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5 questions to Firas Mando, chairman of Almond & Beyond, Iraq (https://www.hospitalitynewsmag.com/firas-mando/)

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In an interview for Hospitality News ME, Hodema consulting services caught up with Firas Mando, chairman of Almond & Beyond Iraq, to find out more about his pastry concept and how it is leaving a mark on the Iraqi pastry scene.

What can you tell us about Almond & Beyond?

In 1968, Homs-Syria, Almond & Beyond bakery and pastry opened its doors as a modest, family-run business. It provided baked goods, pastries, bread, ice cream, chocolates and confectionery to the Homs region with 65 employees. Many of the products were manually prepared.

In 2014, Almond & Beyond opened a second branch in Erbil, Iraq, with 35 employees operating 365 days a year, offering a variety of bakery and pastry items, with a dine-in area and catering services for events (weddings, engagements and birthday parties).

Our range of products is diversified to meet the growing needs of our customers. We produce more than 2,500 different types of bakery items, including bread, pastries, confectionery, muffins, cakes and ice cream.

Our vision is to provide high-quality specialty products while maintaining excellent customer satisfaction.

The bakery consists of state-of-the-art, fully and semi-automated production lines. Our team of highly trained employees ensures that all goods are freshly produced.

What are the key success factors of Almond & Beyond?

We constantly strive to innovate new goods depending on local tastes, events, trends and client feedback. We focus on continuous improvement, and we are always up to date with the latest new techniques used in the industry to maintain the quality of our products.

Our main objective is to maintain quality, excellence and consistency by using the best raw materials, serving connoisseurs, whether consultants or visiting chefs. We strongly believe that consistency is key in terms of quality and customer service.

We also offer exceptionally friendly service. Our employees and chefs benefit from ongoing training conducted by international consultants and chefs in the baking and cake-making industries to provide the knowledge needed to achieve excellence.

How would you describe the food retail trend in Iraq today and in the coming years?

Iraq's food industry faced significant difficulties between 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19.


Nonetheless, the retail food market is evolving, and the industry is expanding. As a result, a significant number of restaurants, coffee shops and food concepts are opening in Iraq to meet the rising demand.

In your opinion, is it a good time to invest in Iraq?

Although the economic situation is not stable, I strongly believe that it is a good time to invest in Iraq. The market is growing, and there is demand in the pastry and bakery industries. The purchasing power is increasing in Baghdad. A certain level of stability is apparent in the market despite higher prices.

What are your short- and medium-term plans for Almond & Beyond?

Almond & Beyond is looking to expand worldwide, particularly in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan and Bahrain. Over the past year, we have worked on developing our franchise manuals, and we are now ready to expand our brand. Baghdad is our priority in the short term. In the medium term, we are working on entering the Cairo market by either signing a franchise or a management/franchise deal.

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