

MINISTRY OF CRAB AND NIHONBASHI CELEBRATE ASIA'S 50 BEST RESTAURANT RANKINGS

A grand celebration took place in Colombo, to celebrate Ministry of Crab and Nihonbashi, the brain child of Dharshan Munidasa being ranked in the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants List by San Pellegrino.



Dharshan Munidasa with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Prof Maithree Wickramasinghe

In the 2017 list of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, Ministry of Crab at Dutch Hospital and Nihonbashi, which have been consistently featured on the list, were ranked at Numbers 29 and 49 respectively. While the formal award ceremony was held in Bangkok, the ranking, a great accolade for Sri Lanka, was celebrated with a gathering comprising restaurant partners, patrons and friends at a gala cocktail in Colombo by Dharshan Munidasa. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, Professor Maithree Wickramasinghe and Minister of Foreign

Affairs Mangala Samaraweera were also present at the event.

While Nihonbashi has been consecutively ranked among Asia's 50 Best Restaurants since 2013, MoC has featured on the list since 2015. MoC, the restaurant Munidasa co-owns with Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardena, was also voted the Best Restaurant in Sri Lanka once again this year. The restaurant also announced that Ministry of Crab will franchise to Bangkok. The restaurant in Bangkok, an investment of 4 million US dollars, will be headed by Chandini Gulrajani.



DHARSHAN MUNIDASA, THE HOST OF THE EVENING, EXPRESSED HIS JOY AND THANKS TO STAFF AND PATRONS:

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It's an absolute honour, and a privilege, to stand here before you today as Ministry of Crab and Nihonbashi celebrate being listed on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants for 2017. Today this list is highly regarded and relevant in representing the culinary landscape of Asia. I am proud to say that in this list of 50, Sri Lanka has two. Today, the ecosystem of a restaurant has changed so much; hashtags, blogs, review sties have become key tools. And this list, such as Asia's 50 Best, have become strong influences of modern day society.

But the heart and soul of a restaurant remains in its dishes and the people we find there. The fisher folk, the farmer, the freight forwarder and our amazing teams in our kitchens, service, reservations, accounts and management are the reasons Sri Lanka is on this culinary map.

Just this morning I was in Negombo, to select one species of fish for this evening. It's incredible that I can get to a fish market on a beach and be back by nightfall with the amazing catches of the day. I consider these trips to fishing villages and Tsukiji a privilege.

My total knowledge of ingredients and the menu ideas I get are from these markets. The Tuna mongers of Tokyo, graders in Sri Lanka,

Nihonbashi has had numerous pop-ups over the last 15 years overseas, showcasing Japanese cuisine, Japanese ingredients and the philosophies of 'washoku'.

the captain of vessels taught me tuna. In fact, it was a crab trader in Pettah who taught me how to grade crabs. 22 years on, I keep going back to these markets, driven by passion and new experiences.

These inspiring ingredients, and my Japanese – Sri Lankan upbringing, are why I am on this stage today, celebrating two of my restaurants. Nihonbashi had many pop-ups over the last 15 years overseas, showcasing Japanese cuisine and also Japanese ingredients and the philosophies of 'washoku'. I am truly delighted that I have been appointed as an ambassador of Cool Japan by the government of Japan, for spreading Japanese food culture to the world and doing it sometimes illegally, as I smuggled otharo and wagyu to India three times, and fortunately did not get caught – yet.

Asia's 50 Best List has increased popup requests, and in the last year alone we have had 12 popups worldwide. At Shangri-La at the Shard in London, Conrad Maldives, Sri Lankan Festival in Tokyo, World Gourmet Festival in Bangkok, The Regent in Taipei, Culinary Greats, Bangkok, and at the Hong Kong Jockey Club to name a few. This weekend we will be at the World Gourmet Festival Mumbai, and the week after at the renowned World Gourmet Summit in Singapore. In every popup or guest chef appearance I do, I rely on my team, who are in this room, and the restaurant, to main-

tain our staff edge, to practice our kitchen philosophy and to play it up with pride and passion.

I must say a special thank you to my mother, for starting Nihonbashi with me when I was just 24. Today Nayana, Piyatissa, Rajitha, Malini run Nihonbashi, and Deepthi, Benedict, Riyad and Jayampathi run Ministry of Crab. Ladies and gentlemen, will you please give a round of applause for the teams of two of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants.

Ministry of Crab lost one of our pillars last month: Sisira, our trusted crab supplier sadly passed away. We feel his loss deeply and are indebted to know him. In the last 22 years, my relationship with key suppliers has grown stronger: Rajamani, Ashroff, Shyan, Madu,

East-West, Stassens - thank you. Suranthy of Hasthagiri Bakery, together we make *kade paan* a thing, thank you. Lion Brewery, for being a strong ally for two decades, thank you.

Our wine partners - Wine World, Decanter Wine, who have kept our wine list current, bold, invigorating and brave, thank you. MTV, Amex, for supporting the events of the Colombo Dutch Hospital and this evening, thank you. S. Pellegrino and Acqua Panna for making this list, and you do make us sparkle and keep us still, if you get the pun. Our host, Cinnamon Grand, Rohan, thank you. Last, but not least, to all of you here today, our valued guests and friends, thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, every ingredient has a story. And I leave you with our story of our ingredients.

And I remember that the first six months of the restaurant operating and it was a nerve-racking time. With teething problems, never knowing where it will go and Mahela and I used to joke that in six months we will have to close it down and it has been a good ride and we started something. But we really didn't think it would last.

Thanks to the incredible Dharshan Munidasa and the incredible team who has been with us and stayed loyal to us in the past two years, we managed to have a restaurant that has been recognised not just in Sri Lanka, but internationally, and we have been very, very humbled by the response that all of you have shown us.

As Dharshan said, last month we lost a great pillar of strength in Sisira. His wife and son are here today. And ma'am, thank you very much for your support and your continued trust in us. We remember Sisira very, very fondly and we look forward to a stronger relationship as the years go by with your family.

I always think that awards, recognitions, finances aside, what makes us really strong are our relationships. And hopefully, with your support, with the strength of our staff and with Dharshan we will strive to get better and keep offering all of you a wonderful experience at Ministry of Crab.

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Kumar Sangakkara, a veteran cricketer and former Sri Lankan national captain, spoke on the success of MoC, which he started with Dharshan Munidasa and Mahela Jayawardena in 2012.

Thank you very much for being here today. It's been another great year, being a part of MoC. I'd like to thank all of you, first of all for being here and taking the time to be with us tonight and also being not just our loyal customers, but also our friends and well-wishers.

It's been an incredible journey for us over the past four to five years. A restaurant spoken about over a glass of wine with friends over a meal, actually came into being.



Mahela Jayawardena, a batting great and former Sri Lankan national cricket team captain, expressed his gratitude towards the hardworking MoC team and patrons, while also looking back on their journey.



Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardena and Dharshan present a plaque to Chandini Gulrajani, heading the MoC franchise in Bangkok

Good evening everyone. Honourable Prime Minister and distinguished guests, when you follow Dharshan who has taken a lot of runs and you follow Kumar, which I always have in the National Team, there are a very few runs that I need to knock off for us to finish this innings.

It has been a wonderful journey. A journey among friends, which we all enjoyed. Like Kumar said, we felt that at least for six months we had a restaurant for us to go and eat at. That is how we started the venture. But with a wonderful team, when I say 'team', obviously from top to bottom, the person who works in the kitchen to the janitorial staff, people who come to clean the place up, everyone has contributed.

And the most important thing is the support that we get from Sri Lankans. I think without the local support; we would not be where we are today as a restaurant. We had very good constructive criticism over the last five years for us to be stronger and improve in what we do. And that's how the crab we cherish is served, and we hope, even though we might not be able to say 'thank you' to each and everyone tonight, that you please keep pushing us. Make sure that we don't compromise on anything. It has become a national pride and we will continue to work harder.



Dharshan, Kumar and Mahela with the teams of MoC and Nihonbashi