

LUXlife
MAGAZINE

Food & Drink
Awards 2025

ANNA'S
GOURMET



Best European Fine Food Retailer 2025 - Singapore

Owned and run by Anna Jaeger, Anna's Gourmet is a specialist gourmet grocer, bringing the freshest and finest food and drinks from Europe to its customers in Singapore. Its customers are both expats, who love being able to get hold of food from their home country, and Singaporeans who are happy to explore new foods and flavours. This high-quality range of products includes baked goods, sweets, fruit and vegetables, nuts, dairy and cheese, meat, fish, drinks, and more, available both instore and with same-day delivery, six days a week.

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Artisanal Gelato Brand of the Year 2025 – South Carolina

Marion's Gelato is a family-owned business producing small batch artisan gelato. Originally a one-woman-band, the firm has grown over the years since its original inception, and Owner and namesake, Marion Kempf Manderville, has big plans for future expansion. We find out more as the firm gains notable success in the Food and Drink Awards 2025.

Food & Drink Awards 2025

LUXlife Magazine is delighted to announce the launch of the Food & Drink Awards 2025, a celebration of excellence across the global culinary landscape. This prestigious programme honours the artisans, entrepreneurs, and brands redefining how we eat and drink – from fine dining establishments and boutique producers to sustainable brands and gourmet retailers.

The food and drink industry remains a cornerstone of the global economy, valued at over \$9 trillion in 2025 and projected to grow steadily in the coming years. The sector is also undergoing rapid change, driven by demand for sustainability, technological integration, and health-conscious products. As these consumer tastes evolve, businesses are embracing eco-friendly practices, creative flavours, and smart solutions – setting the stage for the innovation the Food & Drink Awards 2025 aims to recognise.



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Best European Fine Food Retailer 2025 – Singapore

Owned and run by Anna Jaeger, Anna's Gourmet is a specialist gourmet grocer, bringing the freshest and finest food and drinks from Europe to its customers in Singapore. Its customers are both expats, who love being able to get hold of food from their home country, and Singaporeans who are happy to explore new foods and flavours. This high-quality range of products includes baked goods, sweets, fruit and vegetables, nuts, dairy and cheese, meat, fish, drinks, and more, available both instore and with same-day delivery, six days a week.

Anna is always listening to its customers and on the look-out for new products to add to its offering, while always ensuring top quality and freshness. Why? Because Anna understands how "many people are curious to explore new food and drinks, tired from the same things they find on the shelves of their supermarkets".

With more than 15 years spent working around the world within the oil and gas and telecommunication industries for organisations such as Alcatel and Rockwell Automation, Anna decided to make the move to Singapore in 2020 and start her own business, which in February 2024 she rebranded to Anna's Gourmet.

By August 2025, Anna's Gourmet relocated to bigger and brighter premises in Chip Bee Gardens, Holland Village, with Anna saying, "I fell in love with the Chip Bee neighbourhood. A lot is happening here right now. It is really vibrant. Not just us, a number of new restaurants, shops, and studios are opening their doors. Our new

store is super easy to reach, being just a two-minute walk away from the MRT and a parking lot – very convenient."

Today, Anna's Gourmet stocks a wide range of products, and it sits in a beautiful, spacious, new location – while also placing great emphasis on sustainability in a number of ways. This includes using paper packaging, as well as glass jars, which aren't only friendlier to the environment, but customers can reuse them, too.

Overall, the store's customers highly rate its product offering and customer service, with them leaving five-star review after five-star review.

One person says, "This is a very nice and tidy shop with products from Eastern Europe, which you don't see anywhere else. I would highly recommend to try their caviar and cured fish (extremely fresh) and Georgian wine. Shop owner, Anna is always ready to assist with my shopping experience and is very friendly with extensive knowledge of the products she is selling."



Another person comments, "Who would have thought that I would see our favourite sweets in a Singaporean shop? It's incredible. I already love Singapore! I will definitely visit Anna's Gourmet again!"

Someone else shares, "Finally, the store has moved closer to me. It's great that all the unusual products loved by Europeans are now nearby! Unusual products for Singapore include cottage cheese and other dairy products from the Baltic countries, dried fish, Siberian pelmeni, pickled vegetables, Georgian mineral water, unleavened rye bread, sausages and other meat delicacies, red salmon caviar, wine and liqueurs from Europe, and plenty of sweets. The new location is more spacious and brighter thanks to huge windows."

The future is looking very bright for Anna's Gourmet indeed, as it continues to expand its product range in time for Christmas and New Year – and also with more new products to some. Most certainly worthy of being named Best European Fine Food Retailer 2025 – Singapore, we're excited to see the brand continue to flourish!



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Artisanal Gelato Brand of the Year 2025 – South Carolina

Marion's Gelato is a family-owned business producing small batch artisan gelato. Originally a one-woman-band, the firm has grown over the years since its original inception, and Owner and namesake, Marion Kempf Manderville, has big plans for future expansion. We find out more as the firm gains notable success in the Food and Drink Awards 2025.

Handcrafted with fresh, natural ingredients, Marion's Gelato (Marion's) is locally produced in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, bringing an authentic taste of Italy to the Lowcountry.

Being made from the finest European ingredients, the freshest, organic and seasonal products, and free from any preservatives, artificial flavours or colouring, Marion's is the solution to living a healthy lifestyle and still enjoying a frozen dessert.

"Every cup is filled with love!" enthuses Marion Kempf Manderville, the owner of Marion's Gelato. "I am a passionate chef at home, cooking and baking everything from scratch."

Marion's Gelato was established in 2019 and started its business in March 2020, coinciding with the lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic - one of the hardest challenges that any small start-up company could face.

Initially, Marion's Gelato offered delivery to surrounding zip code areas, and could also be ordered through the website. The company also had a presence at the downtown Charleston city market, the Mount Pleasant, Summerville, and Isle of Palms Farmers Market, plus other local markets in and around the town of Mount Pleasant.

Having grown organically, Marion's Gelato will now be opening the doors to its first location in 2026, providing all gelato and coffee lovers to access the brand and its creations. As well as offering a retail store, Marion's also delivers gelato to restaurants, and to events in the local area.

Growing up in Germany, Marion herself spent a lot of time visiting most of the neighbouring European countries and soaking up many different influences to help her to create a continuous cycle of innovation. This, plus her background working in the food and beverage industry for 39 years, has provided Marion with a lot of knowledge and gives her business a strategic differentiation to its competitors.



"My strengths are having a deep customer and market understanding due to being in this business for so many years," Marion elaborates. "I so enjoy the bond I have established with all my regular customers as customer satisfaction stands on top of all Marion's Gelato doings."

So far, Marion's Gelato has only ever been a one woman show, with the help of family too. Now, with the opening of Marion's Gelato's first brick and mortar location, the company will be seeking staff members to join the team. Marion herself is highly trained in all aspects of running a business in the three big sectors Accounting, Sales and Marketing, and can therefore train anyone who is willing to work, learn, and who is reliable and honest.

Recently, Marion's Gelato tasted success when it gained recognition in the Food and Drink Awards 2025, being crowned Artisanal Gelato Brand of the Year 2025 - South Carolina.

Now, with the new store front being planned for a January 2026 launch, the future is looking bright, with Marion already exploring the possibilities of franchising the company, moving forward.

Marion also plans to expand her services to more local restaurants, as well as create a consistent base of regular customers. Furthermore, Marion's Gelato will introduce, as an expansion of the business, the company "Roasted Awakening" with its very own roasted variety of coffee beans from around the world.

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Best Contemporary Indian Fine Dining Restaurant 2025 – Texas

For a true fine dining experience with a difference, The Delhi Lounge, based in Irving, pays homage to the flavours of one of the oldest cities in the world. Each dish, painstakingly crafted by skilled chefs, seamlessly bridges the gap between traditional Indian roots and innovative culinary techniques, narrating tales of emperors, poets, and the irresistible allure of Delhi's streets. We find out more as the restaurant celebrates a win in the Food and Drink Awards 2025.

Authentic Indian restaurant, The Delhi Lounge, is situated in the heart of Dallas and aims to combine the rich and diverse flavours of North India with a contemporary dining experience that resonates with today's discerning guests.

The team at the restaurant takes great pride in honouring timeless recipes using the finest ingredients, refined presentation, and genuine hospitality. The menu reflects the breadth of India's culinary heritage, crafted with both authenticity, and creativity by the master chefs.

In Indian culture, the arrival of a guest is regarded as a blessing — a reflection of the divine. The principle of *Atithi Devo Bhava* embodies this sentiment, emphasising hospitality, respect, and heartfelt generosity.

"At The Delhi Lounge, we are proud to carry forward this timeless philosophy," a spokesperson for the restaurant tells us. "When we welcome guests into our space, we strive not only to serve them exquisite cuisine, but also to create a genuine experience so warm and memorable that they feel compelled to return time and again."

The Delhi Lounge welcomes a wonderfully diverse community of guests - from second-generation Indian Americans seeking the comfort of their culinary roots, to Caucasian and Native American patrons discovering the depth and vibrancy of Indian cuisine, and to food enthusiasts of every background who appreciate refined, flavour-driven dining. Whether it is an intimate dinner, a weekend outing, a special celebration, or a bespoke catering experience, the restaurant strives to ensure that every visit feels like a warm and memorable journey home.

"Innovation, for us, is a continuous conversation between tradition and modernity - a balance between our guests' evolving tastes and the timeless flavours of India," explains the spokesperson. "Every dish we serve is rooted in forgotten regional recipes and age-old culinary techniques."

These techniques include cooking exclusively in copper vessels, developing curry bases through meticulous research, and upholding a strict commitment to using no artificial food colours in our kitchen. Our marinades are carefully layered and slow-developed, resting for 24 to 48 hours to allow the deepest, most vibrant flavours to emerge naturally.

This dedication to craftsmanship extends beyond the kitchen to The Delhi Lounge's bar programme too, where signature Indian-inspired cocktails that blend regional spices with house-made syrups and

premium spirits are served, alongside a full bar and a wide selection of draft beers to suit every palate.

The restaurant has noticed guests today are moving beyond a generic understanding of "Indian food" and are increasingly seeking out the regional flavours, ingredients, and stories that reflect India's true diversity. This evolution in taste has created space for more refined, experience-driven dining, allowing restaurants such as The Delhi Lounge to showcase the culinary heritage of Delhi in a contemporary, upscale environment.

Yet, the industry continues to navigate its own set of challenges - from fluctuating ingredient costs and staffing shortages to shifting guest expectations. The restaurant meets these pressures with an unwavering commitment to quality over quantity, thoughtful sourcing of premium ingredients, and a focus on craftsmanship that deepens each guest's connection to the cuisine.

Together, these practices guide The Delhi Lounge toward creating not just a restaurant, but a space where culture, authenticity, and hospitality coexist with purpose and grace.

Listening closely to guests, honouring seasonality, and drawing inspiration from the creativity of the culinary and beverage teams is of paramount importance. This steadfast commitment to excellence has earned The Delhi Lounge the OpenTable Diner's Choice Award and recognition as one of the 3 Best Indian Restaurants in North Texas, as well as being named one of the Best Fine Dining Restaurants in the Dallas - Fort Worth Corridor in 2025. More recently, the restaurant gained yet further notable acclaim as it celebrated success in the Food and Drink Awards 2025 where it clinched the prestigious title of Best Contemporary Indian Fine Dining Restaurant 2025 – Texas.

The future of The Delhi Lounge is incredibly exciting, guided by the vision and mentorship of Chef Manjit Singh Gill, the restaurant's Culinary Director and a legendary figure in Indian gastronomy. His decades of leadership at ITC's iconic restaurants, including the globally celebrated Bukhara and the royal Dum Pukht, continue to shape our philosophy, techniques, and deep respect for regional culinary traditions.

Executive Chef Aishwary Agnihotri carries this legacy forward with precision and artistry. Supporting him is Executive Sous Chef Laxmiprasad Gairola (LPG), with more than 18 years of experience in luxury hospitality, Chef Gairola is celebrated as a curry specialist



and master of spice layering. Beyond his technical expertise, he has embarked on a passionate journey to rediscover "lost" recipes — dishes that were historically modified over time to suit different palates. Through meticulous research, he is reviving these forgotten culinary treasures, restoring them to their authentic form while presenting them with a contemporary flair.

"Chef Gairola's work is not just about cooking; it is about cultural preservation," added the spokesperson. "By bringing back recipes that have faded from mainstream dining, he ensures our guests experience both nostalgia and novelty in every bite."

"When we build our team, we look far beyond technical skill," continues the spokesperson. "We seek individuals who share our passion for genuine hospitality, our respect for India's culinary heritage, and our commitment to continuous learning."

Whether Chef Gill is sharing the history behind a dish, Chef Agnihotri is fine-tuning a masala or Chef Gairola is layering flavours into his curries, every member of our culinary family contributes to creating a sense of warmth and belonging for our guests. This spirit of hospitality is a defining hallmark of The Delhi Lounge experience. "As we continue to

grow, our priority remains deepening our relationship with our guests and expanding the ways they experience truly authentic Indian cuisine"

In the near term, the restaurant team is especially excited to host a Food Festival with an exclusive five-course culinary soirée this December, featuring Culinary Director, Chef Manjit Singh Gill.

"In the year ahead, we plan to introduce new dining formats, quarterly menu refreshes that spotlight regional Indian flavours and locally sourced ingredients, and curated tasting experiences that share the stories and craftsmanship behind each dish. We are also exploring thoughtful opportunities to expand our presence within Dallas and beyond, all while creating memorable dining moments that feel like coming home — no matter where our guests come from."



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Best Aged Care & Community Meal Services 2025 – Australia & Resident-Centred Hospitality & Innovation Excellence Award 2025

mecwacare

For more than 65 years, mecwacare has been a non-profit organisation providing a range of aged care services, including residential aged care, respite stays, home care, community services, retirement living, affordable housing, and disability services. We are pleased to be recognising its aged care hospitality division, where its teams, led by Head of Hotel Services, Dineshkumar Subramani, deliver exceptional services in catering and cleaning. Every single day, they produce around 6,000 meals, and their annual meal production is estimated at 2.19 million. We speak to Dineshkumar to learn more about how mecwacare's chefs are leading the way in creating moments of joy, comfort, and connection for residents through food.

The aged care hospitality sector in Australia is in the midst of a significant transformation, where expectations are rising for quality, nutrition, and innovation in resident dining experiences. Food in aged care was once viewed as a just support service; however, it is now recognised how it plays an important role in each resident's wellbeing, dignity, and daily enjoyment. Today, residents and families seek restaurant-style service, personalised menu options, and nutritious meals that cater to individual preferences and clinical needs.

"At mecwacare, we recognise that food is more than nourishment – it's a source of comfort, connection, and joy," says Dineshkumar. "Our Hotel Services team is leading this evolution by introducing chef-led innovation, fine dining experiences, and resident-centred menu design across all our facilities. The focus has shifted from basic meal delivery to creating memorable dining experiences that celebrate flavour, culture, and presentation."

Dineshkumar has worked at mecwacare for 21 years, and today he manages 22 aged care facilities, five retirement villages, and 21,000 home care and community clients. He enjoys being a part of team that he describes as caring, collaborative, and purpose-driven. The organisation fosters an inclusive workplace where every voice matters, and all teams feel free to innovate, share their ideas, and take pride in their work. This staff culture reflects the mecwacare brand – compassionate, resident-focused, and on a relentless mission toward excellence.

Dineshkumar comments, "We believe that hospitality in aged care is about heart as much as skill, and we encourage this through ongoing training, recognition programmes, and leadership development. Team members are empowered to contribute to menu ideas, seasonal celebrations, and fine dining events that bring happiness to residents and families."

Notably, the Hotel Services team has implemented several innovative initiatives that have truly transformed the way residents enjoy their meals. One of its most exciting accomplishments has been the introduction of buffet breakfasts across all facilities, meaning residents get to start their

day with more choice, freshness, and the feeling of dining in a hotel-style setting. This initiative has proven popular, with residents appreciating the independence that comes with putting their own breakfast together and bringing a sense of delight to every morning.

The team have also added Visual TV Menus to the dining areas, which bring menus to life with bright imagery and bold, easy-to-read displays so that residents can visualise their meal options in a way that is interactive, engaging, and inclusive. These menus are updated every season, to keep them fresh, varied, and resident-centred, ensuring a healthy balance of nutrition and flavour using seasonal ingredients. Furthermore, puree meals are also available and served with professional care and creativity, ensuring dignity and visual appeal while maintaining the highest standards of nutrition and texture modification. Importantly, its residents are invited to share their food preferences and ideas directly with the chefs through its Food Focus Forums.



"By combining culinary expertise, technology, and compassion, mecwacare continues to set new standards in aged care hospitality – ensuring every meal reflects our core values of care, quality, and connection. Our values are to be Caring, Accountable, Respectful and Ethical."

mecwacare's Hotel Services division continues to embrace cutting-edge technology to enhance its service offering, such as FoodByUs, an advanced digital procurement platform that streamlines supplier ordering, enhances transparency, and ensures cost effectiveness across all facilities. Alongside this, it has integrated Safe Food Pro, a state-of-the-art digital food safety system that has taken compliance, monitoring, and reporting standards to the next level – guaranteeing that every meal served meets the highest of safety and quality regulations.

It doesn't end there, for Daily Meal Audits have also been welcomed across all its kitchens, which allow real-time tracking of meal presentation,



taste, temperature, and resident satisfaction. By having this system in place, it fosters accountability, consistency, and continuous improvement, aligning entirely with Aged Care Quality Standard 6 – Food and Nutrition.

Through these initiatives, mecwacare continues to raise the standard of aged care hospitality – where every meal is made with love, care, and connection to create dining experiences that are brimming with choice, dignity, and joy.

mecwacare's efforts and commitment haven't gone unnoticed, with it achieving well-deserved, prestigious recognition. Its Hotel Services team are delighted to have won the Team Excellence Awards 2025, which is testament to their dedication, teamwork, and innovation. Additionally, it was celebrated as the State Winner at the Restaurant & Catering (R&C) Hostplus Awards for Excellence 2025 for Health and Aged Care Caterer of the Year, and it has since been named both a winner and National Gold.

"These achievements represent more than awards – they symbolise mecwacare's unwavering pursuit of hospitality excellence, where compassion meets culinary creativity, and every meal reflects our promise of care, quality, and connection," says Dineshkumar. "At mecwacare, dining is more than a service – it's an experience."

Now, looking towards the future, things are looking very exciting! As mecwacare continues to redefine aged care hospitality, the focus for

the remainder of 2025 and beyond will be firmly on digital transformation and innovation in its food service delivery.

The organisation has done a lot to enhance its operations digitally, but there is more to come. It is close to completing development of a pioneering initiative called Meals Connect, a large-scale, chef-driven meal delivery programme designed to bring nutritious, high-quality, and affordable meals to community clients across Victoria. This project represents the next stage of mecwacare's hospitality service model, blending the warmth of traditional care with the efficiency of modern technology.

With Meals Connect, mecwacare will look to reach individuals who are living independently and who value flavour, variety, and nutrition in their meals. The programme will leverage smart systems for ordering, menu planning, client reviews, and logistics management, amounting to a smooth process from kitchen to doorstep. The goal is to extend the same high standard of excellence that residents enjoy within its facilities to the wider community – As always, supporting independence, dignity, and connection through food.

mecwacare

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Best Organic Spice & Herb Blends 2025 – USA

Joanne Sakulich is an innovator and creator of an original range of organic herb and spice blends through her company, HS Creations. Established during the Covid-19 pandemic, the firm now excels in the industry, leading to it gaining notable success in the recent Food and Drink Awards 2025. We speak to Joanne and learn more about the company's ethos and commitment to natural, quality produce.

HS Creations LLC (HS Creations) is committed to providing premium, organic herb and spice blends that enhance culinary experiences for a diverse customer base. The firm's journey began during the pandemic when Founder, Joanne Sakulich, identified a need in the market for handcrafted, organic, healthy, fresh blends.

"At the time I was not working outside of the house and I found an interesting hobby - dehydrating fresh herbs, citrus, and spices," she elaborates. "The amazingly fresh and potent aroma and flavour from this astounded me, so I used the small amount of what I could dehydrate for meals when I did cook. Then, Covid hit. We all got shut down and it was hard to get groceries and supplies. Shelves were empty. With that, I got creative and started cooking more at home."

Joanne's journey progressed as she started to look for better flavours at more affordable prices. The difference she experienced with her fresh blends was incredible and Joanne shared her new-found hobby with her friends, who all loved them too!

As more and more people came on board, Joanne began to struggle to keep up with demand and she began researching how to set up a business to provide fresh, certified organic, non-GMO herbs and spices with a potency matching what she could create with the dehydrator.

After receiving her official license from California to operate as HS Creations, the world was her oyster!

To this end, Joanne now creates small-batch blends that are handcrafted and mixed on demand, ensuring that each batch is precisely measured to maintain consistency in the seasonings.

Her range provides healthier, natural alternatives to conventional store-bought seasonings, as well as those with specific dietary needs such as vegan, keto, salt-free, and gluten-free diets. All products are designed to offer gourmet flavour, convenience, and value, and are high-quality blends so everyone, regardless of their cooking skills or budget, can enjoy gourmet flavours in their everyday meals.

Where core values are concerned, HS Creations operates a steadfast commitment to transparency, sustainability, and customer awareness. So much more than just a spice company, HS Creations is an advocate for healthier, better cooking, and Joanne firmly believes that everyone should have access to gourmet flavours.

"The blends we make today are pure organic," enthuses Joanne. "What you see, is what you get, no hidden additives. The blends I create save space, money, and time. There is something for everyone's taste."

HS Creations stays competitive by focusing on quality, innovation, and educating consumers. Joanne carefully sources certified organic, non-GMO herbs and spices, making sure each ingredient meets her high standards for both freshness and flavour.

The extensive product lineup includes unique blends with many being inspired by seasonings used around the world, like the Bahārāt Blend, which is from the Middle East.

To set HS Creations apart from competitors, Joanne likes to provide as much information as possible for each blend, providing recipe suggestions, flavour notes, and related information. She also uses recyclable packaging in order to highlight her commitment to sustainability and works to find strategic partnerships to expand the company's reach and strengthen brand recognition.

Joanne tells us that the organic spices sector is growing rapidly, driven by increasing demand for natural and chemical-free products. HS Creations

was established in response to the lack of quality and transparency in traditional spice options and a real challenge within the sector is continuous need for monitoring of the certifications and food purity of the suppliers that Joanne uses.

"We have had to shift sourcing, on occasion, due to regional or seasonal availability," she explains. "Our dedication to transparency and quality appeals to consumers, and we are a leading innovator in the movement toward healthier, more flavourful cooking."

At HS Creations, a real passion for food is valued, as is a commitment to quality, and continuous growth, and the company's collaborative approach inspires creativity and excellence in its products and employees alike. Team members experiment with the innovative blends at home and are encouraged to contribute to the shared success of the firm.

"Our dedication to transparency and quality appeals to consumers, and we are a leading innovator in the movement toward healthier, more flavourful cooking."

Above everything else, integrity throughout the brand is prioritised which is why HS Creations recently gained notable recognition and success in the Food and Drink Awards 2025, being bestowed with the prestigious accolade of Best Organic Spice & Herb Blends 2025 – USA.

Now, the future is looking bright for Joanne and the team. HS Creations has established a unique place in the farm-to-table movement, focusing on spices rather than proteins. Looking ahead, the firm now aims to expand its existing product range and develop partnerships.

"We are always creating new blends and seeking customer feedback and suggestions," says Joanne. "By focusing on creating new flavour experiences, we try to stay ahead and engage new customers. The future looks promising as we continue to support the farm-to-table movement by emphasising the importance of high-quality herbs and spices in addition to the traditional focus on proteins."

Such is the praise for HS Creations' range of healthy, natural produce, that we thought we'd share what just a handful of its delighted customers have to say!

"HS Creations spice blends are the only type I use when cooking. So fresh & delicious I have taken on so many new dishes, my family loves it. I highly recommend trying them out for yourself."
- J Todino

"Excellent flavours! Lots of custom blends to play with and learn. I add spices to my normal meals to make them unique."
- D Rhoades

"Great spices and great service. I highly recommend these one-of-a-kind blends sure to please the connoisseurs in your life."
- Jake H



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Wine Bar of the Year 2025 – Western Honduras & Best Artisanal Cheese Producers 2025 – Honduras

Cafe San Rafael

Regardless of where in the world you are, there is always something special about local produce, which is something that should be forever championed across the diverse landscape of food and drink. San Rafael Family Estates in Honduras more than meets this criteria, with the family business specialising in dairy farming, but also being renowned for the food and drink – especially the coffee, wine, and cheeses – served at its coffee spot, Café San Rafael, in the heart of the country's Copán ruins. On the back of the company's dual recognition in this programme, we caught up with the second-generation owner of this family business, Carlos René Guerra, for more.

Most of the products San Rafael Family Estates sells, such as its famous, award-winning coffee and cheeses, it makes across its three farms: Finca Managuá, Finca Santa Clara, and Finca San Rafael. The first of these locations can be found near the ruins in Copán and has been producing a wide range of excellent coffees since 1985. Marking its 30th anniversary in 2015, this country estate even began producing natural cardamom using ancestral knowledge, demonstrating just a taste of the family's prowess in Honduras' F&B industry.

Finca Santa Clara, on the other hand, is a dairy cattle ranch located in Santa Rita de Copán, and is home to around 40 Brown Swiss cows. Across 60 hectares of rich, diverse countryside, these animals are free to roam and graze happily, with this freedom leading to milk of exceptional quality being produced. This is used in the aforementioned selection of cheeses provided by San Rafael Family Estates, the quality of which is reflected through its team having won an award naming them the country's best artisan cheese producers.

The third and final location, Finca San Rafael, is situated just south of the Copán ruins, and is perhaps the most cherished estate in the portfolio of San Rafael Family Estates. Its initial seeds were planted by Mafalda Guerra, the first-generation owner of the company, in 1980, with this having since blossomed into a coffee plantation by the name of 'La Finoca'. In total, San Rafael has 20 hectares of coffee cultivation and over 40 hectares of forest reserve, making it a key component in the success nurtured by San Rafael Family Estates.

Café San Rafael, recognised here as the Wine Bar of the Year 2025 – Western Honduras, brings together everything great about these three estates and serves as the ultimate location for high-quality coffee, cheese, and wine, offered against a contemporary backdrop. Headed up by the aforementioned Carlos René Guerra, a second-generation coffee



producer and National Barista Champion, Café San Rafael is famous throughout the region for the coffee it serves, which is made from beans sourced just down the road at Finca San Rafael.

Visitors from far and wide visit this spot for its selection of speciality coffees, which take the form of everything from espressos and lattes through to more unique flavours including masala chai, cardamom, and Turkish coffees. All of these are made to a customer's liking by a team of talented baristas, young individuals united by a willingness to learn and a knack for problem solving. These individuals are responsible for



upholding the stellar customer service and unrivalled experience the location offers, which extends beyond its coffee.

For those after something a little stronger than Honduras' famous coffee – or the smoothies and hot chocolate it serves, both of which are fan favourites – Café San Rafael also showcases the vibrant flavours of the region by offering a range of signature cheeses paired with wine from an extensive list. Although the wine is magnificent – especially at happy hour (3PM to 6PM) – the combination of it with the unsurpassed selection of cheeses is what really makes Café San Rafael a go-to destination for foodies worldwide.

Be it mainstays such as brie, camembert, and blue or more local styles such as queso fresco, these cheeses are the striking centrepieces of cheese boards which also include staples like olives, crackers, nuts, and meats, complementing the authentic taste of Honduras no end. The timeless pairing of wine and cheese is just one way that Café San Rafael's artisan cheeses can be enjoyed, as they also find their way into a selection of gourmet sandwiches – including grilled cheese, cheese and tomato, tuna melt – and a multitude of other dishes.

“I’m trying to develop a cheese culture in my town.”

The extensive menu here also spans breakfast options inspired by European cafés – omelettes, hash browns, toast, and fruits – as well as a selection of pancakes and waffles. A couple of bistro favourites, namely shakshuka and a ribeye steak with eggs, round out these breakfast offerings, giving way to an equally comprehensive main menu of burgers, wings, and salads, which can be washed down with a curated list of cocktails or a selection of beer from around the world. But make sure to save room for a slice of cheesecake.

All of this top-notch food can be enjoyed outside in Café San Rafael's stunning garden patio, with its shaded seating area being the perfect place to cool off after exploring the Maya ruins nearby. Whilst tourists certainly love this destination – many credit it as being one of few places in Central America to get really great cheese, and a number of reviewers have even described its lattes as some of the best they have ever tasted – the spot is equally celebrated by the locals, many of whom stop by weekly for a coffee and a slice of cake.

Even those who do not live close enough to Café San Rafael to be able to drop in regularly can enjoy this signature coffee from wherever in the world they are, thanks to the team selling bags of their coffee blend from inside the shop. Ideal either as a memory from an unforgettable coffee shop or as a gift for a coffee enthusiast back home, these bags are available in a number of sizes, from 340g up to 1kg, covering all bases for customers. Hot sauce and sweet ketchup – both of which are made in-house – are also for sale.

This adds up to something truly special for San Rafael Family Estates, whose blend of vertical integration (using its own coffee and dairy for these products) and welcoming location in a standout area has positioned Café San Rafael as a premium, authentic, and gourmet dining experience – the likes of which cannot be matched for miles around. With plans to build a rooftop seating area and develop a new menu in the pipeline, things are only set to improve for visitors of this bustling café in the beating heart of Copán.

Recognised as having the Wine Bar of the Year 2025 – Western Honduras and as the Best Artisanal Cheese Producers 2025 – Honduras, Carlos René Guerra and the rest of the team behind San Rafael Family Estates have something really special on their hands with Café San Rafael. For more on its full range of wines, cheeses, coffees, and other such items, simply visit the web address listed below and experience first-hand what makes this modern destination one of the most popular, sought-after spots in the entire region.

Contact: Carlos René Guerra

Company: Café San Rafael

Web Address: <https://www.cafesanrafael.com/>

Most Authentic English Tea Rooms 2025 – USA

Shelly's Tea Rooms is Massachusetts's only authentic English tea rooms that is owned and run by the English – a venture that began almost two decades ago when husband and wife, Sean and Shelly decided it was time to raise the standard of tea rooms. Often finding themselves disappointed with poor service or food quality at tea rooms they visited, they made the leap and opened their own in England, before making the move to Plymouth, Massachusetts in 2022.

It was back in the summer of 2007 that Sean and Shelly decided they were going to launch Shelly's Tea Rooms, which was originally located in a stunning 15th-century building near Canterbury, built 100 years before the first pilgrim arrived in the US. From there, they moved to the picturesque St Margaret's Bay near Dover. The business ran successfully in England for more than 10 years, before the couple made the choice to bring their English tea rooms to America, having fallen in love with the country over 25 years prior while on vacation. Thus, they settled on the iconic town of Plymouth, the birthplace of the USA, for the tea rooms' new location.

Both Sean and Shelly bring experience in retail and running large businesses, which they leverage to deliver the highest standard of service at Shelly's Tea Rooms. Previously, Sean enjoyed a successful career in the retail motor industry, while Shelly also worked in retail after obtaining her diploma in catering. For Sean and Shelly, it has always been about the customer and ensuring they have the best possible experience, with the ethos being simple: "to deliver the best service, food, and value".

Every food item available at Shelly's Tea Rooms is made from scratch, from raw ingredients, right down to the clotted cream. Its menu comprises afternoon teas; desserts including freshly baked scones, Victoria sponge cake, lemon sponge cake, Bakewell tarts, and more; and lunches and light bites such as crumpets, cheese scones, and a selection of finger sandwiches. This is while the tea rooms also serves many gluten-free, dairy-free, and vegan options. To wash it all down, it offers in excess of 100 premium loose-leaf teas, including black, flavoured, green, herbal, decaffeinated, iced, and more, as well as coffee.

Notably, Sean and Shelly recently launched their sister website, Scones 2 You, shipping their delicious, handmade scones anywhere in the USA. They also continue to offer franchise opportunities of their tea rooms across the country.

"For us, it is all about authenticity and staying true to that, so every menu change or tea choice has to have this in mind," Sean says. "We believe in consistently delivering our product with a service level unsurpassed in the industry and not chasing fads."

Ultimately, it is easy to see why locals are flocking to Shelly's Tea Rooms for their traditional English tea fix. With glowing review after glowing review on Google, people can't get enough.

One person says, "Having just visited Great Britain this summer, I was so excited to be able to have high tea locally. This was truly a gem and my parents and I loved the experience."

Another person shares, "So pleased with our experience! We had the Gluten Free Windsor Tea, Apricot Tea, and the Cranberry Autumn Tea – Highly recommend both, they were delicious. All of the tea sandwiches we tried were very tasty; especially liked the cucumber, it was nice and light. We enjoyed the scones immensely; they were such a treat and were the best gluten-free scones I have ever had! They were fluffy and moist; not dry at all. I would definitely try the clotted cream and jam on your scone, it is divine."

"I can honestly say that it was worth every penny! We didn't make a reservation but I would definitely recommend if you are coming on a weekend or busier time of the year. The



owners were so nice and took good care of us. You can tell they have worked so hard to make it a wonderful place to indulge! 10/10 recommend and we will be back!"

Someone else comments, "Staff and service were amazing! This is the only second place I've ever been to for afternoon tea. But first place for ENGLISH afternoon tea. I think their afternoon tea is priced fairly. Their finger sandwiches were good. For me the cucumber finger sandwich was the best. I got peppermint leaf tea, which was good too! Their scones are excellent! The chocolate cake was really good! Overall, I would recommend Shelly's Tea Rooms."



Contact: Sean Sinclair
Company: Shelly's Tea Room
Website: www.shellystearooms.com

Best Emerging Food & Drink Tech Start-Up 2025 - Europe

Our 2025 winner is the Belgian Start-Up beBeer. As you may have guessed, “beBeer” means be beer (we are beer), but there is also another reference... namely ‘Bibere’ that means ‘to drink’ in Latin. beBeer is thus the fitting name for the beBeer world that allows beer lovers to access thousands of places to find their favourite beverage, including breweries, events, calendar and local initiatives. The innovative “beBeer in your pocket” mobile-first web app welcomes beer enthusiasts and promoters alike to access a genuine independent European brewing network that promotes local and regional beer heritage.

beBeer’s mission is simple: to connect brewers and promoters, local and regional beer lovers, and local/regional elected councillors in order to: make it easy for beer lovers and visitors to discover what the world of beer has to offer; to raise the profile of the local brewing industry and promote its activities; and for mayors and elected councillors, to provide an opportunity for local economic development and attracting tourists.

“The project has been maturing and in preparation for several years,” says Founder, Pascal Goergen. “I had to combine my various professional experiences to be able to bring together digital, local, and the brewing world. And above all, to propose something innovative and positive for the local sector and for the brewing tradition in Europe. The same was needed for beer lovers: a practical and concrete tool. That’s what the beBeer app offers. Easy, free, and in your pocket!”

The user-friendly platform is available in French, English, Dutch, and German, while giving anyone who is interested in beer tourism access to a beer calendar and interactive map featuring more than 5,000 breweries and promoters for easy navigation. While there are breweries on the platform, there are also microbreweries, and promoters doesn’t just include pubs but also brewing tours, brotherhoods, museums, tasting competitions, festivals, and even restaurants offering beer-based dishes.

“The added value lies in the creation of a genuine European beer tourism network that promotes local and regional beer heritage.”

On the side of breweries and promoters, they can create a brewing ID page/card as part of the platform and the web app and share their events or products. Beer lovers, breweries, promoters, and elected councillors (as beBeer Ambassadors for their commune) can all come together here to promote local heritage. This is while beBeer is also on the look-out for communes to meet the criteria for the “brewing commune” label with one, two, or three hops.

“Here, there is no ISO or other type of label,” says Pascal. “It’s about compiling everything related to the brewing world in your commune/city so that the beBeer jury can assess the intensity/presence of brewing in a particular commune. There are 10 objective criteria that lead the jury to make its decision and award the number of hops to the communes. Sometimes, you can’t even imagine the brewing treasures hidden in your own city.”

beBeer has contacted several communes and it hopes to soon, in the beginning 2026, announce the first ones to be awarded the label across several European countries. From there, local and regional elected councillors will be able to act as the link between beBeer, their commune, and their local brewing industry.

Underscoring everything at beBeer are values of independence and passion, where it seeks to remain independent so that love of beer can remain the sole driver of the platform; and diversity and mutual respect, which is necessary between all members of the community in order to build and maintain an open, happy/hoppy, and flourishing community.

Pascal Goergen concludes, “The beBeer team invites you all – brewers, promoters, enthusiasts, and local elected councillors – to discover the world of beBeer... and above all, to enjoy exploring our breweries, check out the events calendar and news, and gradually get to know the first ambassadors and brewing communes in all European regions.”

[Register for free on the beBeer platform.](#)



Contact: Pascal Goergen
Email: pgoergen@bebeer.eu
Company: beBeer
Website: www.bebeer.org
Web app : www.bebeer.app



 **with beBeer**

Explore Europe's Brewing Cities



 **Become a Brewing Commune**

 **5,000+ breweries to discover**

 **Events & festivals calendar**

 **Interactive maps & routes**

 **Become a beBeer Ambassador**



**Scan & discover beBeer.app**



Best Craft Vodka Brand 2025

In an industry dominated by multinational players who have huge marketing budgets and global reach, VODKA 57 stands out for its handcrafted Swiss vodka –for the conscious drinker seeking a pure spirit that captures the memory, not just another drink. VODKA 57 honours tradition while adapting to a sustainable and contemporary craft process. As the festive season nears, we are particularly keen to learn more about this multi-award-winning Swiss vodka from Founder and Director, Giulio Dorrucchi.

"VODKA 57 was born from a desire to revive and modernise an historical distillation method, and from the very beginning, our vision was to honour tradition while adapting it to a sustainable, contemporary craft process," explains Giulio Dorrucchi. "This was not something that could be rushed. It took more than five years of meticulous research, experimentation, and refinement to transform an old recipe into a modern expression of excellence. The result is a vodka that reflects both persistence and precision."

The finest winter wheat is masterfully blended with the purest Swiss glacier water to create a spirit that is truly superior. Every stage of production takes place within a historic distillery in Switzerland's UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, ensuring precision, authenticity, and respect for heritage. The vodka is refined through five careful distillations and seven sub-zero filtrations, which results in a remarkable smoothness and balance. The final VODKA 57 product is 100% natural, certified vegan and gluten-free, and doesn't include any additive or enhancer.

"Today, VODKA 57 stands as the most awarded, single-grain, handcrafted Swiss vodka," says Giulio. "Our target is firmly the premium and ultra-premium segment, and our growth has been steady and deliberate, guided by the principle that true luxury is never about speed or mass production, but about uncompromising quality and timeless character."

Not only is VODKA 57 an extraordinary product, but also key is knowing the consumer and what they want, as Giulio goes on to tell us, "Consumers today, especially in the premium and ultra-premium segments, are more curious and discerning. They want to know what makes a spirit truly different, how it is made, and what values stand behind it. Our biggest challenge, and at the same time our greatest opportunity, lies in education and storytelling. We are not offering just another vodka on the shelf; every detail of VODKA 57 is intentional, from the choice of raw materials to the traditional handcrafting in small batches. While the multinationals sell recognition, we focus on intimacy. The key is building a loyal audience that identifies with the refinement, provenance, and artistry behind our brand. That is a slower, but ultimately more lasting process."

"We created VODKA 57 for the conscious drinker seeking a crafted pure spirit that captures the memory, not just another drink."

Sustainability is also very important to the brand, with the distillery's location in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the heart of the Swiss Alps operating under strict ecological standards. It isn't just about having a scenic backdrop, but it legally requires the conservation of biodiversity and to maintain sustainable practices. This therefore dictates every decision, from sourcing its alpine glacier water to waste management



and local environmental stewardship. VODKA 57's process is designed to meet specific ethical and environmental standards, which it views as non-negotiable as a modern handcraft producer.

Notably, VODKA 57's flagship Pure Glacier Vodka line will always be part of its core offering. To complement it, plans are in place to release a selection of limited editions and master distiller collections, while staying true to the integrity of the original recipe and process. Giulio states, "As market studies confirm, today's premiumisation is about authenticity and bespoke creation. Our dedication to handcrafted quality will be the captivating factor for our target consumer."

Indeed, the VODKA 57 brand is thriving; within its first year, it has been the recipient of a series of prestigious awards, spanning multiple gold and platinum medals, and the titles of Europe Vodka of the Year, Swiss Vodka of the Year, Best Premium Vodka Brand, and the most recent Best Craft Vodka Brand by LUXlife. "Today, we are proud to be recognised as the world's most awarded Swiss vodka," says Giulio, and, looking toward the bright future ahead, he adds, "The global spirits industry is a complex landscape, but for a brand built on a solid foundation, it's full of opportunities."

Company: VODKA 57 Pte. Ltd.
Contact: Giulio Dorrucchi
Website: www.vodka57.com

Best Cake Shop & Cafe 2025 – Scotland

Based in Fife, Scotland, Maria's Baking Stories is a café where the décor is as beautiful as the pastries and desserts themselves! We learn more from the firm's Founder and Chef, Maria Kyriakou in the wake of the bakery being honoured in the Food and Drink Awards 2025.

Maria's Baking Stories (Maria's) is proudly owned and operated by Maria Kyriakou - a self-taught pastry chef with Greek Cypriot roots. Together with her husband Mike, she runs the bakery café filled with delicious treats that come straight from the heart!

Everything created at Maria's is homemade and unique, from its cakes and pastries to the creamy gelato it offers.

Known for its delightful pink décor, floral touches and cosy Instagram-able atmosphere, Maria's is a place where people come not only for delicious bakes but also to relax, celebrate and connect.

"Baking has always been my way of sharing love," Maria tells us. "Every recipe we make carries a little story behind it, whether it's inspired by heritage, a happy memory, or simply a new creation I've dreamed up!"

With a wonderful mix of clients, from loyal locals who pop in for their daily coffee and slice of cake, to visitors looking for something

sweet and memorable, Maria's has gained quite a following over the years, not least for its respectful culture and passionate team members who share the same love for food as Maria and her family.

When recruiting for new team members, it is important that they have a positive attitude, something which is much more important to Maria that experience and skills.

"We see our staff as an extension of our family," elaborates Maria. "Everyone plays an important part in creating the welcoming, happy atmosphere our customers feel when they walk in.

"Skills can be taught but kindness, reliability and a genuine love for people can't. We value creativity, team work and positive spirit."

Working in the food and beverage industry is challenging to say the least, and fiercely competitive to boot, therefore it is imperative that Maria's differentiates itself from others in order to continue to stand out and be noticed.

Maria does this by staying true to who she is, whilst always finding new and fresh ways to surprise her customers. By constantly evolving, be it by introducing a new dessert or adding small details to make the café experience even more unique, Maria is leading the way in creating genuine connections with her customers and establishing long-standing relationships.

"We want people to feel welcome and cared for from the moment they step inside," she states. "In such a competitive industry, passion, consistency and authenticity are what truly sets us apart."

For its truly unique outlook, bespoke décor and varied range of delicious home-baked goods, Maria's was recently bestowed with the coveted title of Best Cake Shop & Cafe 2025 – Scotland.



Well done to all the team for an outstanding achievement!



Contact: Maria Kyriakou
Company: Maria's Baking Stories
Web Address: www.mariasbakingstories.com
[Instagram](#)
[Facebook](#)

Most Recommended Restaurant & Bar Collections 2025 – UK

Known for creating high-end dining experiences and for blending tradition with innovation, Thesleff Group is a fast-growing collection of London's most outstanding restaurants and bars. We find out more about the group and its visionary leader, as it excels in the Food and Drink Awards 2025.

Thesleff Group is positioned at the premium luxury end of the London hospitality market, with its portfolio of unique venues. Renowned for its innovative dining concepts, such as the Mexican-Japanese fusion at Los Mochis, or the classic Italian food on offer at Sale e Pepe, the group emphasises creating multi-sensory experiences through genuine hospitality, quality food, and exceptional service.

At the helm is visionary founder and namesake, Markus Thesleff, who serves as the group's Chief Executive Officer.

Markus, himself an award-winning serial entrepreneur with nearly 25 years of international success in hospitality as an owner, operator, advisor, and consultant, is experienced in building brands that have won over 160 awards across cities from London to Dubai. Twice named Caterer Middle East Restaurateur of the Year for Middle East & Africa and shortlisted for the UK "Cateys" Restaurateur of the Year, Markus's achievements have been recognised in the Caterer Power 50, Hot 100 Entrepreneurs, and The Standard's 100 People Shaping London.

In 2024, he was named European CEO of the Year at the EU Business News Awards, and in 2025, Luxury Hospitality Group CEO of the Year at the Corporate LiveWire Awards. Today, Markus continues to shape the future of hospitality through visionary leadership and strategic expansion.

"We are completely devoted to creating amazing memories and incredible experiences by providing genuine hospitality, the highest quality cuisine, and exceptional service at our extraordinary landmark locations and remarkable restaurants," he tells us. "Our

commitment to excellence drives us to curate an impact, with a passionate team that embodies the power of genuine hospitality."

Rooted in London's rich history and culture, Thesleff Group blends innovation and tradition to redefine hospitality, aiming to weave a harmony of comfort, excitement, and authenticity for its guests, with the ultimate aim being to spread joy and positivity through the experiences created in its establishments. Striving to create spaces that people love, leaving them happy and inspired to share the energy with others, the organisation's commitment to innovation, sustainability, and philanthropy, clearly define its journey.

Making an impact in the surrounding community and inspiring the next generation of leaders are significant aspects of the group's endeavours, and it firmly believes that businesses can make a profit while making a difference. To this end, Thesleff Group actively supports various initiatives throughout the year, including Street Smart, Magic Breakfast, and CEO Sleepout, plus its own 'Give Back' Programme, which has seen 264,259 meals provided to the homeless and less fortunate since 2021. This aim is to double this figure annually, showcasing the possibility of financial success with positive social impact.

From seasoned executives to creative minds, Markus is joined by a dedicated team at Thesleff Group who are united by a shared vision to create memories and experiences for guests. With a relentless pursuit of excellence and a deep understanding of evolving trends, the Thesleff Group team is reshaping the landscape of restaurants and bars in London, striving to ensure that every guest experience is characterised by unparalleled experiences.



For its dedication and commitment to setting a new standard in the art of leisure and hospitality, Thesleff Group recently gained notable recognition in the Food and Drink Awards 2025, being named Most Recommended Restaurant & Bar Collections 2025 – UK for its unique portfolio of outstanding establishments.

Congratulations to Markus and the team at Thesleff Group!

Contact Details

Contact: Bianca McNab (Head of PR and Partnerships)

Company: Thesleff Group

Web Address: www.thesleffgroup.com

Best Independent High-End Spirits Bottler 2025 – Germany

Whisky and spirits connoisseur, Peter Krause, is passionate about his craft – bringing new and exciting flavours to like-minded patrons! We find out more about the non-profit company, and Peter's ambitious plans, as it is rewarded with a prestigious accolade in the Food and Drink Awards 2025.

At its core, slowdrink.de is a non-profit club for connoisseurs of excellent drinks. Then, two years ago, the club's founder and patron, Peter "Pit" Krause opened the world's largest whisky museum, Walhalla of Whisky, in which he displays 14,000 bottles and items.

In the Walhalla's tasting lounge, Pit hosts sold-out events surrounding whisky, rum, brandy, craft beer and more, with even tea, oil and balsamic vinegar being served occasionally!

"Any slow drink that fits the philosophy of quality, creativity and slowing down the person enjoying because the liquid demands attention!" enthuses Pit.

The club and its associated networking platform now consist of 9,000 members and is ever growing. For its founders and supporters, slowdrink.de offers annual club bottlings that reach high accolades. Pit is proud to bottle only the best drams for the club due to a meticulous process of selection, cask maturation and other intricate techniques.

"We go the extra-mile because we are small and not bound to make money," Pit states. "The nerdy hunt for extraordinary spirits to bottle, to exhibit or to taste with our guests is what drives us."

In this fiercely competitive industry space, Pit strives to stay ahead of the curve and his competitors by trying to offer something special, this being what he calls "a really unforgettable experience of taste and 'edutainment'."

With Pit at the helm as world-renowned expert and consultant for several distilleries and producers (cask picks, blending, maturation, and contacts) good things happen and he is renowned for being a walking encyclopaedia in his field, along with a gifted storyteller.

He continues: "May it be at our events, where we open incredible rarities, our creative releases or in our museum. Everything comes straight from the heart of the expert connoisseur for a knowledgeable crowd and a sharing spirit. From fans for fans, at fairest value possible, no compromises. Hence our products reach much higher prices at auctions and in the secondary market."



Pit's releases are in the high-end sector of the spirit industry (mostly old whisky, rum, cognac and more). The tastings he offers are also aimed at drinkers who are looking for more than the usual offerings, and Pit will open legendary bottlings from days gone by and tell their stories in his living museum.

The ultra-premium field has boomed for many years but in the last few years, many whisky fans were priced out of the market, and fewer and fewer releases reached the level of greatness. This resulted in a turnaround – with many new players and depleted stocks of old quality spirits, a certain disenchantment, along with oversaturation, took place.

As Pit still has such stocks and works on a non-profit basis, he is able to offer the quality others lack. Over the years, Pit claims he has never let his members and guests down – which is rewarded now as every tasting and bottling at Walhalla of Whisky is highly sought after.

As well as his knowledge, charisma, and highly-acclaimed stock of beverages, Pit also boasts a talent to ignite a similar fire and fever in his team by opening doors to aromas, tastes and stories. He leads by example, being a maniac for whisky, rum and spirits to which he has dedicated his whole life. Pit enables extraordinary liquid culinary enjoyment and the necessary information for further self-education.

"Every staff member works on a voluntary basis – it is the passion for spirits that we all share, and maybe the strive for a bit more, for excellence," he tells us. "New staff members need to have a broad knowledge and the fire inside."

About a hundred unpaid hands, whom Pit refers to as 'heroes,' make bottlings, tastings and the magic inside the museum happen. From welcoming spirit lovers from all over the planet to taste the best liquids in the world, to informing them about the drinks and passing on the art of slow drinking, it humbles Pit to regularly entertain knowledgeable connoisseurs.

It is thanks to this true passion for his craft that Pit and his company recently gained notoriety in the Food and Drink Awards 2025, being crowned with the illustrious title of Best Independent High-End Spirits Bottler 2025 – Germany.

For the coming years, Pit is looking forward to many great guest hosts and to emptying the full bottles in the museum at wonderful tasting events, and he fully intends to defend his title with more stunners in the near future!



Contact Details

Contact: Peter Krause

Company: slowdrink.de / Walhalla of Whisky

Web Address: <https://www.walhallaofwhisky.de>

Best Tea Sommelier for Custom Tea Blends & Unique Tea Experiences 2025 – Netherlands

Theesommelier Benita

It was during COVID-19 that Benita Roetman-van IJzendoorn started Theesommelier Benita – She had been working in the healthcare sector for 26 years, and in the last few years as a trainer for people with intellectual disabilities, but that ended due to the pandemic; thus, she was ready for a new challenge. What started as a bit of fun to learn more about tea quickly grew into her profession. Now, four years later, Benita crafts personalised tea blends for corporate gifts that tell stories and strengthen connection. Following Benita's success within the Food and Drink Awards 2025, we are keen to learn more about her business.

Benita could have continued working in healthcare as a nurse, but she doubted whether she still wanted that after having worked in the healthcare sector for 26 years. Her journey in the world of tea began one night when she was listening to a podcast by a tea sommelier. Benita tells us, "This podcast touched me deeply; there was so much to discover in the world of tea. That night caused a turning point in my life. I enrolled in the training to become a tea sommelier, initially with the idea that it would simply be fun to gain more knowledge about tea. However, soon, I knew that I wanted to make this my profession."

Today, Benita creates bespoke tea blends for an array of clientele, including photographers, accountants, yoga teachers, coaches, hospitals, yacht owners and their crew, electricians, elderly care institutions, daycare centres, mayors and aldermen, hairdressers, beauty salons, and many more. She stands out to these clients not only because she creates exceptional tea blends, but also because of her focus on the connection between people, an ability she honed during her time in the healthcare sector. Benita says, "Flavour plays an important role, but my focus is also on the communal aspect of drinking tea, the contact, the feeling of togetherness, and truly connecting. To make something unique and special out of an everyday product. A product you want to talk about at a party, something that lingers in memory and feeling."

Each of her tea blends is designed to symbolise something regarding the company's identity, mission, and vision – for example, a blend featuring rosemary reflects focus, concentration, and the desire to keep learning and improving. Or she can visually match their logo, where blue flowers might be used to represent their brand colour. Another example would be for a business providing treatments for clients, thus calming herbs such

as chamomile or lavender would be suitable to promote relaxation.



"Sometimes it is about a flavourful tea blend that conveys a certain feeling or taste experience," says Benita. "For example, an au-pair agency that wants their South African employees to feel at home in the Netherlands, where rooibos is therefore the main ingredient in the tea blend."

Once the blend is ready, it is packaged in original, personalised packaging,

with print. If the client wishes, Benita can provide the packaging with a QR code with a personal video message or text, all to strengthen the connection between the giver and recipient.

"Tea is a sensory product that brings gentleness and warmth, a moment of calm and relaxation. By letting tea tell a story, I want to further strengthen the connection between the giver and recipient."

Not only does Benita provide professional and creative tea blending services, but she also organises workshops for groups, both private and corporate. She says, "At my own location, I have a pleasant, cosy workshop space (the Garden Room of Theesommelier Benita), where I can host a maximum of 12 people. I also give workshops to larger groups, for example, I organise a Tea Battle, in which departments of a company compete to create the tastiest tea blend. This blend can later be given as a gift to clients, perhaps during the holidays or as an anniversary gift."

She continues, "I also give intuitive tea workshops, in which participants discover their own unique taste, stimulate their senses, and create a tea that really fits them, therefore, not a standard blend that can be bought in a tea shop. I give workshops at various external locations such as hospitality venues, artisan events, neighbourhood and clubhouses, and office buildings."

Looking ahead, Theesommelier Benita has several workshops scheduled in, where teams or clients will jointly create a unique tea blend for their department or company. Previously, the workshops were mainly focused on creating a personal tea blend by each participant individually, however it is now on collaboration: multiple people creating one blend together, which requires a different approach, with the challenge of giving everyone a voice in the composition of the final blend.

Ultimately, Benita is truly on her own path, as she concludes, "My creativity, intuition, and feeling guide what is right to do. My goal is to bring more gentleness back into the world to help people reconnect with themselves (relaxing over a cup of tea) and with each other (having a good conversation over a cup of tea). But also, to convey the tangible appreciation from an employer who has made an effort to create a unique gift for their staff."

THEESOMMELIER
 BENITA

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Website: www.theesommelierbenita.nl

Best Emerging Wellness Beverage Brand 2025 – UK

Wow Cacao isn't just another wellness drink – It's a new way to experience one of the world's most powerful superfruits: the cacao pod. Most people know cacao for chocolate, but what they don't realise is that the juicy pulp that surrounds the beans is packed with vitamins, electrolytes, and polyphenols. Wow Cacao is the UK's first cacao water brand, using this overlooked part of the cacao fruit to create a healthy, indulgent, and mood-lifting beverage that's not only hydrating but also rich in antioxidants. All while also tackling waste in the chocolate industry, too.

The beverage sector is experiencing a major shift, where consumers are choosing to drink less alcohol, as well as becoming more ingredient-conscious, and seeking products that offer both function and flavour, minus the added sugar and sweeteners.

Enter Wow Cacao, the upcycled cacao drink, a refreshing, tropical-flavoured, clean alternative that maximises existing land use and resources.

"Instead of discarding the cacao pulp, we turn it into a feel-good drink" says Founder, Pam Thornton. "The challenge has been education – helping people understand that cacao is more than chocolate, but that's also what makes this journey so exciting."

Pam is a veteran cocoa trader who has been roaming cocoa farms around the world for more than 40 years. Her work has included evaluating crops to estimate price and supplying beans to global chocolate makers. Pam and the team at Wow Cacao boast a combined more than 70 years' experience within the cocoa industry, spanning farming, trading, sustainability and product development. Their passion isn't just about developing a new market for cocoa growers, but also minimising waste.

Wow Cacao currently sources pulp/juice from trees in the coastal regions of Guayas and Santa Elena, Ecuador.

A state-of-the-art irrigation network was installed in Cerecita in the 1990s, which made farming possible on the semi-arid lands of the Santa Elena Peninsula. There has been no deforestation here and the proximity to a major port has ensured installation of the infrastructure necessary to develop the rapid

collection, processing and export of cacao pulp and juice.

Similar juice is available in Brazil, including from a farm Pam partly owns, but given its huge fresh juice culture, it all gets consumed locally. At some point similar developments in West Africa, where most cocoa is grown, might enable sourcing there but for now the high quality and consistency of the Ecuadorian product makes it the obvious choice.

"We help deliver more of the cacao pod's full potential 5000 years ago, long before chocolate, the precious juice, renowned for its strength-giving, medicinal and sacred properties, was used as a beverage and as an offering to the gods during Meso American rituals. We have connected ancient tradition with modern wellness culture, resonating with a new generation that craves authenticity, transparency, and purpose in what they consume."

What's next for the brand? Pam reveals "We are promoting across wellness, hospitality, and lifestyle channels – from collaborations with health-focused bars and clubs to partnerships in the spa and fitness space. As people continue to move towards mindful drinking, we see huge potential for cacao water. It's designed for modern lives: a refreshing reset between meetings, a post-workout boost, a mindful swap for your usual glass of wine. Or simply a delicious healthy drink that can be enjoyed by the whole family. It's made from frozen pure juice, which we dilute, and naturally contains a broad spectrum of vitamins, minerals and polyphenols which we then fortify to ensure consistency. There are no added sugars or sweeteners. Available in still or sparkling versions.



World Cocoa Foundation



"We're working on new product innovations. An energy variant will be available in Q226. We will also be introducing 100% pulp pouches designed for the hospitality and food industry to demonstrate the versatility of the taste and expand awareness. Pulp can be used like acai in bowls and smoothies but also in savoury haute cuisine. And it makes amazing desserts."

To conclude, we take a look at what some Wow Cacao fans have to say:

"What an incredible drink! I love how it is made, what it's made from, and the fact it is so hydrating and packed with healthy goodness! A drink that tastes good and does good! Love it!"

"At last, I have found a lovely sparkling drink, that is healthy and a nice change in the evening."

"I've been enjoying the Wow Cacao waters in the morning, and it gives me such a boost! Tastes great and feels good to know I'm starting the day with my daily dose of electrolytes!"

Contact: Pamela Thornton (hello@drinkwowcacao.com)

Company: NutriJu Ltd t/a Drink Wow Cacao

Website: www.drinkwowcacao.com

Social Media: #drinkwowcacao

Best Customised Quality Coffee Subscription Service 2025 – Switzerland

“Innovation is in our DNA”

Husband-and-wife team and coffee connoisseurs, Dan and Salome Bärtschi are behind CaféMail, where they translate their love of coffee into an innovative subscription service that allows others to enjoy high-quality, personalised blends. Roasted to each customer's taste and delivered to their doorstep, CaféMail's coffee is naturally and ethically sourced, and inspired Italy with “strength of the south” and Scandinavia with “smoothness of the north”. In light of the business' success within the Food and Drink Awards 2025, we speak to Dan to learn more about its offering.

“Having started out selling coffee, tea, and hot chocolate by the roadside early in the morning in Moutier, I specialised in creating personalised coffee blends to suit each customer's taste using my own roasts,” Dan says. “Our service allows you to enjoy excellent coffee, made from high-quality beans roasted in small batches, and to customise your blend with each order.”

CaféMail combines top-notch coffee with speedy service, where its beans are roasted in small batches to order and delivered to customers in Switzerland in 1-2 working days. CaféMail is also working on a brilliant idea for coffee packaging at the moment, this will be courtesy of jutecoffeebeansbag, where it will be prepared for shipping in solid material to

protect it, and sent via priority mail as a letter to keep the cost low and delivery fast. This journey is only just beginning but CaféMail is excited to be on the path towards developing this idea further.

Then, the customer can effortlessly order again by using its SMS chatbot, the phone number of which they can save to their contacts. Here, they can adjust the blend if desired, whether they are in the mood for strong espressos of Italy or light filter coffee of Scandinavia that is influenced by the “hygge” culture of simple pleasures and cosiness.

CaféMail's coffee blends is made from beans who have a score of 80 or more on the SCA (Specialty Coffee Association) scale, meaning it is classified as “specialty grade” and deserves to be truly savoured. The SCA uses a 100-point scale to rate coffee according to factors such as aroma, flavour, acidity, body, and lack of defects. A score of 80 reflects the green bean coffee as high quality and coming with a complex flavour profile. As such, there is no denying how CaféMail's blends allow coffee enthusiasts to get lost in a moment of opulence.

The business knows its audience very well: coffee lovers who are seeking the perfect blend to precisely match their taste, that they can weave throughout their busy day, starting each morning off strong with their tailored cup of joe, as they take on new challenges and pursue their goals throughout the day, and then as they take a break, a moment to just savour and feel a sense of gratitude for all that is good in life.



“All things start with a small seed, much like a brand new day with a great cup of coffee.”
says Dan.

By providing the ultimate experience for coffee lovers that allows them to completely customise their blend and combining it with outstanding, efficient service, CaféMail has proven itself worthy of being named Best Customised Quality Coffee Subscription Service 2025 – Switzerland. We look forward to seeing its continued innovation and success into the future.



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Best Authentic Marinara Sauce Brand 2025 – USA

Antonio Carlo Gourmet Sauces (Antonio Carlo) is a family-owned business that has been making premium gourmet Italian marinara sauces since 1877. Born in Genoa, Italy, Antonio Carlo is a master in crafting gourmet marinara sauces. He has loved being in the kitchen ever since he was a young boy – where he discovered his Nonna's incredible homemade "mari-naada" sauce, that has stood the test of time. Antonio has been making this sauce for more than five decades, using only the freshest, organic vine-ripened San Marzano plum tomatoes and real olive oil, slowly simmered with tantalising herbs and spices. All natural, vegan, gluten-free, Whole30 approved, and with no added preservatives or sugars, we are excited to learn more about its award-winning sauces.

Antonio Carlo and his family moved to the United States in search of new experiences and soon found themselves settled in New Jersey, where, in line with tradition, he continues to bring his Nonna's classic marinara recipe to life. With family and friends saying they enjoy it for an authentic flavour, nutritiousness, and quality that just isn't found on store shelves, he decided it was time to bring it to the market. It has been two years since Antonio launched the brand and it has quickly achieved national reach, with many major US retailers picking it up, including Harris Teeter, Meijer, Lowes Foods, The Fresh Market, Central Market and Amazon.

Antonio Carlo Gourmet Sauces currently offers four authentic Italian marinara sauce flavours: the 3rd generation original "mari-

naada" recipe, a spicy arrabbiata, roasted garlic and tomato basil all of which ooze heritage and flavour, and are handcrafted in small batches. Each flavour is suitable for pretty much any dish; while traditionally for pasta, they are just as delectable with seafood, chicken, veal, pork, grilled vegetables, homemade, pizza, and even as a dip!

If you are looking for inspiration on ways to get creative with its sauces, you can take a look at some delicious recipes featured on the Antonio Carlo website. From gluten-free cauliflower crust pizza to Italian stuffed chicken breasts to traditional bolognese to linguine with red clam sauce, and even a signature Bloody Mary, the possibilities are endless. As Antonio says, "Who knows? You might discover your next drool-worthy meal!"

"I've been making these sauces for over 50 years and let me tell you something, this ain't no ragoooo. It's the real deal. You're gonna love it. Buon appetito!"

So, what is the secret to these sauces? Antonio reveals that there is no secret – It's all about the process, which he keeps at the centre of every concoction. And he also surrounds himself with gourmet executive chefs and industry leaders, who are equally devoted toward ensuring each jar of sauce is crafted to perfection.

"With each flavour in our collection, our process always starts the same – using only the freshest ingredients and adding nothing else," Antonio says. "We carefully select premium vine-ripened Italian tomatoes and combine it with the purest of olive oils. Over low heat, we fuse together those rich, authentic Italian flavours with onion, garlic, and fresh basil leaf. A dash of salt and pepper and we've created a mouth-watering, all-purpose marinara that is as delicious as it is nutritious."

Ultimately, Antonio Carlo and the team are confident that just by tasting its sauces once, you will never look back. You can expect to savour its flavours like never before, and they may just be reminiscent of your parents' or grandparents' recipes of the past. You will never feel a need to use any other brand's sauce again. As Antonio says, "From our family to yours", shop the sauce range here.

Contact: Anthony Costella

Company: Antonio Carlo Gourmet Sauces

Website: www.antoniocarlo.com

**Antonio
Carlo**
GOURMET SAUCES



Best Fine Dining Restaurant 2025 – Edinburgh

From king scallops and haggis to neeps and tatties and Cullen Skink, Scotland is home to a diverse range of traditional dishes. Tucked away in Edinburgh's New Town, The Magnum Restaurant and Bar blends the comfort of a welcoming bar with the care and creativity of a seasonal Scottish kitchen. As The Magnum is named in the Food and Drink Awards 2025, we spoke with Owner Chris Graham to learn more about this exceptional eatery.

Edinburgh is a city brimming with fantastic locations to eat and drink, so it is important that establishments focus on their distinct edge if they hope to survive in such a competitive environment. The Magnum manages to do just that, offering the best of both worlds to guests who don't want just a restaurant or a bar, but a space where they can enjoy an expertly crafted cocktail, a relaxed bite, or a full seasonal dining experience.

Having mastered the art of hospitality by championing warmth, quality, and authenticity, The Magnum serves a wonderfully diverse mix of guests: from neighbours popping in for a drink to families enjoying a meal together, professionals looking for a reliable lunch spot, and visitors discovering Edinburgh's more intimate dining spots. Regardless of the guest experience, exceptional service, a welcoming atmosphere, and consistently high-quality food remain at the core of everything The Magnum offers.

"Whoever steps through our doors, our aim is simple: to make them feel at home and serve food and drink we are genuinely proud of," Chris told us. "Our team is the heart of The Magnum; we look for people who are genuinely passionate about hospitality – warm, attentive, and proud of the experience they deliver. Skills can be taught, but attitude, authenticity, and care are what truly shape the guest experience."

The Magnum's unwavering guest focus is made possible by its independence, which allows the team to remain agile and personal in the face of industry developments. Across the UK, the hospitality sector has experienced significant challenges, from rising supplier and energy costs to ongoing staffing challenges. At the same time, diners are more discerning than ever, demanding value, provenance, sustainability, and a genuine sense of care for their experience.

In response, the team has leaned into The Magnum's strengths: sourcing fresh Scottish ingredients, adapting its menus with the seasons, and forming strong relationships with local producers. This approach has ensured that its dishes stay fresh, flavourful, and cost-responsible, as well as having a direct impact on its local economy. As a result, The Magnum's menus celebrate the finest local produce, and its team remains dedicated to creating an experience that feels both relaxed and memorable.

"We listen to our guests, evolve with their tastes, and regularly refresh our menus to reflect the seasons and support local producers," explained Chris. "We've also made a conscious effort to maintain a warm, inviting atmosphere – because in an environment where guests are choosing



carefully how and where they dine, service and ambience matter now more than ever."

This commitment to staying ahead of the curve is complemented by The Magnum's internal culture, which is friendly, supportive, and grounded in respect. The establishment encourages its team to always be themselves, focus on connecting with guests, and offer a service that is relaxed yet professional. Through ongoing training, communication, and an emphasis on trust, The Magnum empowers its team to take pride in their roles and contribute ideas that help the establishment grow together.

As the team looks to the future, the focus remains on evolving whilst staying true to their roots. The Magnum intends to continue menu development with new seasonal dishes, in addition to expanded collaborations with Scottish suppliers and small-scale producers. Alongside this, the team are exploring ways to enhance The Magnum's bar offerings with curated wine selections and new cocktail ideas. This dedication to improvement and sense of shared purpose is what gives The Magnum its character and has earned it recognition as Edinburgh's Best Fine Dining Restaurant 2025.

"We are committed to refining the guest experience," Chris announced, "from small interior enhancements to thoughtful service touches, ensuring The Magnum remains a place people look forward to returning to. As an independent venue, we are excited to keep growing in ways that feel authentic, personal, and true to who we are."

Contact: Chris Graham

Company: The Magnum Restaurant

Web Address: www.themagnumrestaurant.co.uk

Best Liquorice Manufacturer 2025

Halva is a cherished Finnish confectionery brand that has been feeding the nation's sweet tooth for almost a century. The company stands as a leading manufacturer of premium liquorice and traditional sweets, combining Nordic craftsmanship with quality ingredients to create tantalising treats that are beloved in Finland and enjoyed worldwide, with approximately 40% of its productions distributed to countless countries around the world. We took a closer look at Halva and its premium products below, following its recent recognition in the Food and Drink Awards 2025.

The story of Halva began more than 85 years ago, in 1930s Europe. Brothers Jean and Michael Karavokyros left their home in Greece as teenagers to look for work abroad and had heard that there were plentiful professional prospects in St. Petersburg. As the brothers prepared to leave, their grandmother shared the family's secret recipe for halva, in case they needed a sweet, familiar treat whilst on their journey.

While this journey was arduous, the Karavokyros brothers were determined. They soon found work in a food factory after arriving in St. Petersburg and quickly discovered that halva was a popular dish amongst the Russian population. Due to rising political tensions, however, Jean and Michael were forced to relocate elsewhere. After some thought, they chose the nearest neighbouring country, Finland.

The Karavokyros brothers arrived in Helsinki in 1919, basing themselves in the country's capital to boost their employment prospects and holding a variety of odd jobs as they found their feet. The boys noted that halva was just as popular and well-known in Finland, though all halva products were imported. This presented

a clear opportunity for Jean and Michael, in the form of their grandmother's halva recipe.

Halva was subsequently founded in 1931, offering a range of products developed from the original family recipe. Its products were successful, and, after a few years, the company began to expand its operations into juices. Chocolate kisses and pop corns 1960s/ 1970s. And then to include various other confectionery; first, with marmalades, and then hard candies, liquorice, and gummy sweets, before more into its offerings.

Today, Halva is a renowned manufacturer of liquorice confectionery products. The company has remained true to its roots since its inception and is currently led by third-generation entrepreneur Jean Karavokyros, following in the footsteps of his father Fokion Karavokyros. These family values extend beyond the company's leadership team; Halva has built a multicultural workforce of dedicated employees, many of whom have worked for the company for two generations.

This ethos is reflected in all that Halva does, as it continually strives to honour its legacy. The

company's liquorices recipes date back to 1951, the year of its first liquorice product launch, and are produced through time-honoured methodologies. All liquorice is cooked in batches for hours using traditional practices, which gives the product its unique taste and strong flavour.

Of course, consumer behaviours are always evolving, and businesses must stay ahead of emerging novelties. Halva recognises the importance of ongoing improvement and continuously adapts its offerings without ever compromising its longstanding legacy. It regularly introduces new flavours to keep its product portfolio interesting and has responded to major market shifts with determination, integrating vegan, palm oil-free, and gluten-free treats into its offerings.

Alongside its flavour profiles, Halva also pays close attention to the development of its packaging. In addition to offering traditional packaging for both its grocery and retail clients, the company further separates itself from its competitors through unique and upscale gift packaging options, as well as advent calendars for consumers who wish to add a festive flair to their liquorice purchase.

These endeavours are supported by the continued modernisation of Halva's production machinery and sustainability endeavours; Halva holds certifications in ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 28000, and the BRC Product Safety Certificate. These certifications emphasise that product safety and environmental considerations are of paramount importance to the company and reflect Halva's continued commitment to improving the quality of its operations.

Halva has focused strongly on evolution since its inception and will continue to do so in the upcoming years. The team's dedication to continuous improvement and evolution – all the while never losing sight of the Karavokyros brothers' legacy – has enabled Halva to earn its title of the Best Liquorice Manufacturer 2025.

Looking to the future, Managing Director Jean Karavokyros shared: "We want to make more of our delicious products, and, for that, we need to step up our production. The growing demand for our products outside of our borders must also be met. Ultimately, we will continue to launch new products in new packaging to keep the liquorice enthusiasts happy."

Contact: Jean Karavokyros
Company: Halva Ltd.
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Best Ethical Halal Drink Brand 2025

Tawfik Mathlouthi founded Mecca Cola in 2002 as the world's first ever halal cola brand, an ethical and cultural alternative to mainstream soft drinks. To this day, the brand is constantly innovating, whether developing healthier formulations, exploring eco-friendly packaging options, or expanding into new markets – all while remaining true to its founding ethos of ethical consumption, with its power to drive positive change. We speak to Tawfik to learn more about the company's incredible mission.

"The global beverage sector is undergoing significant transformation, shaped by sustainability demands, evolving consumer tastes, and growing interest in ethical and halal-certified products," Tawfik begins. "Consumers are increasingly seeking beverages that not only taste good but also reflect their personal values and social consciousness. The challenges lie in balancing ethical sourcing, sustainability, and affordability while competing with industry giants.

"At Mecca Cola, we view these challenges as opportunities. We've adapted by reinforcing our commitment to responsible production, expanding into emerging markets such as Asia and Africa, and strengthening partnerships with like-minded distributors."

Indeed, Mecca Cola believes strongly in social impact, with this underscored by a company culture that is collaborative and mission-oriented. Its people are equally passionate about ethical business practices, cultural inclusivity, and creativity, while thinking beyond profit and being highly driven by purpose. They understand that they are contributing to something larger than a beverage; they are a part of a brand that gives back to communities in need. This internal culture is nurtured through regular engagement, community involvement, and by aligning its goals with humanitarian outcomes – and this shared sense of purpose is what strengthens the business' identity and which motivates the team to make a global difference through every can produced.

With such a strong brand heritage and community-driven philosophy behind it, Mecca Cola continues to resonate with consumers who seek authenticity. Today, ethics and transparency matter more than ever, thus Mecca Cola's long-

standing credibility gives it a leading edge within the industry. This is while many other beverage companies are focusing all their time and energy on competing on branding or price. Mecca Cola stands out with its values and impact, being the pioneer of the concept, "Making Value with Values", where every purchase contributes to humanitarian causes.

"Mecca Cola is more than a brand – it is a symbol of ethical entrepreneurship and solidarity. For over two decades, we have stood by our commitment to donate part of our profits to humanitarian causes, supporting communities in Palestine, the Rohingya crisis, and other global relief efforts."

"Our approach to innovation keeps us ahead – from diversifying our product range to embracing sustainability across our operations," says Tawfik. "We constantly explore eco-friendly packaging, healthier formulations, and new markets while remaining rooted in our mission of ethical consumption. We have also enhanced our digital presence to connect directly with younger, socially aware audiences – turning our story and mission into a movement that transcends borders."

Mecca Cola's story is nothing short of extraordinary, and now, we are keen to find out what's next for the brand. Tawfik reveals, "The future for Mecca Cola is filled with exciting growth and renewed impact. In 2025, and beyond, we are expanding our footprint in Europe, Asia, and Africa, with new regional



production facilities to better serve local markets while reducing our carbon footprint. We are also developing new product lines that cater to evolving consumer preferences – including healthier, low-sugar alternatives and new flavours inspired by diverse cultures. At the same time, we are enhancing our environmental sustainability initiatives, focusing on recyclable materials, and green logistics."

He concludes, "Our long-term vision is to reinforce Mecca Cola's identity as a global ethical beverage leader – one that continues to prove that business can be both profitable and purposeful."

Contact: Tawfik Mathlouthi
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Best Gourmet Snack & Ingredients Producer 2025 – UK

The food and beverage manufacturing industry is the UK's largest manufacturing sector and, valued at £1.4.4 billion, accounts for a significant portion of the country's economical output. This unprecedented growth has created a highly competitive landscape that demands companies remain dynamic and innovative in order to meet the evolving needs of their consumers. At the forefront of this scaling sector is AIB Foods, a leading manufacturer known for processing and packaging a variety of premium products. We explored AIB Foods and its standout services below, as the company is named in the Food and Drink Awards 2025.

AIB Foods is a food and beverage manufacturing company based in Wolverhampton. First established as Amin Imperial Bakeries in 2009, the company underwent a significant transformation in its branding and operational identity in April 2012, marked by a complete transition to AIB Foods. This transition reflected the company's growth and evolution in the food industry, with AIB Foods now focusing on a broader range of products and services.

Today, AIB Foods primarily serves the food and snack industry as a processor and packer. The company predominantly supplies a range of supplies – including lentils, pulses, rice, flour, pickles, and cooking ingredients – to supermarkets and independent stores under the INDUS brand and private label. Its product line showcases a wide variety of dishes and ingredients, from caramel pudding and firni mix to authentic seasoning packets and sensational sauces.

In 2015, the company diversified its offerings to include nuts, dried fruits, and low-fat, allergen-free plant-based snacks. Snack Factory is a division of AIB Foods, known for manufacturing premium gourmet snacks under the SHALIMAR label, including roasted and natural nuts, dried fruit and nut mixes, coated flavourful nuts, organic snacks, and authentic world snacks. The company acquired Scrubbys in 2016 to further expand its portfolio and offer a range of over 40 products, including vegetable crisps.

Across its diverse product portfolio, AIB Foods upholds an unwavering commitment to quality. The team is dedicated to ensuring that every item meets the highest standards of freshness, guaranteeing premium quality in every item it produces. This commitment has enabled the company to build a prestigious reputation across the food and beverage industry, driven by a belief that the trust each client places in its service is an investment in culinary excellence.

AIB Foods proudly offers locally sourced produce, delivering the freshest ingredients from nearby farms and suppliers directly to the customer's table. When purchasing from AIB Foods and its brands, customers can support local communities whilst enjoying the exquisite taste and quality of the company's carefully selected, regionally grown produce. What's more, the company has formed strategic partnerships across the industry, ensuring any ingredients that cannot be sourced locally are of the finest global quality.

This is complemented by a customer-first approach, in which the company places the customer's satisfaction as its top priority. AIB



Foods offers a seamless and personalised shopping experience through a user-friendly platform and dedicated customer service, ensuring that customers feel valued and supported at each step of their journey. This allows AIB Foods to serve as more than a producer, but a dedicated partner trusted by clients to deliver exceptional results, time and time again.

From its prolific product line to its staunch client-centrism, AIB Foods has emerged as a leader in the production of gourmet snacks and ingredients. The company has earned renown for its meticulous methodologies, premium processes, and superlative snacks, carving out a reputation for innovation in an industry dominated by dynamic players. For its significant contributions to the industry, driven by a relentless pursuit of excellence, AIB Foods has been named the UK's Best Gourmet Snack and Ingredients Producer 2025.

Contact: Adeel Parvez
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Best Mediterranean Dining Experience 2025 – South East England

Those in search of Kent's finest Mediterranean cuisine need look no further than Minel Meze & Grill, a bar and restaurant located in the county's small village of Meopham. Open daily for lunch and dinner – as well as staying open very late on Friday and Saturday evenings for drinks – this Mediterranean restaurant is built on the passion and experience shared between its Turkish founders. On the back of its recognition for providing the South East's premier dining experience when it comes to Mediterranean food, we take a closer look at this acclaimed establishment below.

Blending inspiration from their Turkish heritage with an array of ancient cooking techniques, the minds behind Minel Meze & Grill strived to create a destination where Mediterranean flavours converge and provide a true taste of their homeland – all from a traditional-looking British countryside restaurant in the heart of a quaint Kent village. By delivering the best Mediterranean dining experience for miles around – and serving dishes made using only the finest fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients – they have more than done this.

This distinction all starts with a comfortable space complete with modern touches, where these authentic, high-quality products feel right at home. As a former Kings Arms pub, the building itself is historic, but has been updated to reflect the sense of warmth and intimacy diners seek from independent restaurants today. Its delectable cuisine can be enjoyed either in the dining room within the restaurant or from a spacious outdoor seating area, the latter being perfect for soaking up the sun that has long been the backdrop to these dishes.

Regardless of the weather outside, this cuisine is certain to take patrons to the sun-kissed shores of the Mediterranean year-round, with their smells and flavours designed to tantalise the senses and celebrate the rich culinary heritage of the region with every bite. Many of the recipes behind these exquisite meals have been passed down the generations and be it a dish encompassing the aromatic spices of Turkey or the rustic timelessness of Italian classics, a team of skilled culinary experts are on hand to capture the magic of the region.

It is unsurprising then that Minel's menu represents a symphony of bold flavours and fresh ingredients, with everything from its seafood and steak to its pasta and speciality dishes connoting a sense of authenticity that few establishments can match. This even extends beyond its main menu to include its set lunch and party menus, not to mention the dishes on its current Christmas dishes – which represent a perfect mix of traditional British Christmas food (such as turkey and Yorkshire puddings) and Mediterranean staples.

Since no restaurant is complete without a comprehensive drinks menu, Minel offers exactly that, with its wine list in particular reflecting its Mediterranean heritage down to a T. Across an immense selection of white, red, and rosé – as well as champagne and sparkling – Minel lists the country every wine is from, allowing novices to pick the perfect complementary drink from their meal. Its offerings even extend beyond Europe, with the finest wines from as far away as Argentina, the US, and New Zealand also being available to sample.

For those in search of something a little more playful or a little less strong, Minel's menu also extends to include an equally impressive selection of cocktails and mocktails alike, alongside the traditional alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks which can be found in restaurants across both the Mediterranean and the rest of England. As touched on above, this selection of drinks stands on its own, so much so that many visit Minel just for a drink – as well as to savour the ambience and signature hospitality the location delivers at every turn.



More than just a place to indulge in the finest food and drink that the Mediterranean has to offer, Minel Meze & Grill is a destination where family and friends come together to share unforgettable moments in each other's company. The backdrop of a welcoming atmosphere and a flawless service only adds to the experience, which is perfect for everything from a romantic dinner for two through to a lively gathering of friends or celebrating a special occasion with loved ones. Such versatility sets this destination apart.

Consistently rated one of the best restaurants in the area by guests visiting from far and wide, we are delighted to add to the prestige surrounding Minel Meze & Grill by recognising it as offering the Best Mediterranean Dining Experience 2025 – South East England. More on how it achieves this through its menus and unique ambience can be found below.

Contact: Muzaffer Celik
Company: Minel Meze & Grill
Web Address: <https://mineLuk/>

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