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Busaba Eathai

Concept

Conceived by Alan Yau with the first branch opening on Soho's Wardour Street in 1999, Busaba Eathai is a modern, Thai eatery.

Busaba is a Thai flower. Eathai is a fusion of the words eat and Thai. Differing from formal dining establishments, Eathai represents a Thai casual dining venue, offering a one-course dining experience devised to feed you with minimal fuss.

Fifteen years on, Busaba delivers a much coveted, flavoursome selection of freshly prepared salads, stir fries and curries. The menu also offers an extensive list of Asian-inspired juices and smoothies, as well as a simple yet selective wine list

Appealing to a youthful, aspirational and creative clientele, Busaba Eathai offers an authentic, affordable and yet elegant dining experience at an average price of £17 per person.

Philosophy

Sookjai is Busaba Eathai's living ethos. Based on traditional Buddhist values,sookjai is about avoiding the everyday chaos that distracts you. Instead, focus on taking life as it comes and creating your own reality. Literally, its meaning is 'to enjoy' and 'happy heart'.

Gan Gin Gan Yuu means 'as you eat, so you are'. It is an axiom which parallels Brillat-Savarin's 'you are what you eat' but goes further to suggest you also define yourself by your approach to food. The choice of ingredients, preparation and presentation are all indicative of who you are.



Joel Falconer
Development Director

After completing his law degree at University College London, Joel joined Busaba in 2002 as Assistant Restaurant Manager. Twelve years has seen him rise through the ranks, and now Joel leads Busaba's team of 500. Driven to achieve another ten Busaba openings within the next two years, you will often find Joel striding across London's West End with moleskin book in one hand, flat white in the other. Joel is passionate about Busaba's food quality and people development.



Brigid Hughes FCA
Finance Director

Born and raised in Adelaide, Australia, Brigid joined Busaba 2 years ago after lengthy tenures with Pret A Manger and Deliverance. With an extensive background in expansion, Brigid has created a strong framework for Busaba's growth. She loves the fast paced environment at Busaba and that the company has remained true to its ethos of 'sookjai'.



Chef Rommel Bustarde
Group Kitchen Operations Manager

Rommel is the culinary mastermind behind Busaba, and perhaps the most playful and charismatic chef you're likely to meet in a London kitchen. Rommel was invited to open Busaba in 1999 after working with Alan Yau at Wagamama. Fifteen years on, Rommel says "Busaba has been the biggest challenge of my career, but it's my baby, isn't it? I'll always love it!"



Chef Jude Sangsida
Executive Chef

Jude is the heart and soul of the Busaba kitchen. All of Busaba's recipes have been coloured by his wisdom and depth of skill. Whilst Jude's love of food began in his humble family kitchen in Pakchong Town, his talent led to tutelage under the head chef for the Thai Royal family, to successful adventures in the Antipodes, and today he embodies the Busaba spirit. Jude's warm, calm nature infuses the 'sookjai' culture throughout the entire team.



Leila Botham
Business Development Manager

Originally from Sydney, Australia, Leila's first day at Busaba in 2010 was marked with much celebration and excitement, as it was also the opening of Busaba Bicester Village. With several years experience in hospitality sales, operations and marketing in Sydney, she has also immersed herself in all these areas at Busaba as well, now managing all PR, marketing and branding. Leila loves Busaba's egalitarian and people-focused spirit, along with the simple and elegant brand aesthetic.



Adnan Celik
Group Operations Manager

Adnan moved into hospitality after relocating to London in 1998. With a Mining Engineering degree and MBA in his portfolio, along with his entrepreneurial spirit, Adnan has run his own business ventures as well as worked across kitchen and restaurant operations. Adnan's impressive university basketball career has impacted his approach to restaurant operations. "It is all about the team, all 500 of us. Our cohesiveness and team work is why I love coming to work every day".





Clockwise from top left: Green chicken curry, Jungle curry, Aromatic butternut pumpkin curry, Mussaman duck curry, Prawn curry, Red beef curry



Left to right: Hesham Daud, Tamas Khan, Jude Sangsida, Sasi Meechamnan , Rommel Bustarde



Side / Thai calamari



Side / Por-pia jay



Side / Fish cakes



Soup / Tom kha chicken





Wok noodle / Sen chan pad Thai



Sides / Pandan chicken

Then



Wardour Street

The original Busaba Eathai opened in 1999 in London's salacious Soho. Fifteen years later, there are still queues along the street every night of the week.

1999



Store Street

This little gem tucked away in leafy Bloomsbury offers outdoor seating and a private dining den for up to 24.

2003



Bird Street

Just seconds from the shopping mecca of Oxford Street and Selfridges, Bird Street is the busiest, and some argue the most beautiful Busaba restaurant.

2005



Panton Street

Nestled between Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus, Panton Street offers a tranquil oasis from neighboring tourist spots.

2010



Old Street

In the heart of London's hip East End, Busaba Old Street has introduced a lounge bar and extended drinks list to the concept.

2010

Best Chain award from Londoneats.com
2006

Thai government award for Thai restaurant
abroad
2007

Busaba is 2nd in Timout: 50 best London
restaurants award
2008

Busaba Eathai is awarded Best Cheap Eats by
the Observer Food Monthly
2004

1st in Timeout: Londoner's 10 favorite
restaurants
2009

Featured in London's Top 50 Restaurants
2011

Busaba ranked in the top 20 employers in
hospitality
2011

Bicester Village wins Best Restaurant at the
Restaurant and Bar Design Awards
2011

49th in the Sunday Times 100 Best Companies
to work for
2012



Westfield London

Located in Europe's second largest shopping mall, Busaba Westfield London offers shoppers some peaceful respite from the retail buzz.

2010



Bicester Village

Catering to the designer shopping crowds, Bicester Village is one of Busaba's busiest restaurants with a private dining room that regularly hosts Thai and Malaysian royalty.

2010



Covent Garden

Tucked between Longacre and the Royal Opera House, Busaba Covent Garden is superbly placed for a relaxing pre-show meal for Londoners and tourists alike.

2011



Westfield Stratford City

Overlooking the Olympic stadium and aquatic centre with private dining room and outdoor seating, Westfield Stratford City revitalises weary shoppers with its unique Thai serenity.

2011



King's Road

Residing in London's poshest postcode, Busaba King's Road has proven to be a tasty pitstop for locals buying their designer wares.

2011

Now

Events

As London's leading Thai restaurant group, Busaba Eathai has regularly participated in highly regarded events such as Taste of London, Foodies Festival, We Feast, Street Feast and Thai at Trafalgar.



CookThai

On Sunday mornings, Busaba opens the kitchen to their most-devoted customers for CookThai classes. Teaching three dishes from the menu, Chef Hesham and Wok-Master Sasi impart their wisdom and passion to their guests.

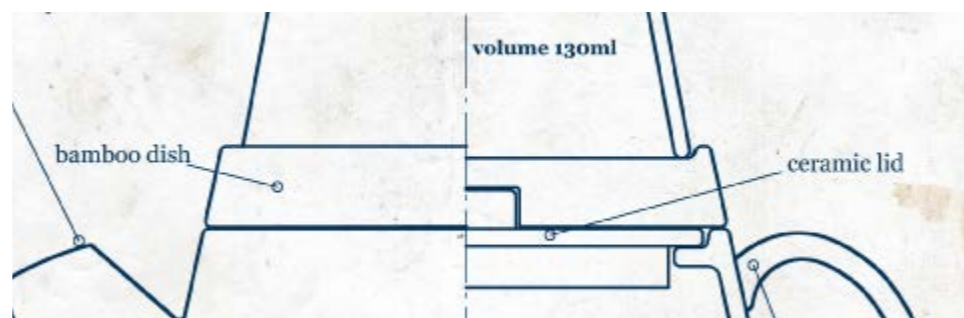


Creative Projects

Busaba is proud to have collaborated with a litany of talented creatives over the past 15 years.

Engaging with young designers, Busaba Eathai commissioned two competitions with University of the Arts: Central St Martins. Winners of the ceramics competition included a curry bowl and teapot design. Both have been used in the restaurants. The short film entries were inspired by five emotions of eating and exhibited at the opening of Busaba Panton Street.

Photographer Jason Lowe travelled to Thailand to capture the spirit of 'Gan Gin Gan Yuu'. His photography evokes the true spirit of Thai Food, also reflected in his short film 'A Love Affair With Food'.



Design

At its core, Busaba Eathai embraces a holistic approach to the dining experience.

At the entrance, guests are greeted with a tranquil water feature of floating candles and flowers, lemongrass incense and the centrepiece, a bronzed Buddha.

Deep and warm wooden hues are integral to the Busaba brand. The large tables were designed according to the Golden Ratio and offer a balance of communalism and privacy. Sharing dishes with your friends is encouraged at Busaba to ensure the salty, sweet, spicy and sour flavours complement each other.

All these elements were featured in David Archer's award-winning design for Busaba Eathai Bicester Village (Restaurant and Bar Design Awards 2010/11) (see image overleaf)



The award winning Bicester village design

Busaba Eathai has been serving affordable, authentic Thai food to London's exacting diners since 1999, when the first restaurant opened on Soho's Wardour Street.

Today, queues at its restaurants still stretch around the block. Fans of Busaba Eathai's signature dish, the Thai calamari, post online their attempts to recreate the recipe on Epicurious.com.

"We sell our calamari by the truckload, even after 10 years," said Joel Falconer, the company's development director. "This sort of loyalty and longevity is amazing in this business."

The brainchild of noodle king Alan Yau, famed for the Wagamama and Hakkasan restaurant chains, Busaba Eathai ticked along with just three sites until the business was bought by Phoenix Equity Partners in 2008. Busaba Eathai now has 10 sites, and all but one is in London. Last year, the company turned over £21m.

Mr Yau remains a shareholder and board member, but it is Mr Falconer who is tasked with doubling the size of

the business to 20 restaurants in the next three years.

"We're looking to develop three or four new sites, focusing on Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Bristol," he said.

This is no small ask. All of Busaba Eathai's food is made fresh on site, with no artificial ingredients or preservatives. Scaling this kind of business is tricky, said Mr Falconer. "And we refuse to compromise on quality."

The real secret to the brand's enduring appeal is its authenticity. "We have at least four Thai chefs in every Busaba kitchen," said Mr Falconer. "We can and do train our own chefs, but when it comes to truly understanding the flavours and culture, there are some things you can't teach."

In order to expand, Busaba Eathai will have to bring in more than 40 new Thai chefs from south-east Asia. Under the Government's current visa rules, this poses a serious challenge. "It will be extraordinarily difficult," said Mr Falconer. "The visa language requirements

mean that our chefs need a certified level of English. We're actually having to coach people in Thailand to help them get over here."

Mr Falconer refuses to compromise on this point, however. "Consumers have never been more sophisticated," he said. "They can spot poor imitations." Maintaining the quality of the brand goes beyond making good food, however. To maintain its credibility, Busaba Eathai does almost no discounting, a practice used by many other high street restaurants as a means of filling empty tables.

"It's easy to win business with heavy promotion and heavy discounting, but you don't win a reliable customer," he said. "And our average spend is £17 per head which is pretty good for London, unless you're eating fast food."

Busaba Eathai has benefited from the recent downturn as savvy diners traded down their usual expensive restaurant meal for something more affordable.

"That was a real challenge as we had to up our game in terms of service and quality," admitted Mr Falconer. "We had to be as good as the restaurants charging three times the price."

Busaba Eathai was founded on democratic principles. All the diners eat at communal tables; there are no bookings and it's first come, first served.

"This was revolutionary when we started and now everyone's at it," said Mr Falconer. "But I'm a firm believer that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

These principles are also at play within the company itself. Busaba Eathai is committed to promoting internally and invests a lot of cash in training.

Mr Falconer himself is a product of this system. He joined the business 11 years ago as an assistant manager and has climbed up through the ranks. Staff retention is particularly tough in the restaurant business and by investing in training, the company hangs on to its employees far longer than most.

"We don't just do the usual hospitality training, we also try to involve our people in the development of the business," said Mr Falconer. "Restaurant staff are only waiters when they are at Busaba, but outside this job they can have other careers. Some are actors, some are photographers, artists or musicians. We want them to use all these skills in the business."

telegraph.co.uk
January 2014

The Telegraph

"A lovely relaxed vibe" is created by the dark and "funky" decor at these large-communal-table Thai Wagamamas' (same creator, but better ratings) – "a great cheap eat", with dishes offering "lovely vivid flavours".

London Restaurants
2014

©Harden's



Busaba Eathai takes a Buddhist approach when it comes to employee engagement. Staff at the London-based Thai restaurant chain enjoy regular "sook jai" chats to reflect on performance and areas for development. Sook jai means not being caught up in the everyday chaos that distracts individuals from being able to take life as it comes. In Thailand it means happy heart, but it also suggests taking pleasure in the traditional Buddhist value of living in the moment.

Managers and teams are empowered to set their restaurant strategy to achieve objectives, so every member of staff takes pride in living the company's values. In our survey, employees give the firm a 79% positive score for its strong sense of family and say everyone is treated fairly (76%, a top 10 ranking).

Founded in 1999 in central London by Alan Yau, Busaba Eathai is a modern Thai eatery that offers customers a casual, single-course dining experience with minimum fuss. The combination of its stylish interior, atmosphere and mouthwatering food has

ensured a core cult following of loyal customers. Managers are the firm's secret ingredient. They are encouraged to give constant feedback to their teams through scheduled and impromptu sook jai chats as well as twice-daily briefings. They are trained to coach and mentor, in order to support their team members more effectively in their personal and professional development. They also organise team-building sessions that appeal to their colleagues to create a strong group dynamic. Staff say managers motivate them to give their best every day (75%), a positive result in fourth place in our employee engagement survey. The chain's staff tell us they have confidence in the leadership skills of their managers (81%, in ninth place) and say that team leaders regularly express their appreciation when they do a good job, scoring 81%, ranked fifth.

Outstanding achievements are rewarded with company incentives ranging from store vouchers to personalised presents. Managers send an email detailing staff success stories for the attention of the

company's senior team. The chain's flexible benefits package includes performance and profit-related pay, free private healthcare, childcare vouchers, a cycle-to-work scheme, travel or personal insurance and staff discounts as well as free meals and drinks. Creative colleagues are encouraged to use their flexible working hours to focus on personal projects such as art or photography, and the restaurant has collaborated with Central St Martin's College of Art and Design. Busaba has organised design competitions with monetary prizes for students to design items including T-shirts, teapots, bowls, prints, and a photography competition.

A team member earns on average £21,000 a year and, compared with individuals in similar positions in other organisations, staff feel they are paid fairly for the work they do (64%). They also feel their pay is fair in relation to colleagues (65%) and are happy generally with their pay and benefits (66%). All three results are in the top 20 nationally.

The company's staff induction is a video-based introduction developed by employees who give their personal examples of working for Busaba Eathai. It is followed by a structured two-day course and then a 10-day on-the-job learning programme. Other opportunities for growth include wine training, a leadership academy and a chef's apprenticeship programme.

Employees believe the experience they gain will be valuable in the future (80%) and agree that their jobs are good for personal growth (79%). They're not wrong: about 80% of the chain's middle and senior managers have been recruited from within.

The Sunday Times top 100 best companies to work for 2012



Conceived by restaurateur Alan Yau more than a decade ago, this original branch of Busaba Eathai attracted queues round the block when it opened in Soho. These days, Yau has only a minority share, and Busaba has become a ten-strong chain – but it's still not your average Thai joint. The dark, handsome interior combines teak wood, incense and dimly lit lanterns. With spacious shared tables, no reservations and brisk service, the restaurant remains a great spot for a casual meal with friends.

Renowned Thai chef David Thompson's influence is now far less pronounced than in the early days when he was menu consultant, though there are still a few dishes that aren't often seen in London, such as the sen chan pad thai (a pimped pad thai with crab originating from the Chanthaburi province of eastern Thailand). The unusual addition of green mango gave this dish a nice crunch, while the mild chilli kick married well with the sweet and sour tang.

A more mainstream tom yam talay was a disappointment, however; what should have been an aromatic, spicy seafood soup was overpowered by fish sauce with only a hint of lemongrass coming through. Busaba may not be as polished or as innovative as when it opened, but you'll still find a measure of inexpensive charm here.

Eating and drinking guide
2014





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Floor space requirements

4,000 - 5,000 sq ft.

The image features a close-up, vertical view of a wooden surface with a prominent, wavy grain pattern. The wood has a warm, medium-brown tone with darker and lighter streaks following the grain's direction. The texture is smooth but shows natural wood variations.

busaba.com