

CATERER

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MIDDLE EAST

A black silhouette of a hand holding a lid over a platter. The hand is positioned at the top right, with fingers curled around the handle of a large, dome-shaped lid. Below the lid, a hand is shown holding a flat, circular platter. The entire scene is set against a bright yellow background.

Fine art

Lifting the lid on haute cuisine's rise

Fad or trend:
**How Dubai's first gourmet
water bar is doing**



Roia Jabari, managing director of AQUA Water Bar in Dubai Media City, says the outlet is proving popular

When LUQEL, a German water filtration system provider, opened a water bar in Dubai Media City, it created a splash in the media, with as many people poking fun at it as praising it for providing health-conscious alternative in the area.

The concept of a water bar, where patrons can enjoy different types of water recipes curated by ‘water sommeliers’, was met with a level of trepidation by many.

Offering around 30 recipes, AQUA Water Bar aimed to be a game-changer in a region where clean, pure, and sustainable water is considered an essential part of daily life. Along with the liquid offerings, the outlet also offered healthy dishes, in partnership with Kitopi.

Roia Jabari, managing director of LUQEL UAE and AQUA Water Bar says of the response from the media and the public: “We were not expecting the level of attention and excitement the idea of a water bar generated. We had lots of people coming in to see what we were all about and received many inquiries for water bar locations in other places.”



Free water for all

As part of the launch, AQUA Water Bar ran a promotion where the water was offered for free. Jabari says as well as promoting the concept, it was also designed to encourage customers to shift towards buying refills rather than using plastic bottles.

But what of profitability for the new business? Jabari says despite some impact on the bottom line, this was all part of the plan. “We planned for a trial period, and part of the investment was giving away water. Additionally, we have several add-ons to complement the water bar, including refillable bottles for sale, with all profits going to Dubai Cares, a special needs school.”

What are customers drinking?

The water bar’s customer habits have been varied so far. “Our customers are adventurous and always trying new recipes. Our detox water and fruit blends are continuously evolving,” says Jabari.

The most popular infusion currently is the “appetite control”, a mix of cucumber, lemon, and lime infused in the “thirst quencher” water, appealing to those seeking a refreshing and health-conscious option.

“The idea of a water bar has been long overdue, especially considering the saturation of coffee shops in the UAE,” adds the entrepreneur. While the initial response was remarkable, Jabari acknowledges that the first month was a period of trial and error. The unexpected influx of customers prompted the team to rethink their

food menu and water recipes. However, with Dubai’s longest holiday season following the June opening, they used this time to perfect the water bar concept and train their team, preparing for the upcoming months.

The summer months though, can also affect businesses adversely, resulting in less footfall. Is this something the company has been worried about? “Our core business is the LUQEL water station, so we are actively working even during the summer. We have several testing pilots going on and focus on training and educating our customers.”



Future pours

Looking to the future, Jabari says there are plans to grow the brand’s reach.

LUQEL is set to launch its automated bottling system, designed to transform the hospitality industry’s approach to water consumption.

“In October, we will have two pilot hotels operating the system, which handles everything from emptying and cleaning bottles to refilling them with our 30 mineralised recipes, sealing, and labelling without the need for personal staff. This will make gourmet water efficient, low maintenance, and reduce human error in terms of hygiene,” she says.

Overall Jabari said they were happy with the reception. “We are super happy with our AQUA bar concept and believe it’s going to catch on. We are already eyeing other locations, including London.”

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