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## Global brands spice up India's resto bar action

Samidha Sharma | TNN

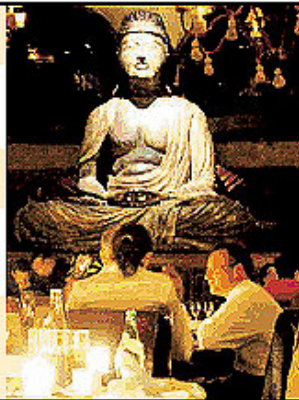
Mumbai: The iconic Parisian café & restaurant chain Buddha Bar is the latest glamour brand to spice up India's resto bar business. George V Eatertainment, parent of Buddha Bar, has just struck a deal with an Indian F&B start-up to open doors under a new brand, B-Bar, keeping in mind the local religious sentiments. UK's Boisdale Restaurant & Bar, which offers Scottish cuisine and has, arguably, the largest collection of malt whiskeys, is another player waiting to enter the local market.

Boisdale's Indian partner, Spiritual Luxury Living, is already at work to finalize India plans later this year, as more niche international brands chase the local market potential. Boisdale, for instance, could play on the growing thirst for premium Scottish malts in the world's largest whiskey market.

### DISHING IT OUT

- ▶ Paris-based Buddha Bar, a celeb hotspot, to open in India
- ▶ Boisdale, famous for its malt whiskey collection and Scottish cuisine, may follow
- ▶ Chinawhite, Nobu Restaurants & Sushi Samba also eye desi market
- ▶ Indian organized F&B market pegged at **Rs 9,700 crore**, and growing at **13%**\*
- ▶ Cafes, quick service restaurants and fine dining account for the majority share of this market

(\*Source: Asipac)



There are more brands exploring niche opportunities in the organized domestic F&B market, now approaching \$2 billion. Nobu Restaurants, co-owned by Japanese celebrity chef Nobu Matsuhita and Robert de Niro,

has held discussions with potential local partners. Sushi Samba, which blends Latin American and Far East cuisine, and Chinawhite, a fashionable lounge bar and restaurant in London, are also looking at an India entry.

Brands such as Buddha Bar and Chinawhite are nightspots for the upper crest in their core markets, and would compete with international rivals Hard Rock Cafe and homegrown names like Athena, Blue Frog and Prive in India's emerging (but heavily regulated) super-premium segment. They follow the global fine-dining brands like Hakkasan, Megu and Le Cirque which entered the country to tap the spending power of the affluent Indians.

Retail consultancy Asipac said a significant market was opening up for fine dining and exclusive resto bar brands in the Rs 9,700-crore organized F&B industry. The high-end resto bar segment, the potential of which is limited to the top metros currently, is nascent in a sector where cafes and quick service restaurants are bigger businesses.

Delhi-based Kunal Lalani — who owns the 24-hour radio taxi service, Mega Cabs — and part-

ners have floated a new F&B venture beginning with Buddha Bar. The Paris-based parent will manage the 25,000-sq-ft outlet in Select City walk mall initially before handing over operations to the franchisee. George V Eatertainment is a global entertainment group that operates multiple hospitality brands such as Barrio Latino, Little Buddha Café and Siddharta Café. It also runs hotels and spas under the brand name Buddha Bar globally.

The resto-bar has been renamed for its India entry keeping in mind the local sentiments. "All the new Asian outlets will also be known as B Bar instead of Buddha Bar," Lalani said.

"The strategy for a place like Buddha Bar is that it should remain exclusive. If you look even in places such as New York and Paris or London, there will only be one property. This is what makes it so iconic," said Amit Bagaria, MD, Asipac.