



**Success
stories**



Abdul Karim

Mahdi Lounge
32-34 Cinque Ports Street,
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When Abdul Karim arrived in England from Bangladesh in 1977 at the age of 12, he had no experience in the restaurant industry. But just two years later, a part-time job at Darbar restaurant in Bayswater, London, would change the course of his life. Karim fell in love with the hospitality world and, after completing his GCSEs in 1980, joined Darbar full-time. From there, he embarked on a journey through several restaurants—including Wimbledon Tandoori—where he honed his skills as a waiter, manager, and kitchen worker, driven by a deep passion for cooking.

Karim dreamed of owning his own restaurant but understood the risks of going solo too soon. In 1986, he made a strategic move by partnering with others to open Kent Tandoori (later renamed Baadshah) in Tenterden, Kent. The restaurant was a resounding success, and Karim spent most of his time in the kitchen, introducing traditional Indian and Bangladeshi dishes that were new to the region.

As his family grew, so did his ambitions. In 2002, he opened Mahdi Spice—named after his third son—in Rye, East Sussex. The location was daring, just steps away from a well-established curry house, The Gandhi, and another competitor nearby. But Karim was undeterred. He poured his energy into every aspect of the business, ensuring his personal touch was felt in every detail. His relentless pursuit of excellence paid off: Mahdi Spice quickly became the top curry house in Rye, winning multiple awards in its first year, including the prestigious Curry Award.

Karim's success is rooted in two key principles: outstanding food and exceptional customer service. A firm believer in 100% customer satisfaction, he goes above and beyond to accommodate every request. His mission is simple—ensure every guest leaves happy and eager to return. And they do. His reputation for quality and hospitality soon led to the closure of the two competing curry houses nearby.

With Mahdi Spice thriving, Karim's three sons joined the business, each bringing their own strengths. Jakaria, the eldest, holds a business degree; Mahee studied computer science; and Mahdi, the youngest, is pursuing business

management at the University of Canterbury. All three have grown up immersed in the restaurant world, learning the trade from their father through hands-on experience both front-of-house and in the kitchen. Karim has not only built a successful business but also nurtured the next generation of restaurateurs.

Despite his achievements, Karim remains deeply connected to his roots. In 2010, he founded the Dighal Bak Union Development Association, UK, and currently serves as its Vice President. In 2016, he established the Greater London Nabiganj Welfare Association, which focuses on improving conditions in his hometown—particularly in areas affected by seasonal flooding and monsoons. His charitable work addresses critical social issues, with a strong emphasis on education and youth development. Since 2006, he has been actively involved with the Zukta Razya Nabiganj Education Trust.

Karim's contributions extend to the broader Bangladeshi catering community. He is a founding member and Executive Member of the Bangladesh Caterers Association and has been part of the British Bangladesh Caterers Association (BBCA) since 2012, where he currently serves as a Senior Vice President.

Now, with his sons gradually taking on more responsibility, Karim quietly hopes to begin planning his retirement. Yet his presence remains a cornerstone of Mahdi Spice. Whether greeting a familiar local, a curious tourist, or a solo diner on curry night, his warm smile and generous hospitality embody the spirit of South Asian culture.

Recently, Karim transformed a four-decade-old restaurant into the upscale Mahdi Lounge, a bold move that signals his continued drive to innovate and elevate the dining experience. His journey—from a teenage kitchen hand to a respected restaurateur and community leader—is a testament to hard work, vision, and heart.