44-year old Chef-Patron Sabbir Karim has created two acclaimed Indian restaurants in London, Salaam Namaste and Namaaste Kitchen. Sabbir is a consultant, humanitarian and activist. Uniquely, he is also a Purser for British Airways’ cabin crew. A British Bengali, he features in the 2013 British Bengali Who’s Who.

Sabbir Karim took a Business Studies diploma at Southgate College. As cabin crew, Sabbir experienced lots of different dining situations. Travelling to Delhi, Bombay, Karachi, Lahore, Bangladesh, Mauritius and the far east, he became fascinated with the cuisine and culture of each territory he worked.

Sabbir’s culinary arts are all self-taught though he did do a two-week crash course in cuisine with the chef at Delhi’s historic Imperial Hotel. In London, he worked at the Red Fort and Chutney Mary restaurants. “In those days,” he told me, he was “front of house and now I like to be much more face to face with customers.”

By 2005, Sabbir knew enough of the culinary world to open his own restaurant, Salaam Namaste. He devised the menu and the recipes but employed chefs - one of whom I met the night he was presented with Asian and Oriental Innovative Chef of the Year 2013 at the Asian Curry Awards. In 2012, he was named Asian and Oriental Chef of the Year at the same event.

The success of this ‘new sensation in Indian dining’ gave Sabbir the confidence to open his second restaurant, Namaaste Kitchen, in 2010. Recently, the restaurant was named ‘Best Newcomer’.

The combination of Sabbir’s innovative stunning food and the appointment of a team committed to top-notch customer service saw Namaaste Kitchen gain instant fame and recognition in the first year of opening. A raft of rave reviews appeared in ES Magazine, The Guardian, and Time Out. Legendary critics Matthew Norman and Fay Maschler loved it, with the latter claiming she was happy to pick up a personal tab!

The restaurant was acknowledged as the ‘Critics’ favourite - newly and critically acclaimed’ and, in 2011, was nominated as a finalist for the ‘Best Newcomer’ at the prestigious British Curry Awards. In 2012, Sabbir introduced a ‘regional food festival’, presenting the finest dishes from a different Indian state each month to diners at both Namaaste Kitchen and Salaam Namaste. The media took great interest, with glowing reviews emerging regularly.

Sabbir’s restaurants really took off after they started receiving attention from critics. Food reviewers like the Guardian’s Matthew Norman gave a nine out ten rating. The paper called Sabbir ‘A maestro of modern and traditional Indian cooking’ “This motivated me,” said Sabbir, and so he

“A maestro of modern and traditional Indian cooking” (The Guardian)

started to focus more on the marination and cooking. Sabbir’s gorgeous wife, Aneela, has a Pakistani background and this adds richness to Sabbir’s culinary world. “I discuss a lot with Aneela,” he told me. “This opens up another dimension.”

The chef is also passionate about customer service and cooking, he would love to use his expertise to be a consultant to airlines, advising on menus and cooking. He certainly has enough experience to have become an in demand expert by now and will likely continue to soar as far as his ambition will take him.