



Vendor Spotlight: Cross Culture

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It is no doubt that you have heard of Cross Culture, the ethnic restaurant serving Indian cuisine, which is taking over Pennsylvania and New Jersey. With the majority of restaurants that open and close within the first few years of business, how has Cross Culture been able to open six locations in such close proximity? To be a successful restaurateur, it takes more than just great food. We interviewed Gurjeet (Monty) Kainth to learn the secret to his success.

Before Cross Culture, what was your job?

I was involved in an international business trading wholesale accessories and clothing. Through this business, I was introduced to Peddler's Village. My goods were sold in their boutiques, I was their sales representative. Cross Culture was a business I accidentally got into.

When did you open your first restaurant?

One day, my wife and I went to the Peddler's Village Annual Apple Festival and I saw an opportunity for a restaurant. I reached out to management and said I wanted to introduce Indian food. It was a big challenge, there were tough negotiations with management because I had to convince them Indian food could fit in. We opened our first restaurant in 2005, it was well received and business was great. The problem was that our space was too tiny, there

were only 14 seats! It was cafe style and I wanted it to be more formal.

How has your business evolved?

First, we moved our location from Peddler's Village to Doylestown in 2006. Then we opened up another location in Haddonfield during 2009. In 2010 we opened a Princeton restaurant and in 2011 we opened up a location in Lambertville. From 2011 to 2016 we focused on branding and getting the word out about our established locations. When we heard about Ferry Market opening in 2017, we decided to move our Lambertville location to New Hope and open another restaurant in Buckingham. Just before the holidays, we opened up Cross Culture Newtown. Right now, we are also looking at locations in Montgomery County, King of Prussia, and Center Valley.

In what way does Ferry Market differ from your other restaurants?

At Ferry Market we prepare the same meals fresh every day. There are lots of tourists in Ferry Market, so our staple items are all there. We know what people like the most and serve our most popular dishes there. Everyone likes the vegetable samosas as an appetizer, so it is available for anyone who wants it. Many people want tandoori chicken, so we offer that too. Chicken tikka masala is the foremost item on almost every Indian menu. If customers want to branch out, they can venture to one of our sit down restaurants. Local people know we have a spot at Ferry Market and that if they want to try new things they can come to our other locations.

How did you design your menu?

We've found our niche, which is northern Indian food. Our menu has never changed since its inception. We have no specials, everything is special. When people go out, they have specific favorites for themselves. They will order the same dish because they are spending money and they don't want to go experimental. If someone has been coming in for 10 years and tried every dish, that is the day I will introduce a special.

What are key ingredients in Indian cooking?

Primarily, Indian food is all about curry. If you go out and ask people if they know what Indian

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food is, they say ‘yes, it’s curry’. Curry is a sauce, it’s similar to how you dress yourself. You can wear different clothes, but you maintain your core. There is so much depth with Indian food and huge variation with each curry. The key ingredients in Indian cooking are the spices. When we talk spices, we are not talking about the heat level. People are reluctant to try Indian food because they think it is hot. That’s not what we’re talking about here. We’re talking about the flavors, like cinnamon, cardamom, and cloves. We create a special spice mixture called garam masala. Masala means a blend.

How do you respond to people who say ‘I don’t like Indian food’?

One summer I was sitting outside at our Doylestown location and I saw a couple going back and forth. They would look in the restaurant, but would not enter. I asked if they needed directions. The couple said they were retired physicians and lived in town for many years. These two locals dine out every day and had seen my restaurant many times, but never tried it. When I asked what was keeping them away, the woman told me 30 that years ago she had a bad experience with Indian food because it was too spicy. I asked if she would allow me to reintroduce her to Indian cuisine and she agreed. It took her 30 years to return to Indian food, but now she and her partner come in every week. We have everything for everyone. My goal is to introduce Indian food to people who have never tried it, or reintroduce it to people who think they don’t like it.

If someone has never tried Indian food, what dish would you recommend?

We try to give the guest an overview of Indian food first. Sometimes people come in, see the menu, and say ‘I want to try curry’. Well, everything on the menus is about curry, what do you like? We won’t just blindly recommend something, we get to know the guest. We’ll ask things like what level of spice do you like? Are you vegetarian or are you a meat lover? We will ask their specific needs and push them to the best choice. A great option is the tandoori mixed grill, which is a sampler of all our meats in the house. For people who are new, we will provide a variation of sauces to introduce new flavors.

What keeps customers coming back?

The consistency and package we provide. I always look forward to tomorrow’s business. Some guests who used to come in as kids have gone on to college, married, and had kids of their own. Now they bring their families here too. We provide a consistency with our food, service, and ambiance. This package makes them come in again and again. We haven’t done any promotion, it’s just word of mouth. What we do is keep it simple. It’s authentic, original, and consistent. When guests hop from one location to another, our customers feel they are getting the same thing again and again.

Tell us your vision for Cross Culture.

I have a vision to get Indian food to the next level. I don’t consider myself a chain, even with six restaurants. There has been an emergence of Indian food all around, but Indian food has not ever hit a level of PF Chang’s, or even casual dining like Chipotle. I want to take it to that level, but I will only be able to achieve this when I can focus on the core American people in communities throughout the country, not just big cities. We are raising awareness, but there are lots of markets available which can be tapped into. We still have a long way to go.

You’ve clearly had great success, what advice would you give to other restaurateurs?

Whatever you do, do it with your heart and soul. It is important to bring these elements together. Everybody wants to do something big in their life and become successful. You can’t just say you want to open a restaurant, the dedication and commitment should be there. You must ask yourself, does your heart want this? Does your mind say yes, you can do it? If your heart and soul are there, your body will do the work.

Trying new types of foreign cuisine can be intimidating, but it doesn’t have to be. Cross Culture distinguishes itself from other ethnic restaurants because they take the time to get to know their guests and understand their needs. Monty is educating consumers about Indian food and making it accessible for everyone. Visit Ferry Market for an introduction to Indian food, or venture into one of Cross Culture’s sister locations to expand your palate.