

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Case Study has analysed an entrepreneurial endeavour of Mr. Udena to popularise Sri Lankan cuisines among non-Sri Lankans living in UAE. Mr. Udena started his Sri Lankan cuisine restaurant Ayubowan in the year 2015 in Dubai, the most culturally diversified Emirates in UAE and one of the most dynamic and vibrant cities in the world. Among several other Sri Lankan restaurants operating in UAE as ‘budget eateries’, Ayubowan was distinguishable based on its positioning as a ‘casual-dining’ restaurant which offers customers a good dine-in experience at a relatively higher price. Further, ‘Ayubowan’ was identified as a casual-dining restaurant that offers Sri Lankan cuisine for ‘anyone & everyone’ and compete against other casual dining restaurants offering other types of international cuisine such as Indian, Italian, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic.

The Case Study has taken an effort to understand how entrepreneurial characteristics of Mr. Udena helped ‘Ayubowan’ achieve its business objectives and also how other key factors such as the marketing strategy and training & development of the staff helped to position ‘Ayubowan’ in the ‘casual-dining segment’ of UAE’s restaurant business domain. The Case Study has also explained the influence and impact of a multicultural and multi-ethnic society on a restaurant start up and the challenges encountered and resolutions implemented along the journey of Ayubowan to popularize Sri Lankan cuisine among non-Sri Lankans.

The case study was analysed using qualitative techniques. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were carried out to collect data. Observations made during the long hours spent in the restaurant conducting interviews have been useful to improve on the reliability of the data gathered through interviews. The main focus of the KIIs and FGDs was to establish how the identified drivers of the case framework helped ‘Ayubowan’ establish itself as a popular restaurant offering Sri Lankan cuisine among non-Sri Lankans living in UAE and the influence of multi-cultural diversity of UAE on this endeavour as a whole.

Secondary data collection involved gathering data through multiple sources, such as, ‘Ayubowan’ web site, YouTube videos uploaded by ‘Ayubowan’ to promote various theme nights organised at the restaurant as well as to create awareness on preparation of

some of the most popular Sri Lankan cuisines, reviews & related articles published on newspapers both in UAE and Sri Lanka and customer feedback provided on Facebook.

Mr. Udena's entrepreneurial characteristics combined with leadership traits have played a major contribution to the success of Ayubowan restaurant and in achieving its business objectives. He has been a connoisseur of food since his youth and was interested in learning about the culinary arts and traditions of various parts of Sri Lanka. Over the years he has also developed his skills in cooking. When his idea of starting a high-end Sri Lankan cuisine restaurant was rejected by the existing Sri Lankan restaurateurs in UAE, he took a big risk and started a restaurant on his own. Mr. Udena has been managing his personal relationships with people very effectively and as such, when he decided to start a new business, there were a lot of support from his ex-colleagues and friends.

A marketing plan was drawn identifying the market position and the target customer segments of Ayubowan restaurant. A key differentiating factor was the extensive training provided to the staff, both customer facing and in the kitchen. This was necessary to operate in a culturally diversified city like Dubai and to compete against other restaurants in casual dining segment, some of which belong to well established global restaurant chains.

Mr. Udena's initial objective was to open up a Sri Lankan cuisine restaurant that satisfied the 'social needs' (dine-in experience, ambience, prestige) of the high-income Sri Lankans and non-Sri Lankans who love Sri Lankan food. Due to various economic and environmental challenges, the long-term sustainability of Ayubowan restaurant required pursuing the 'food needs' of other low and middle-income population in the UAE. Mr. Udena also realised that he needs bigger support from the Sri Lankan community living in UAE for his endeavour to popularise Sri Lankan cuisines among non-Sri Lankans. During the Case Study, it is found that Mr. Udena has cleverly adopted new business strategies to suit changing conditions in the market.