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## Food: Popular Kolkata Ice-Cream Brand To Debut In Mumbai

Nov 13, 2016, 08:24 IST | Anju Maskeri

***Kolkata's Ice Cream Makers, Known For Out-Of-The-Box Flavours Like Wasabi And Sandalwood, Are Making Their Mumbai Debut Tomorrow. Are You Adventurous Enough?***



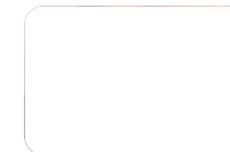
*As many as 17 ingredients go into making a paan flavoured icecream*

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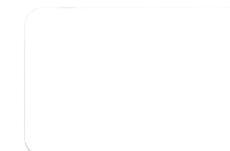
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In 1985, when Anuvrat Pabrai started a small ice cream shop at Kolkata's Russel Street, it was to help wife, Tulika, gainfully utilise her time. "My brother-in-law owned a small 350 sq feet space from where we began to operate. Initially, we bought and sold ice cream from Vadilal and Kwality," says Pabrai, who went on to invest in a factory in 1986, making Tulika's Ice Cream, now one of Kolkata's best known regional brands.



*The highest selling item is the nolen gur or khajur ka gur, the traditional jaggery that can be found only in West Bengal and Bangladesh*

But, in 2008, the Pabrais were forced to shut shop due to severe labour problems. "Knowing nothing else, but to make ice cream, we took over a small factory in Kolkata's Ballygunge Park Road area and decided to make a niche product — natural ice-cream of unusual flavours. The aim was to offer varieties, the likes of which people had never heard or tasted before," explains the 58-year-old, who took this decision because competing with established brands seemed commercially impractical.



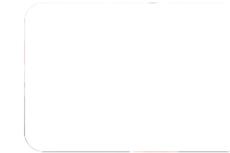
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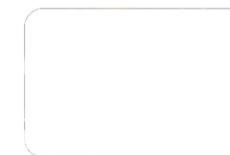
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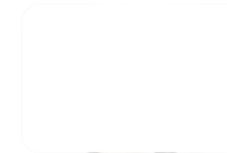
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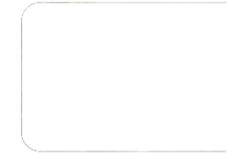


*The lemon grass ice cream has been inspired by Thai cuisine*

Today, after eight years, Pabrai's Fresh & Naturelle Ice Creams is synonymous with the unconventional and bizarre flavours such as wasabi, sandalwood which gives a cooling sensation, mascarpone cheese with candied fruits, aniseed (saunf), matcha green tea, rose sandesh, sandalwood and lemongrass. Flavours are also adopted from different cuisines, regions and fruit extracts.



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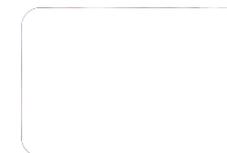
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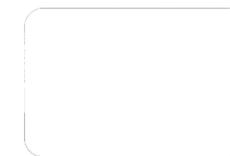
*The Mumbai store will be launched tomorrow at JP Road, Versova*

And, it's got some well-known patrons, too. President of India Pranab Mukerjee, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli are said to have their own favourite Pabrai's. "In fact, when Hillary Clinton visited India in 2012, she fell in love with the nolen gur or date palm jaggery flavour. She was staying at the Taj and had just the ice cream for dinner," says Pabrai's elder son, Kunal who now runs the business with his brother Nishant.



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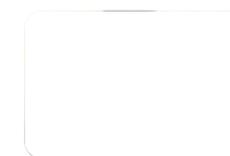


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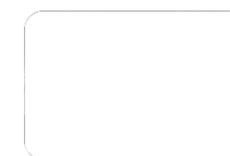
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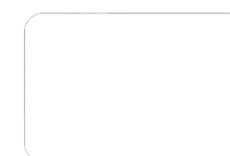
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*(From left) Nishant, Kunal and Anuvrat Pabrai run the ice cream business*

Perhaps, among their celebrity list will now be a few Mumbai stars as well. The brand launches its first franchise in Versova tomorrow. Currently present in 11 cities, including Ahmedabad, Chennai and Gurugram, the Mumbai outlet will be its 26th franchise outlet. “We’ve been eyeing Mumbai for a while now. It is an exciting space for an entrepreneur because people here are open to experimentation,” reveals Kunal, who in the past one year has made several trips to the city to understand the market and competition like Naturals, Gokul and Taj.

Much of the research, he says, goes into identifying flavours that the public will resonate with. “So, when we went to the South, we realised people love their filter coffee and hate instant coffee brands. So, we introduced the Indian filter coffee flavour in the menu.” He adds that the brand often ties up with executive chefs to craft the recipe.

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But, that was not always the case. Back in 2008, Pabrai recalls spending hours studying ingredients and making trials. “I would typically make two or three combinations and give it to friends and family members for feedback. Even now, every time we concoct a new flavour, it calls for a dinner table discussion,” says Pabrai, who has now turned chief advisor to the brand.

The most challenging recipe till date has been the paan ice cream because there are 35 different types of betel leaves and each tastes different. “As many as 17 ingredients go into making a paan, and the Kolkata meetha paan has a blend of flavour and sweetness. We make a concoction of the ingredients and add it to the paan ice cream. We also use mulethi, a herb commonly used as a cough remedy,” he explains, adding that they also prepare the gulkand in-house. The highest selling, however, is the nolen gur or khajur ka gur, the traditional jaggery that can be found only in West Bengal and Bangladesh. It is also called ‘new jaggery’ and is only extracted from the trees during winter.

The Pabrais take care to ensure that all ingredients are genuine. While the mascarpone cheese is imported from Italy, the wasabi comes from Japan. It’s probably why each scoop costs between R60-80. The attention to ingredients also has the Pabrais using naturally processed cocoa. “This gives the ice-cream five times more antioxidants than green tea,” explains Pabrai. Using natural ingredients, he adds, can make a basic flavour like vanilla taste different. “You’ll be able to spot the vanilla pods, the black spot marks, on the scoop. We procure the bean from Madagascar,” says Kunal.

Interestingly, the fruits are not processed using machines, but are hand cut. “We realised that the natural flavour of the fruits gets lost when processed in a machine. People find that hard, but in the past we have offered patrons a taste of hand-cut and factory-processed variant, and they invariably taste the difference,” he says.

Two years ago, they introduced the concept of cuisine-based ice-creams and have flavours inspired by Chinese, Thai, Italian, Vietnamese and Japanese fare with varieties like sichuan peppercorn, black sesame and 5 spice. These are supplied to some popular restaurants like Mainland China and the ITC Group.

Despite drawing from other cuisines, Pabrai tries to add a desi touch to their ice cream by weaving in flavours such as chandan, rose sandesh and kesaria rabri malai.

The family normally encourages patrons to do at least 10 tastings before selecting a flavour. “Funny as it sounds, we even ask them to smell it because each flavour has a distinct aroma. The matcha green tea is nothing like the green tea we have. It has a wonderful aroma and is rich in taste,” he says. This flavour, we learn, left Japanese Emperor Akihito and his wife Empress Michiko asking for more when they visited the country in 2013.

“We are hoping the same from Mumbai,” smiles Pabrai.

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Tulika's Ice-Cream

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