

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Union



aXnvMIPK

Entry details

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Naan Stop South is a vibrant new Indian concept in Union South at University of Wisconsin, Madison. This concept, which serves delicious Indian-style curries along with Indian snacks and beverages significantly enhances the diverse and authentic offerings of the Wisconsin Union Dining portfolio. The concept has become a destination venue for comforting food and community building amongst Indian students, as well as all students who love delicious and authentic Indian cuisine. The operation opened in late August of 2025 and has exceeded our financial expectations and consumer expectations.

Essay:

Naan Stop South was driven by the Wisconsin Union's Dining Advisory Board's challenge to provide more diverse dining offerings by developing an in-house brand that would resonate with the campus community. In one year, we took this from idea to fully executed concept. Input from the India Student Association (ISA) ensured that we would create a consumer experience that felt welcoming to our Indian student population-and something they could be proud of sharing with other students on campus.

The culinary experience had to be authentic. A partnership with Café Spice (an Indian-owned food specialist) to supplement our in-house culinary team's production became the preferred option.

The hearth stone oven turns out fresh naan in multiple flavors while the smells of tikka masala, chana masala, basmati and other Indian favorites permeate the air and entice future customers. Specific attention was paid to ensuring vegetarian offerings were well-represented for the 50% of students in the ISA that identified as vegetarian. Dry-fried Gujarati green beans, Masala spiced potatoes, and fresh samosas are additional offerings. Authentic Indian packaged snacks, to-go offerings, Indian beverages (including three house made flavors of lassi) and a custom condiment bar with chutneys, cilantro, and spices complete the experience.

Introduction:

Naan Stop South was developed to be inviting to reflect the warm spices and comforting qualities of the food we were serving. It had to have the appearance of a well-designed brand. And, most important, it needed to perform for our guests and us! To that end, Naan Stop South's design and merchandising were focused on five clear principles:

- A food-forward vibrant consumer experience that focused on sights, sounds, smells, and discovery
- A sense of place and environment that enhances the experience
- Visual appeal from a distance
- An efficient and effective workflow for staff
- Speed of throughput for our consumers

Essay:

The space we identified for Naan Stop South was previously an underperforming sandwich and salad location with muted colors. An upgrade was necessary, but retrofitting a facility can present challenges. To give our design process the best chance of succeeding, we created a team of managers, student supervisors, a campus engineer and marketing staff to guide us.

The flames of the hearthstone oven became a visual centerpiece for the concept. New hot wells attractively display the warm-colored curries in rich shades of red, yellow and orange. The style of service dropped service times from 5 minutes to 45 seconds per customer.

For merchandising we installed a circulating beverage machine for lassis including traditional cardamom spice flavor. A large variety of Indian snacks, beverages and to go items filled the remainder of the space.

The previous Amish-built heavy wood furniture was replaced with a lighter, more contemporary option. This also allowed us to expand the seating by 40%. Bar stools under glowing orange pendant lights added appeal and seating variety.

Lastly, a custom designed backlit sign and digital monitors offer increased visual appeal and enticed customers from further ends of the building.

Introduction:

Our marketing approach was to create a sense of place--and to start from the inside and work outward. The visual appeal of the food you can SEE and EXPERIENCE was the best marketing we had. Each day, the incredible smells waft 100ft through the building, drawing you closer to see the warm colored dishes, lassis, and naans being toasted by flames from our centerpiece oven. High quality food photography was used in the graphics for our digital marketing screens throughout both Unions, on ATM machines, the actual digital menu boards, and of course, throughout our Union social media channels.

Essay:

Our marketing department was instrumental in working with students and the ISA to develop the color palette, font, graphics for menus and the mandalas that create a sense of place for Naan Stop South. The migration from print menus to digital menus (through Nutrislice) and the digital marketing signs allowed us to take advantage of high-quality food photography and improve our flexibility in adding graphics of specials and seasonal offerings. Reducing the hassle of print menus was a bonus! Moreover, the food photography was ideal for use in our social media postings and on multiple assets throughout the Union.

Introduction:

Indian food has the benefit of being comforting and nutritional. We focused on the ability to customize your dishes with additional vegetable and side offerings, as well as the selection of many vegetarian entrée offerings.

Essay:

Naan Stop South's offerings can be customized to incorporate many dishes that provide optimized health in the form of plant-based protein and fiber, as well as protein rich dishes that include meat and dairy. Additional side dishes such as masala potatoes, Gujarati green beans, and the Kashmiri Kachumber salad allow you to lighten your meal if you desire. A key focus for Naan Stop South was to increase the number of vegetarian offerings to satisfy the 50% of ISA students that identified as vegetarian, in addition to providing satisfying options for any student, faculty or staff that would enjoy more options, specifically hot options, for vegetarian cuisine.

The menu screens at Naan Stop South were the first use of our Nutrislice System for digital menus and nutritional. While our nutritional is currently available in print form in the operation, we are working to have all nutritional information formatted for our digital screens by Fall of '26.

Introduction:

We intended to create a concept that would have the look, feel and quality of a private brand. Additionally, the unit had to better serve our customers with enhanced throughput, high satisfaction and, of course, meet revenue targets by doubling the revenue of our previous operation. We were able to succeed on all counts.

Essay:

Customer satisfaction was built into Naan Stop South by design. Indian food is difficult to produce authentically, and we understood that partnering with Café Spice (in addition to handling our own culinary production) was critical for a truly successful experience. From the selection of products to the refining of recipes and offerings, our partnership with the India Student Association allowed us to create a unique experience that hit the mark for authenticity while providing an offering that all Badgers can enjoy. Additionally, it has become a destination venue for comforting food and community building amongst Indian students.

The financial performance has been equally successful. Our previous concept, Harvest Grains, finished the '25 fiscal year at \$133,500. Naan Stop South, which opened in late August of '26, has achieved \$329,000 through the end of February. We anticipate reaching just over \$500,000 by the end of this fiscal year, essentially quadrupling the performance of the previous concept, and bringing new business to Union South. While we are building our formal customer satisfaction systems, we feel the performance of the operation and our many repeat customers speaks to the level of satisfaction of Naan Stop South.

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