

BITING INTO BLOGGING

Meeting interesting young people is one of the perks of being in the media industry, and it is a true highlight of the job. It gives me the opportunity to interact with various people, from different walks of life, with all kinds of intriguing stories. Not only this, but Y is also able to give these people the exposure that they truly deserve or may require in order to progress further.

Last issue, we completed 100 issues of Y following its re-launch that happened some time back, and the very many people we have met and interviewed crossed my mind; although there are many names, faces and talents, each and every one of them has left us with a memory.

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This week we spoke to someone from an online community on food and restaurants, and for me, I enjoy reading about something before actually trying it, especially when it comes to watching a movie at the cinema or eating out. My only daring side is with my beauty section, where I try out different products, perfumes, treatments and give my opinion on them. But for our Spotlight this week, it is a whole different story.

Eating out at restaurants is something most people enjoy doing at least once in a while, but trying out new restaurants can be risky when you are hungry. A couple of years ago, a twenty-something, Riyadh Al Balushi, started out a blog called OmaniCuisine.com and today it has become a guide to many about what to expect when heading out to eat. Riyadh is well known in the online community and has been blogging for many years. Gradually, over the years, people learned more about who he really was, and so he started blogging under his real identity. He is a Senior Legal Researcher and an enthusiastic restaurant blogger online. I for one enjoy his honesty, and we get to know him better this week.

Riyadh tells me about his beginnings, saying: "Omani Cuisine ironically started as a website about cooking and not about eating out. It was in December 2007 when a friend of mine suggested that he come over to my place to make a meal, and I suggested that we blog about these kitchen adventures. Once the website was up and running we thought it would be much more fun to have a section about restaurant reviews and in time the posts on food recipes reduced and the restaurant reviews dominated the website."

For those of you who don't know Riyadh he is originally from Sohar, and runs a number of blogs such as the OmaniCuisine.com and Blue-Chi.com. Omani Cuisine is an Omani bloggers' guide to restaurants in Oman, while Blue-Chi is his very own personal blog. Offline, he works in Muscat as a Senior Legal Researcher for the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Riyadh has

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a Law degree from Cardiff University and a master's degree in Information Technology Law from the University of Southampton. One of his main hobbies is clearly trying out new restaurants in town, but he also enjoys creating all forms of web content. He adds: "I also enjoy playing videogames, photography, writing, and reading contemporary fiction. My favourite authors are Douglas Coupland, Nick Hornby, and Scarlett Thomas, but my favourite book I've read so far, this year, has to be the adult graphic novel called "Daytripper" by Ba and Moon."

Many bloggers, like Riyadh, live in Muscat, while their families are in different parts of the Sultanate. In this case his family lives in Sohar and he frequently pays them a visit. He tells us a little bit about Sohar, "Getting to have a good meal with my family is quite important as I don't get to see them all the time. However, even though Sohar is supposed to be booming, there are still very few restaurants worth going out for. I used to love Woodlands in Sohar, but after it closed down the only options I would go for in Sohar are Dawaat and The Mandarin (formerly Silk Route)."

If you read Riyadh's reviews on restaurants in Oman, they come out as honest, sometimes bold, giving you a real feel of what really went on; it is interesting and pretty informative. Of course, it isn't always easy to stay honest about restaurants without hurting feelings, especially when Riyadh personally knows the owners or the management. He says, "It is very difficult to remain objective when writing reviews about restaurants because you don't want to damage the business of a restaurant. I occasionally get emails from restaurant owners asking me to visit and review their restaurants, but I try my best to come without letting them know, and I usually do not inform the waiters that I am taking photographs for my review. I also try to be honest and fair about my reviews and try to give as much of a chance to new restaurants as possible."

It was interesting, as for what Riyadh hates the most about restaurants, he simply tells us: "I hate restaurants that do not have a specialised cuisine, for example, I don't like it when a restaurant serves steaks, chicken biryani AND sushi – that just does not make sense, and it is impossible for a restaurant to be able to produce these three different dishes in decent quality."

> I really enjoy the process of creating content on the internet and sharing my opinions with the rest of the world. I also like to think that Omani Cuisine somehow helps to promote restaurants and that make me a little fulfilled knowing that I am supporting local Omani businesses.

I would like to thank Riyadh for allowing our cameras into his home, and for answering our somewhat quirky questions. Keep up the good job Riyadh, and we are waiting for your next reviews to come.

Want to get in touch with Omani Cuisine? Well there is more than one way. For iPhone and Android users, Riyadh tells us that the Omani Cuisine Application for the iPhone and Android is a little bit different from the Omani Cuisine blog because it is primarily a directory for restaurants that enables you to have access to contact and location details of many restaurants in town and read their reviews, if a review has been written about them. I have recently downloaded the Omani Cuisine Application on my iPhone 4, and have been enjoying it so much, as I now have all my restaurants phone numbers for reservations, and the reviews of some that I didn't try out yet. Riyadh hopes that people find the application fun and useful, and I for one think it is indeed fun and useful and a great directory to have on your phone. You can also check out his website: www.omanicuisine.com, and contact him on Facebook: www.facebook.com/omanicuisineand and Twitter: www.twitter.com/omanicuisine.

Riyadh lists his top three restaurants in Oman and why:

Ubhar – it sets great examples on how you can have Omani food with a modern twist. It defines how Oman should be: modern, stylish, and yet representative of its culture. Whenever I have guests from abroad, this is the first restaurant they have to come and try.

Shang Thai – they have a car parking crises in Al Al Khuwair, but hopefully that won't be an issue for their upcoming branch at The Wave. Their food is amazing and their service is excellent.

Tokyo Taro – excellent authentic Japanese food, the service is great and they are not as expensive as you would think they are.

Readers tips on how to write a GOOD blog
People who want to start a blog must make sure that they have a clear specific topic for the blog, the narrower the topic the more focused the blog will be. I think bloggers should also try their best to be original and not rehash what everyone else is saying, they must also have a predictable rhythm for posting new updates, and last but not least, they have to be passionate about the topic they are blogging about.