



Audrey DeHaven

American ice cream chain Cold Stone Creamery opens its first outlet in India at Kochi's Lulu Mall

Regular ice cream is passé. Vanilla, strawberry, the cassata or butterscotch is antediluvian at Cold Stone Creamery. This super-premium American ice cream chain that has expanded to over 1,400 stores in 27 countries opens its first ever Cold Stone Creamery in the country in Kochi this week.

At the brightly coloured store in Lulu Mall there is a buzz of excitement as the team is on an overdrive giving the place its final touches. Across the counter are the Cold Stone Creamery crew members, young boys and girls in their bright red and black uniforms and caps, getting instructions from one of their trainers.

“The crew members are trained in not just serving ice cream. The service is highly personalised at Cold Stone Creamery. Your choice of ice cream comes with the crew members breaking into songs, dancing sometimes and juggling with scoops of ice cream and cups loaded with Cold Stone Creations. We have an entertainment director for each location who will take the customer through the varied aspects of the store right from choosing from the menu, the flavour, and suggesting the mix-ins to help provide the ‘ultimate ice cream experience’,” says Audrey DeHaven, Director of International Operations, Kahala Brands (the U.S. parent company of the Cold Stone Creamery brand).

The crew begins singing, this time a Bollywood song parodied to incorporate the Cold Stone Creamery experience. From the mounds of a variety of ice cream inside the counter two of them scoop out mint and chocolate. “You can get anything mixed into your ice cream. We tried working out the exact number of combinations but lost count because it runs to a zillion,” says Audrey with a laugh.

Cold Stone Creamery has something called ‘Signature Creations’ and ‘Create Your Own’, which is really the best part of this experience. “Here the ice cream is customised for each guest by combining a variety of mix-ins on a frozen granite stone. The chosen flavour-scoops are put on this slab and the mix-ins that can be nuts, candies or fruits depending on the choice of the customer are mixed with the ice cream to create a blended treat.”

The paper cup with a chocolate ice cream beneath thick blankets of chocolate syrup, cream and peanut butter was heavenly, each spoon of it. The texture was perfect where everything was not mashed soup-like; here you actually got to taste the peanut and the chocolate.

Cold Stone Creamery was co-founded in 1988 by Susan and Donald Sutherland. For 19 years it remained a standalone brand before being acquired by the fast-food franchisor Kahala Brands in 2007. “They have expanded through a community of franchisees who are passionate about ice cream. Tablez Food Company Pvt. Ltd, India, is the Master Franchisee for India and Sri Lanka. We have plans to set to up 40 stores in India and five in Sri Lanka by 2020. The first is slated to open in Kochi on May 7. By July this year, we will be opening more stores in Bangalore followed by other parts of the country,” informs Manu Abraham, General Manager, Tablez.

Cold Stone Creamery claims its makes its ice cream, cakes, smoothies, and shakes with the highest quality ingredients. “We make ice cream fresh every day in every store. The milk, the ingredients are all of tested quality. Apart from ice cream we also have cakes and shakes, all made in our stores. We will soon introduce our other products like ice cream cookie sandwiches,” adds Audrey.

Audrey gave a peek into some of the delicacies to expect apart from the countless ice cream combinations. “We have 18 signature creations, these are the tried and true combinations that can mimic popular U.S. desserts like Mud Pie Mojo or Founder’s Favorite, which is Don Sutherland’s favourite signature creation, there is ‘Cookie Mintster’, which is based on the character from the popular television show Sesame Street, made with mint ice cream, and another favourite, Chocolate Devotion, where all of the ingredients are made of chocolate, so if you like chocolate you will love this!”

Ice cream brands are finding new ways to stay competitive. Classic concepts lean heavily on their brand names even while rolling out new offerings. Customising it is perhaps the key. Brands are thinking out of the box. “Cold Stone Creamery, relies on innovation. We keep adding twists to the desserts using top quality ingredients, intensive crew member training, and coming up with innovative flavours. We want our guests to keep returning to Cold Stone Creamery and enjoy the fun and friendly experience, which will always make our brand different,” assures Audrey.

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