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Adventures In Hospitality: Yossi Eliyahoo Brings Something Different To The Table

by Olivia Ebeling



Judging by his cool, calm and collected demeanour, when you meet Yossi Eliyahoo it's hard to believe that he runs a steadily growing empire of restaurants across no less than four countries.

Since 2008, when he founded the internationally renowned THE ENTOURAGE GROUP, he has established gastronomy concepts in the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and the UK. And that is

just to date.

When we sit down for a coffee with the hospitality trailblazer at [IZAKAYA Ibiza](#) on a sunny morning during the high season, another lip-smackingly good project is being built in London as we speak – more on which later.

Yossi hasn't let his success get to his head. The award-winning gastronomy expert is down to earth, straight-talking, and has a genuine interest in the many people he encounters every day. With over 35 years in the hospitality industry under his belt, he has the calm confidence of someone who has ridden the rollercoaster of this challenging and risky industry, and come out on top time and time again. And he is far from tired of it.

“I never get bored, or question whether I should do something different. I just try to learn more, and do more, all the time,” Yossi says.

Here, he talks about establishing a presence in the competitive hospitality landscape of Ibiza, what motivates and inspires him, and that little extra sprinkling of magic that sets his venues apart from the rest...

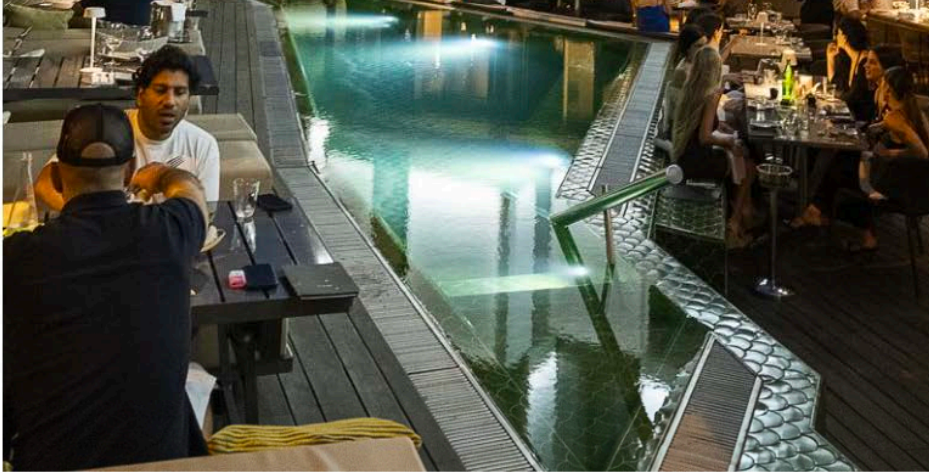
You entered Ibiza's competitive gastronomy scene with two restaurants in 2017: IZAKAYA Ibiza and THE BUTCHER. Both of them are still here, which is not a given on this island. How have you found the past five years?

It has been great. We have been building up our clientele and getting more and more regulars. Of course, we had the pandemic in between, but during those two years the restaurants probably did the best out of the entire hospitality industry because apart from during the lockdowns, dining out was the only entertainment that was allowed here in Ibiza. Ironically, revenue-wise that was one of our best seasons.

Then, when the clubs reopened, everybody just wanted to go and party, and it was noticeable. And this year, the island has become so ridiculously expensive, that the volume of visitors is dropping. Flights have doubled in price, hotels are expensive... a lot of people cannot afford to come here at the moment. Or they come for a shorter amount of time.

I think it will have to balance out. I always say, “every room has its limit”. You simply cannot charge 3,000 Euros for a horrible accommodation. People will become frustrated and even if they pay, they will not be happy about it. I think it's a mistake.





Why do you think your venues have been so successful on this very competitive island?

Every year, there are more and more restaurants to compete with and this year there are less people on the island. A lot of places are not full. But I think we are still one of the key players because we offer good value for money: Quality-wise, experience-wise and location-wise.

And we were the first one in this area, really – we were doing the high-end Asian contemporary cuisine before Nobu, Zuma and Novikov arrived. So, we are very happy to be here, and I'm enjoying this time of the season. It's a great island for networking, everybody stopping by and it's easy to make connections.

We heard that you are preparing to launch in London... How exciting!

Yes, we are going to open MR PORTER in Mayfair, which is our modern steakhouse concept. We hope it will be ready to open by the end of the year, depending on how smoothly everything goes. I'm really excited to go back to London with one of our concepts, because I started my career in the UK and Europe.

Take us back to the beginning. What first attracted you to the hospitality industry?

I started working in the industry when I was a teenager to earn some pocket money. I worked in kitchens, I worked in bars... I've been in hospitality for over 35 years now. As I got more experienced, I moved into management – I became a general manager at a very young age.

When did you first start to develop your own brands?

Actually, my first project as a hospitality entrepreneur was when I started my own chain of Italian coffee bars in Tel Aviv. I literally sold my motorcycle and put the money into developing some nice corner coffee shops. I did that for seven years, until I felt like I wanted to explore something else.

I had lived in New York and a few other places before, and I always felt I wanted to go back abroad. So from there, I moved to London, and that's when I started to develop different concepts for different companies.

What came after the coffee shops?

The first concept I developed was called Chino Latino, and the first restaurant was opened at the Park Plaza in the city centre of Nottingham. It literally changed the city, because there was nothing like it before. Cosmopolitan places like this were usually in London. I brought in chefs from Nobu, created a contemporary style with an interior designer from Tel Aviv, and it was a great success. It brought all the glamorous people to Nottingham, because it was the first restaurant that had a really nice drinking culture, pan-Asian cuisine, DJs playing at dinner – in a high-end but informal way.

Just eight months later, we opened another Chino Latino in Leeds. We were winning many awards every year, and the concept was voted into the Top 10 Asian Restaurants in the UK by the Times.

I spent seven years doing that before moving onto the next chapter. In 2008, I founded THE ENTOURAGE GROUP in Amsterdam and started with MOMO Restaurant, Bar & Lounge.



When did you realise you have what it takes to become a successful entrepreneur?

I grew into entrepreneurship very naturally. I just really enjoy it and I love the speed and the action of the hospitality industry. I like the busyness, the rush, and the social aspect. You get to meet so many people on a daily basis, and no day is the same. There is the showmanship of entertaining a different audience of 200 people every day, and you have different conversations. My love for hospitality has always been there.

What do you think have been the key elements to your success?

I think it's a mix of many things. You need to know what you're doing, of course. This business is very high risk and if you don't really know how to swim in this ocean, you put yourself in danger.

I have worked in every department of this business, from washing dishes to waiting tables to doing the accounting and marketing. When you start with a small business, you cannot afford to hire people to do these things for you. So you are learning a lot. And with every experience, you are building your knowledge and confidence. Even bad things teach you something.

There is not a bulletproof formula, but you need to build something that has a strong base. You need to have consistency, you need to offer good value for money. What you offer can be expensive, as long as it's worth it. To get the full picture, a lot of elements have to come together. That's why I always said I create experiences, not restaurants.

One thing that always stands out at your venues is the service. The team members are relaxed and friendly, but the service is always on point! Is that training, or personality?

You need to learn to read your customers. Some people prefer a more formal service, and others don't. I want my team to be friendly, but not over-familiar with the guests. You have to learn to see how the guests want to develop the conversation. We try to direct them as much as possible, and, first of all, not to be arrogant, rude or patronising. Even when something is not possible, it can be said in a way so you don't upset the guest. Of course, the customer is not always right, and when you deal with difficult people you have to learn to rise above it.

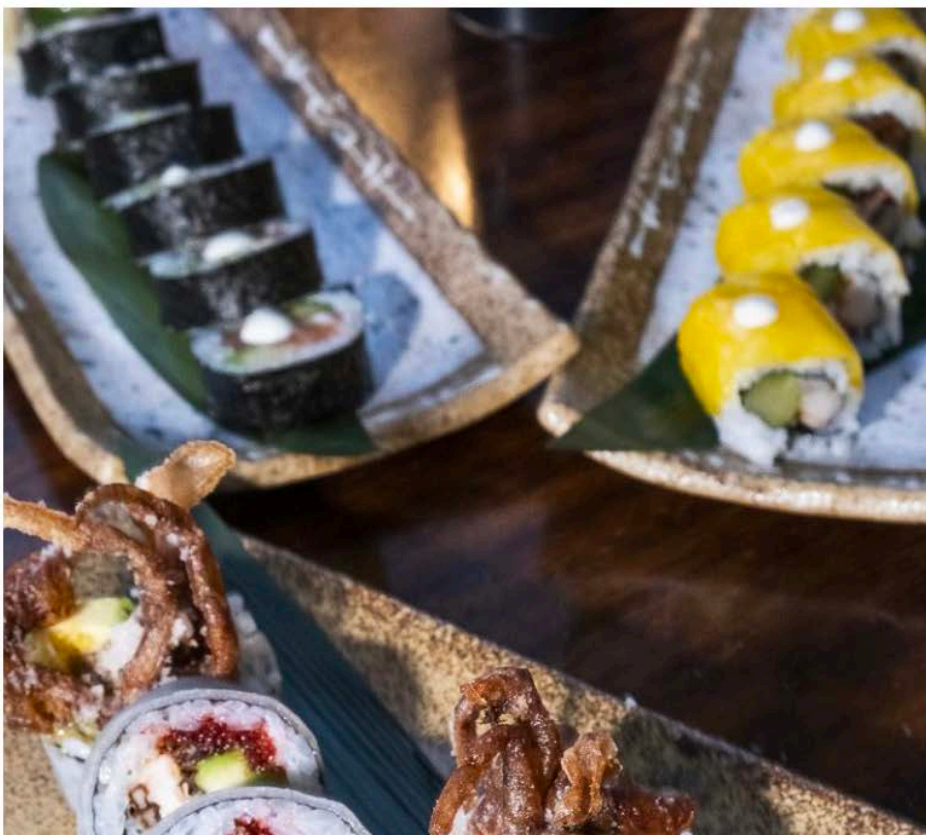
Each of your concepts has a very distinctive style. Are you interested in interior design yourself?

I'm always involved from A-Z when we design a new concept, or move into a new location. Before the interior designer starts, I give him a full brief on the layout, the menu and the look and feel we want to achieve. And we never 'copy and paste', when you look at IZAKAYA Munich, for example, it has been designed to fit in with the city. Of course, elements of the brand DNA remain, like the 360-degree bar and the open kitchen, but materials, colours and textures can change.

Ibiza, Munich and Amsterdam all have a completely different feel, but that's deliberate. Why would you want to step into a restaurant and not even know whether you're in New York or Los Angeles, for example? Every location has its different needs, and I think it's really nice if a place has its own character.

Where do you find inspiration?

Inspiration comes from a lot of different things. I get inspired by art, by fashion, and travelling. I get inspired by cookbooks, by clubs, and other restaurants, too. But I don't copy – I take my ideas and I always put my own signature on them. When you look at MR PORTER, for example, of course I didn't invent the steakhouse – but it's my take on a steakhouse and it's nothing like the others out there. It's not a New York steakhouse, it's not a 'manly' steakhouse, and it has more vegetarian options than any other steakhouse in the world.





How do you go about curating your menus?

I don't like to have the same dishes on our menus as everybody else. There are many restaurants that all repeat the same plates, but when you come to IZAKAYA, THE DUCHESS or MR PORTER, you will always find something on the menu that you have never seen before. That is us. And that is why I'm saying THE ENTOURAGE GROUP is very, very innovative. We bring something different to the table – quite literally!

How do you choose which locations to go into next?

We mainly look into cities that are busy 365 days a year, like the capitals, because of the international crowds and the local habits. We look at cities that have a culture of restaurants and hotels, like Paris, Madrid and Milan, cities that have a connection to fashion, and a lot of dynamic. Ibiza is a bit of an exception, because we usually go into places that are less seasonal.

With so much going on, how do you keep your focus and motivation?

It's hard, but the key is to find a balance between family, friends, having fun, developing the business and following up on things. I'm involved in every aspect of the business, so it's important to also have a high level team around me so I can step back when I need to. You need to learn how to trust people and delegate to them, and put solid procedures and guidelines into place. At THE ENTOURAGE GROUP, from the executive chefs to HR, we have a very strong structure upon which everything is built.

Are there any wellness practices that help you stay grounded and clear-headed?

I think I need to start to get into yoga and meditation, because I have so many things in my head! I'm a very active person, though, I like having action around me. I'm a city boy, so I need to be not only in the city – I need to be in the middle of it!

You know, I believe that you have 100% control of where you put yourself and what you're doing. Things are not coincidental, and people who think they just go where the wind blows them in life, that's a choice also. You have full control about what you do, how you do it and where you do it.

And lastly... What do you like to do when you have some time off on Ibiza?

I like it all! I like parties, I like to see what's going on, I like the socialising. But I also like the family gatherings with a lot of kids, the BBQs with friends, the days on the beach... I have literally been exploring all of the beaches here. And, of course, I'm exploring the restaurants here to see what's happening outside. I have a lot of meetings and greetings, networking and socialising. I'm very active. I'm always glad to come back here, but I'm also very glad to leave... in one piece!

To find out more about THE ENTOURAGE GROUP and Yossi's latest projects, follow on Instagram at [@the.entourage.group](https://www.instagram.com/the.entourage.group) or visit www.the-entouragegroup.com.