And the best part? Every order will go directly to your EPOS.

Keep your drivers connected

With our integrated Driver App, never lose track of your deliveries. It only takes a few taps to see your drivers' location, assign orders straight from your EPOS and more.



Ready to make running your restaurant easier than ever?

Scan the QR code to find out more

