

Awards of Excellence 2016: Overseas Development Program (ODP)

Participants – Gabbriel James (At-Sunrice Restaurant Manager of the Year)

Cross Exposure Experience

Firstly, I would like to thank the Awards of Excellence (AOE) and Singapore Tourism Board (STB) for this wonderful opportunity. This opportunity has fulfilled one of my dreams, which is to work with one of the top restaurants in the world and for this I am especially thankful and grateful.

When I first received news of the program, I was really very excited although not without reservations. The concerns I had centred on leaving my family behind for 2 weeks and looking into the low-peak period of the restaurant that I'm currently working at because of the short time frame given to me to select the travel period for this trip. There were also decisions to make like which restaurant to choose and planning my travel itinerary that would fit the budget outline provided to me.

I had narrowed my choices to two restaurants and after waiting for some time, the first person to respond was Chef Anthony Demetre from Wild Honey in London. I had worked with Chef Anthony before, when he was in Singapore in 2013, making it easier for me to get in touch with him and his team. He has a 2 Michelin-star rating for 2 of his restaurants. Chef Anthony introduces me to his business partner, Will Smith, who is in charge of the front-of-house. I finally decided to work with Wild Honey in St George Street, London.

When I arrived in London on the first day, Will made arrangements to meet up with me to further understand the program and discuss my work schedule, job scope and what I was hoping to learn. I was really excited and also a little nervous. I was quite surprised that there aren't many changes in London compared to the last visit I had when seeing my aunt who lived there 20 years ago. I noticed that the F&B concepts and layouts have evolved; it's catered more to the young and trendy executive types, where they savour dishes that steer towards tasting portions.

Working at Wild honey was a good experience for me as I had the opportunity to work at different work stations and understand how its operations were carried out. The restaurant has two levels – the ground floor where the kitchen is, and the first floor where the dining area for 60 diners is located. For lunch, the restaurant would have about 40 to 50 diners, during which I shadowed the senior head staff and the manager most of the time. Although lunch was a set menu, the dishes prepared had quality and the presentation was simple, yet beautiful. I was assigned to the pass area on one occasion and managed to see how they prepared for the day's service and how operations were carried out. Their lunch menu changes every day with only 1 to 2 items remaining as their signature dishes, like the rabbit dish.

Dinner service was much more relaxed, so everything seemed to slow down and take a step back as compared to lunch service. The menu offered to diners was different, as it included a la carte options. I observed and learnt from the staff how to approach service from a practical standpoint, like adding table settings course by course as opposed to placing the full setting from the start. They also settle bill payments at the diners' table, helping to cut out time spent running back and forth from table to till. The one thing that I really admire is the fact that staff are very passionate about the produce and are well-informed on daily changes that occur regularly. On the other hand, there

was one thing that puzzled and disappointed me. It was hard to accept the fact that the restaurant doesn't have a dumb waiter so all the soiled dishes and utensils had to be carried manually, up and down the flight of stairs. The overall experience was really meaningful and engaging, spurring me to have a word with my superiors so that I can suggest to them some of the implementations that might be able to apply to our own establishment. Once again, I am thankful and grateful for this opportunity as it has made me think about how we can improve our own level and quality of service.