

Lifestyle – Social

NY Bagels in Singapore

by Brett Gold

Many of us have considered starting our own businesses at some time in our lives, though for most it remains just a fantasy. For Beth Ginsberg and her partners, that dream became a reality only recently, right here in Singapore, with the creation of the New York City Bagel Factory.

As those of us who grew up eating bagels know, there is something addictive about the chewy, doughnut-shaped bread, especially when toasted with a "shmeor" (of cream cheese that is). While the origins of the bagel may be uncertain (many believe in Poland), it was indisputably introduced to America in the 1880's by Jewish immigrants in the Lower East Side of New York City. Until not that long ago, to get a good bagel in the states you had to live in or near a major metropolitan area where there were Jews. Well times have certainly changed in the U.S. where bagels are de-rigueur. But the rest of the world is a totally different bread basket....

After living in Singapore for about four years, where she had moved with her husband and two children from the Boston area, Beth began toying with ideas for starting a business of her own, something she had often thought about. Her background is in engineering. Though she had done some local consulting work, she still had the entrepreneurial bug. Selling bagels in bagel-poor Singapore was one of a number of ideas she tossed around. A sign came during the summer of 2004 while she was back in Denver with her then three kids. Their Filipina helper who accompanied them back to the states, ate two to three bagels a day! Beth figured if Asians liked the dense bread as much as expats do, selling bagels in Singapore would be a breeze. And when her friend Renee Kongsiri, upon returning to Singapore for a second tour, mentioned to Beth she had been thinking about selling bagels as well—it seemed meant to be. The two teamed up with silent partner Nick Groth who agreed to sign on with the bagel idea after giving up on his notion of running a brewery.

Thankfully Beth discovered that starting a business in Singapore is a relatively straight-forward affair. There were lots of t's to cross and i's to dot, but everything is well documented and Singapore is very pro-small business. The owners decided that wholesale was the way to go with the new venture as a result of the failure of the Brooklyn Bagels' retail store on River



Valley Road in 2002, after only a few years in business. Miraculously while searching for equipment for their new enterprise, the women stumbled upon the dissolved company's abandoned bagel-forming machine. They bought it, had it overhauled, and it now molds each and every New York City Bagel Factory bagel.

Factory space also had to be found, as did high horsepower mixers. Ordinary mixers don't cut it for bagel dough which is extremely dense. Unlike normal bread

dough, which is 60% water and can contain other liquids or oils, bagel dough has a water content of only 48-51% and has no other added moisture. After much research and legwork they located their fledgling business at Gourmet East Kitchen, a new HDB food factory in Bedok, and acquired the required heavy-duty mixers. Bagel fans greeted the new bread in town very favorably and the bagels have pretty

much sold themselves. It took a few months to get the whole manufacturing, delivery and ordering process going. (Until January, Beth was getting up at 3 a.m. to deliver the bagels herself!) But the business now has a solid foundation, a great staff and the emphasis will be directed to sales and marketing.



Ember, a Wonderful Restaurant in Hotel 1929

By Terry Goldstein
Expat Extraordinaire

As I enter my eighth month as an expat I was surprised to learn of the long standing tradition in our wonderful expat community – the Birthday Festival! As those of us who are experienced expats know, a birthday celebration is not nearly as much fun without your friends and acquaintances to share it with. This year I was fortunate to truly enjoy my Birthday Festival with friends, acquaintances and family here in Singapore.

Being a typical gregarious Aquarian, I love to meet people and participate in as many new experiences as possible. Mort, my husband, on the other hand is not always as eager, but then he is a successful accountant in a major international company so we can overlook some of his eccentricities. Let me share the entire festival with you.

It began on Wednesday evening with a dinner at The American Club for six, always a great place to eat.

Then Thursday evening, our fabulous Singaporean neighbors, Stella, Maverick (ahh, the influence of Western TV on Eastern culture) and their son Brian took all of us, including our twins Brittany and Christina (named after my two favorite pop singers) to Ember, a wonderful restaurant in Hotel 1929.

What a delicious meal in a very pleasant setting! The 1929 Hotel is one of those boutique hotels in converted shop houses for expats who want just a bit of local flavor without getting too close. The Ember restaurant is on the ground floor right next to the lobby, with lots of glass and large windows.

For a starter, I heartily recommend the deep fried oysters with six fabulous dips, each one better than the last. I only had a half dozen this time, but the next time I am going for the whole dozen and I am not sure I will be sharing. Mort had the pan-seared scallops on rocket salad and I thought he was going to lick the plate. I gave him the "mother look" across the table and he settled down. Brittany made me so proud; she actually ordered and ate pan-fried squid and was ecstatic. Christina still has issues with seafood but she is working through them.

When the main courses came, Stella and I started in on our Maine lobster pasta and funnily enough the conversation pretty much stopped until we were done. I am beginning to think that the idea of sharing a bite of one's food is highly overrated. Mort and Maverick enjoyed their cod marinated with miso and served with herbed potatoes. The girls and cute little Brian had crispy chicken with white beans.

Dessert was "a dream come true." We smiled all the way through the bittersweet Valrhona chocolate mousse, banana tart and lavender ice cream and the warm chocolate cake with vanilla bean ice cream.

A visit to this restaurant is heartily recommended for all expats who want 1929 ambience in air-conditioned comfort. Be sure to call 6347-1928 for reservations.

So for now your Expat Extraordinaire says, happy eating. Call the Ember for reservations and be sure to order the deep fried oysters. They are fabulous.

NYC Bagel Factory bagels are offered at some of the city's finest hotels, the U.S. Embassy cafeteria and as proof of just how mainstream bagels have become, the Jewish bread with a hole in the middle is ordered for Sunday delivery at a number of local churches! So where can you buy

sesame, onion, garlic and cinnamon raisin; and the newest item—bagel chips. Yum! Thank you, Beth and partners for bringing a bit of Americana to Singapore!

Photos – (from top): Beth and bagels; bagel chips; bagel mixer

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