



Razeen Parambil, general manager of Absolute Barbecues managed by Dubai-based Mayfair Restaurants, talks to **RetailME** about the concept's aspiration to take the barbecue experience in Dubai to the next level by offering a 'do-it-yourself' option

## Delighting barbecue lovers

It all began in India with the desire to serve succulent kebabs to meat lovers," recounts Parambil.

"Realising the growing demand for good quality grilled food, we took the cue from the tandoor, a cylindrical oven made of clay or metal that is traditionally used to cook and bake. But using it is a cumbersome affair so we wanted a barbecue concept with a difference. That led to the birth of Absolute Barbecues, AB's in short, in 2006," he elaborates.

India's first wish grill concept earned kudos as one of the best restaurants in Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai before crossing the seas to the UAE in December last year in the company of Dubai-based Mayfair Restaurants, which set up the first restaurant at Fraser Suites in Dubai Media City.

"The response has been overwhelming. We received over 1,000 guests over the third weekend in January and we draw around 150-to-200 people daily on work days, 60% of whom we see as regulars. That repeat footfall is heartening, considering we haven't leveraged any marketing media aside from radio and Zomato, the online restaurant search and discovery service," reveals Parambil.

### DIY barbecue, a big draw

AB's USP is the live, table-top DIY (do-it-yourself) barbecue experience it offers its guests. "Dubai has its share of restaurants offering barbecue options on their menu. But letting your guests barbecue their own food choices is a novelty and fun



activity, which sets us apart from the crowd," says Parambil.

"We place a charcoal grill on each table. It's a steel canister with three compartments, the top one with a plate to hold the food to be grilled, the middle one with a cover for the coal and the bottom one to collect the falling ash. There's also a central counter with a live grill offering exotic choose-it-yourself culinary options for main courses and desserts. If a diner wishes to marinate the meat, we train them how to go about it. But you've got to remember that the tastiest choices are meats marinated 24 hours before barbecuing," he elaborates.

### Offering wide and innovative options

"We've introduced a lot of innovation in barbecuing. For example, one of our barbecue options is watermelon, which isn't quite the norm. Juicy lamb chops are one of our best-sellers, while cheese potato also sees a lot of takers. We don't have beef on our menu, but we have wide options in seafood including prawns, baby octopus and squid as well as turkey, duck, quail and, of course, chicken," Parambill explains.

AB's prepares the accompanying sauces, salads and side dishes in-house, offering two types of sprays (chili garlic and paprika),



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### **Adhering to technical requirements**

He draws attention to the mechanics of barbecuing, pointing out the details that need to be looked

three sauce variants (pineapple, mango and Mexican) as well as garlic-mayonnaise and mint chutney.

"Our wide vegetarian options are another differentiating factor. A restaurant with barbecue as its core proposition isn't always known for its vegetarian options. That has given us an edge. In fact, we offer similar DIY barbecue options for our vegetarian guests, including main courses. Our desserts have also struck a chord, especially our customised options for diabetic guests. The idea is to change the menu highlights every week to ensure newness," Parambil continues.

into. "If there's less coal, heating becomes difficult, while excess coal can burn the meat or vegetables. Or consider this – when filled and placed on the table, the grill or 'sigree' weighs around 15kg. So the table has to be designed to bear the weight. Our table-top has a sunken hole that is covered on all four sides to ensure guests do not touch the hot grill. The cover and grill are placed in a way to prevent contact and the table has wooden collars to capture heat transmission. The chairs are also ergonomically designed to maximise comfort so guests can enjoy the barbecue experience," Parambil elucidates.

AB's spans 6,300 sqft, of which 1,800 sqft

is occupied by the kitchen, and it houses 32 tables with a seating capacity for 172 guests. "We ensure our guests are seated comfortably and have enough space to move around so they can spend quality time here when they come to dine. There is wide access between tables for our staff to carry canisters back and forth," he explains.

"Any restaurant our size doesn't require more than 40 tonnes of air-conditioning. But we have three times the capacity, with a chill water air-conditioning system so we can adhere to health and safety guidelines. Our grills do not emit heat but they do emit smoke. But even smoke is emitted only if a guest uses the oil spray while the skewer is still on the grill instead of placing it on the platter. For that we have installed a smoke eliminator system with a four-level filtration process – UV, carbon, electrostatic and mesh. It not only captures and filters the smoke but sends back fresh air. We plan to upgrade our current fresh air system within the next couple of months to make it even more effective," Parambil clarifies.

### **Going slow on expansion**

"Being part of the food service industry we're aware that people here don't mind paying a premium for good food served in a unique ambience. In fact, they don't mind travelling from distant places to eat at their favourite restaurants, even if the waiting period is long," Parambil believes.

"That's what we factored in while choosing our current location in Fraser Suites. It's also close to Dubai Media City, Jumeirah Lakes Towers, Jumeirah Road and other prime residential and commercial areas," he adds.

The first location being standalone, AB's is already planning its second branch, which, most likely, will be mall-based. "We're in R&D mode at present. We don't need as large a space as our current one but it should look different. We're working on the technicalities to identify the right location that doesn't compromise health and safety requirement nor consumer delight. We don't want to rush through the incubation period, preferring to proceed in a slow but steady manner. We're looking at setting up two more locations by 2016-end, having earmarked \$2.72 million for our expansion plan," Parambil concludes. ■