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Breaking the glass ceiling

Increasing female enrolment in hospitality colleges of Switzerland Education Group confirms how women are challenging age-old perceptions

Donning the chef's hat, Indian girls are confidently marching into the kitchens of plush hotels and exotic restaurant across the globe. Thanks to the diverse education and exposure acquired in the global institutes, the hospitality industry is clearly undergoing a sea change in mindset and work ethics.

Three girls from various corners of India decided to break the stereotype that played on the perception that being a cook is a male domain, and the girls do not make a successful career as a chef.

Riddhi Jalan and Karishma Kothari from Kolkata, Diya Sharma from Jaipur are finishing their undergrad from Culinary Arts Academy Switzerland, Bouveret campus. The struggle of these three girls is not just restricted to breaking the gender bias but is also about making a mark in the international hospitality market. "The number of girls getting into the culinary industry is increasing. Their zeal and dedication are reflected in the fact that girls in the classrooms are outshining their male counterpart," says Diya. "Our fac-



Riddhi Jalan, Karishma Kothari and Diya Sharma are ready to break the stereotype



ultly confirm that most of the girls are working harder to diversify their talent and brighten the kitchen," says Karishma. "Girls are working hard to hone their passion and at the same time break the myth. Still, more girls are needed in the restaurant to prove their worth and break the misconception," says Riddhi, a student of La Martinere, Kolkata, who decided against joining her family business to follow her passion.

Privately owned Switzerland Education Group (SEG) started in 1982 has five Swiss hospitality schools that include Swiss Hotel Management School, Hotel Institute Montreux, Cesar Ritz Colleges, Culinary Arts Academy Switzerland and International Hotel and Tourism Training Institute. The average course fee is around Rs 15 lakh per term, lasting for 5 to 10 months and most students rely on education loan.

"Studying at SEG is a life-changing experience," says Karishma, who is in her final term. Education from an international institute changes your perception towards life, it teaches you everything from management, the art of cooking, soft skills and ability to keep calm under pressure. "We learn a lot while interning, as it gives you a reality check. An intern has to put all the theoretical knowledge into practice," says Diya, daughter of an Army officer. "The rigorous training while studying here prepares you to work in any kitchen. The 11 weeks in each term is divided into different kinds of world cuisines which the students learn in due course of time," she adds.

Finding a job continues to be a major challenge for

most students studying at SEG colleges. One has to make a mark while interning. "The industry is hard to get in and one has to face massive competition at every step. Many students give up midway realising the pressure one has to endure. Inside the kitchen, it is an altogether different world. People order a variety of things in a restaurant but inside the kitchen, it is the job of the chef to prepare something which is delicious and visually appealing," adds Diya. "The stress is worth it if one is happy with the job and the adrenaline rush that it offers," adds Karishma.

Students aspiring to study abroad must research well and also understand the market trend. Finding a job in hotels in Europe, America and the UK could be a tough call for Indian students. "Hotel management is reluctant to sponsor the job seeker with Indian passports. They may prefer a European and a Brit, as that saves them the visa hassle," says Diya, who is currently interning after finishing her term 5.

"Hiring is restricted at times because of our passports. Most countries do not offer the stay back option after interning," says Karishma.

The increasing number of Indian students at SEG speaks about the growing demand for professionals with a global outlook and education. Since the hospitality industry is diversifying in India, students with a foreign degree, advanced hotel management skills and knowledge of international food culture are set to change its face. ■

– **Priyanka Srivastava**