

Awards of Excellence 2016: Overseas Development Program (ODP)

Participants – Chef Javed Ahamad (Vismark Asian Cuisine Chef of the Year)

Travel Experience

I was delighted to find out from the World Gourmet Summit (WGS) team that the award winners from the Awards of Excellence (AOE) will be enrolled in the Overseas Development Program (ODP) that was organised jointly by WGS and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). It was a pleasant surprise to be presented with the opportunity to go abroad to pick up new culinary skills during a 7-day trip to Sydney, which included a visit to Zaaffran.

I was definitely very excited to experience Sydney's culinary scene, especially since my accommodation was situated near Darling Harbour, providing me ease of access to the city's best dining spots. My first meal in Sydney was at a Thai restaurant around the area, which turned out to be a real treat. In the evening, I headed to Zaaffran but unfortunately they were very busy with dinner service, leaving me unable to meet the chef personally.

The following day I met with Chef Vikrant Kapoor, head chef and co-owner of Zaaffran. I asked him to take me into his kitchen, to showcase and highlight the way he runs the kitchen. I also had the chance to sit down to lunch with him as we exchanged stories and tips regarding Indian cuisine and our own culinary journey. From that session, I took away a better understanding of how one of Sydney's best Indian restaurants is run and what their challenges are.

My experience of Sydney's culinary scene is that of a cosmopolitan nature, with Australian cuisine that's peppered with global influences. Organic and biodynamic foods have become widely available and there has even been a revival of interest in bush foods. There's evidence of British traditions persisting to some degree within domestic cooking and the take-away food sector, as popular dishes like Australian meat pie and fish n' chips are still a staple.

However, there are also new elements featured in these comfort foods. Meat is a core component of Australian cuisine and its diet, with the production of meat being a historically significant part of the country's agricultural economy. While fast food chains are abundant, Australia's metropolitan centre is home to many well-established gastronomic establishments, with both local and international servings due to a strong multi-cultural presence.

In spite of Sydney being a country that houses many trendy and fine dining restaurants, I feel that Indian cuisine there still has much ways to go as it doesn't seem to reflect the authentic flavours that the cuisine is known for. My guess is that they have adapted the flavour profiles to suit local palates. I have, though, learnt a few things about their dessert-making, having witnessed candy floss- and chocolate fudge-making demonstrations.

My most memorable meals were at Altitude Restaurant at Shangri-La Hotel Sydney and Westfield Sydney. The meat dish I had at the two-hat Altitude Restaurant was one of the best meals Sydney could offer any diner. During my trip, I picked up a few technical cooking tips like how they prepared their special roast beef and beef ribs. I will be sure to implement what I've learnt during my trip at my restaurant. I'd like to extend my gratitude to Peter Knipp Holdings Pte Ltd & STB for giving me such great opportunity to go on this culinary journey.