

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

OUR 2020 INSIDE STORY & A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE MYLAHORE COMMUNITY

(6 min read)

As we say goodbye to the dizzying year that was 2020, we're already well outside of our comfort zones.

So we thought we'd start off 2021 with something new that also gets us feeling a little uncomfortable, and share with our most treasured MyLahore community some behind-the-scenes and personal end-of-year reflections, as well as a few new year thoughts. We also wanted to properly express our gratitude to you and say a little about how much your support has meant. So here we go, and thank you for offering your attention...

What a year it was.

First and foremost, our hearts went out and continue to go out to all who have faced huge adversity due to the pandemic – whether it be losing loved ones, suffering illness, losing livelihoods, struggling to put food on the table, dealing with loneliness or abuse, or just trying to cope with the turbulence of it all.

We deeply and sincerely hope and pray everyone's difficulties are eased, and all are blessed with better times ahead. We are here, and we really do care.

Like everyone else, we too have faced our own personal challenges and losses.

And as an organisation that lives to bring people together, honestly, we've been rattled by having to repeatedly close our doors for weeks on end, send team members home, turn customers away, and hold off orders to suppliers, not knowing when the situation might change. This is something we never even thought possible, let alone planned for.

Yet by God's grace, the hard work and innovation of our team, and your incredible support, we're very grateful to be getting through it all, battered and bruised, but definitely not down and out.

We would like to say a huge thank you – from the depths of our hearts – for your love, for your custom, for inspiring us, for believing in us, and for standing by us. We don't take your support for granted at all, and it really has meant the world to us. We truly can't thank you enough.

We hope too that despite it all, during the year we managed to help provide you with a few uplifting and meaningful moments in your lives and the lives of your loved ones.

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As the restaurant and catering industry was pummelled by the pandemic, we must admit we did sit around feeling sorry for ourselves for a while, wondering about the future of MyLahore, an institution built with blood, sweat and tears over the last 18 years.

But like many of you, we were strengthened by our faith in God, grateful for what we had, and conscious that many others had it much, much worse. We placed our trust in divine wisdom, wisdom that we knew we may not always easily or readily understand. We remembered this is all temporary, and tried to respond to adversity with patience and resilience. So rather than give up, we tried to step up and look for opportunities to help and make the most of the silver linings.

As well as being inspired by you, and by our team and our communities, we drew strength from the stories of our parents' and grandparents' generation. Many of you can relate to the tales of those who bravely came to these shores as pioneering migrants, some with just a few pounds in their pocket. Whether it was twelve hour shifts in the textile mills, driving buses seven days a week, endless night shifts on the wards, or raising a family on a shoestring budget, their drive and determination to improve their lives and the lives of those around them always inspires us.



So we soon dusted ourselves down, tightened our belts and pulled up our socks.

Feeding key workers and those in need, serving customers the meals they know and love, and keeping the business running for our team and suppliers reignited the spark in us all.

Our incredible team worked relentlessly to implement Covid-safety best practices and shift our business model to a Delivery and Takeout focus, re-training and re-deploying into new roles and different stores, as well as keeping Dine-In open whenever and wherever possible. Their hard work, courage, sacrifice, patience, understanding, and the way they came together, make us very proud indeed.

The team also innovated to create new Sharing Boxes, expand the range of Celebration Cakes & Dessert Boxes from our in-house bakery, re-launch a now market-leading Tentastic Rewards programme, as well as introduce a hugely popular E-Gift Card platform.

More than anything, we're so incredibly grateful to have managed, against the odds, to retain each and every one of our 470-strong team, and not have to let anyone go due to the pandemic. Many of you know that MyLahore's key not-so-secret ingredient has always been a family spirit of togetherness. Though this naturally comes with its ups and downs, we believe in this approach more than ever.



2020 also reminded us of the blessing of growing up rooted in a world of small kitchens yet huge hearts. A world with people who may not be regarded as particularly wealthy in the usual sense, yet show true richness of spirit in the way they selflessly serve others, in their families and in their communities, and in particular those facing hardship.

Many of these unsung special people will be reading this message – we thank you immensely. We hope to be launching a Community Champions initiative in January to honour as many of you as possible.

We were reminded of the Islamic teachings, reflected in other faiths too, that the deepest generosity is to give from what you yourself need, without expecting anything in return, preferring others to oneself.

In an unexpected way, we came to believe with even more conviction in the founding philosophy of MyLahore: *'treat others the way you would like to be treated yourself'*.

Over the year, we tried to live up to these ideals in our own small ways.

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Working with other local businesses, charities and community partners, we were blessed to be able to provide thousands upon thousands of free MyLahore meals to the homeless, the disabled and the vulnerable. This included people for whom being delivered a MyLahore meal was the only hot food they received, and also their only contact with the outside world.

Free MyLahore meals also found their way to key workers at bus stations and fire stations, to police officers and ambulance crews, as well as to hospitals and schoolchildren.

"That little lad's smile on receiving a "take away" from MyLahore was worth its weight in gold."

Messages from you like the one above always lifted our spirits when we felt drained.



The year had a couple of other highlights. We were honoured to receive an official visit at our Bradford restaurant from the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. And we were thrilled to finally fulfil a long-held dream to open our doors amidst the bright lights of London.

Over the year though, we'll be the first to admit we did not always get things right – we thank you for your patience and understanding, and we ask you please to excuse us for our mistakes and missteps.

You may also have noticed we've been more active than usual on email and social media. We felt we needed to get messages out and engage with our community digitally, if not physically. If you felt at times you were seeing or receiving too much from us, again please excuse us.



As we enter 2021, let's try to do so with hope.

Let's recall that the greats throughout history are not remembered by how they enjoyed the good times, but rather how they responded to adversity.

Let's continue to stand together and support each other, especially those in hardship. Let's keep a special lookout for those whose physical, mental, emotional or financial challenges may not be immediately obvious. Let's also be bold enough to ask for help.

Much more can of course be said, but we'll pause here for now. We'll just add, as a note to ourselves first and foremost, that let's keep reminding each other not to think that 'somebody else' is going to create the world we all want. In however small or large a way, we can all be participants, rather than bystanders. (Captain Sir Tom Moore showed us that!). This might feel uncomfortable at first, but isn't a little discomfort often the price of courage, personal growth and positive change? It'll be worth it!

We certainly are taking a long hard look at ourselves to see what we can do differently – and we'll be keeping you posted.

Thank you all once again – we warmly wish you and your loved ones a brighter new year, full of joy, peace and blessings.

We love to hear from you, so if you have any comments, feedback or messages of support, please do get in touch at hello@mylahore.co.uk

Lots of love from all at MyLahore

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