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Interview with Yasser Al Hobayeb (http://www.hospitalitynewsmag.com/en/event/in-with-yasser-al-hobayeb/)

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In an exclusive interview with HN, Hodema consulting services talks with Yasser Al Hobayeb, owner of Delicious Food and member of Erkaz Investment Group Co., and franchisee of Em Sherif Café in KSA.



1. Why did you decide to acquire the franchise of "Em Sherif Café" for KSA?

Em Sherif Café was an interesting investment for KSA for several reasons: It first came from our desire to offer the Em Sherif 'experience' to our country since it benefits from a strong brand awareness among our target clientele. On the other hand, following the optimistic financial feasibility study, the well-documented manuals detailing intricate details of construction, operations and management, the training programs and support provided by the franchisor, as well as the opportunity for us to scale up with multiple brand offerings with the same franchisor, we concluded that acquiring Em Sherif was a very positive and promising financial move.

2. What was the most rewarding part as a franchisee?

And the most unexpected struggle?

Seeing the satisfaction and pleasure in our customers' eyes after a visit at our café, is the greatest reward for us. Our staff and our franchisor helped us in our vision of bringing the authentic Lebanese flavors and recreating the 'Em Sherif experience' in Riyadh.

However, our efforts to reach perfection definitely come with a lot of challenges. Our franchisor is extremely sensitive in all matters related to food quality, taste and authenticity. The economic crisis in Lebanon led to export restrictions in terms of products and ingredients hence adding a lot of complexity to the production process.



Yasser Al Hobayeb, owner of Delicious Food and member of Erkaz Investment Group Co., and franchisee of Em Sherif Café in KSA

3. How do you perceive the Food and Beverage (F&B) market in KSA today and in the coming years?

Saudi Arabia leads the F&B market in the GCC, with a market value of about USD 12 Billion. The Kingdom's food industry remains one of the most attractive in the region, with strong sales growth figures forecast over the next decade. The F&B industry represents one of the largest shares of the total household spending. Despite the small decrease in the overall spending in the last few years, we expect that sales growth will recover and flourish due to the steady improvement of the local economy. In addition, the sub-sector will continue to provide the food retailers with impressive growth opportunities, whereby hypermarkets and supermarkets which that account for more than half of market share of grocery retail, continue to be largely supportive. The food sector benefits from a sizeable population of around 31.74 million and the relatively large size of a Saudi family. These demand generators will boost the needs for consumer goods amid a weaker consumer-spending environment, with projections that consumption could grow over 50 percent in the next few years.

In the KSA, the days when restaurateurs used to take their guests for granted are over. Customers are now offered numerous choices in every F&B segment, so they are looking for better variety, taste, price, convenience and overall experience. Any restaurant chain that is falling short in any of these areas is bound to perish sooner than later.

In conclusion, growing population, increasing consumer spending, and public sector investment in malls, hotels and restaurants are driving growth in the F&B sector.

Moreover, the effects of globalization on the sector are quite evident, with the increasing modernization in lifestyle and food preferences. This has led to a shift in people's dietary preferences from the traditional Arabic cuisine to international flavors.

4. What is the expansion plan for "Em Sherif Café" in KSA on the short and mid term?

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We will be opening three to four locations in Saudi Arabia within the next two years. Although the idea of expanding is exhilarating, we want our growth plan to be smart, built on an accurate planning, team consensus, as well as on the guests' experience and demand. We will be pushing our limits but with calculated risks. We are currently setting up a solid foundation with a well-studied IT and support service infrastructure.

5. Do you have any future plans to venture into additional F&B projects?

We are currently negotiating with major F&B brands to bring them to KSA for the first time. We also have ideas to launch local brands, but this project is still under study and awaits the completion of market studies.

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The image shows a promotional graphic for the magazine 'Taste & flavors'. On the left is a thumbnail of the magazine cover, which features a chef's hat, a clock, and various food items. The cover text includes 'Taste & flavors', 'TOP CHEFS', and 'NEW ISSUE'. To the right of the thumbnail, the magazine title 'Taste & flavors' is written in a large, green, serif font. Below the title, the text reads: 'NEW ISSUE IS OUT NOW IN BOOKSTORES! CLICK TO READ YOUR FREE E-COPY'. At the bottom of the graphic are social media icons for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

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