

<http://goreng.my/chill/article/serving-the-people-who-serve-the-customers-the-delicious-way>



Chef Hanafi places the cooked food into a warmer before it is picked up for delivery later. – Pictures by Choo Choy May

By Melissa Xavier

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Have you ever wondered what your favourite restaurant serves its employees? A restaurant staff meal or family meal as it is often referred to in the industry can be anything from take-out (usually the easiest way out and Indian-Muslim food is the most popular choice) to a meal whipped up by the kitchen itself.



Cooking the yummy chicken rendang for the family meal.

You may have even interrupted the staff of a Chinese restaurant tucking into their family meal -- usually a hearty but simple affair -- when you walked into the restaurant a little early in the evening!

The Delicious Group -- the people behind the very-popular Delicious restaurants -- introduced family meals just three months ago. As you can imagine, serving 600 staff at six different outlets is no joke and involves a lot of prepping and co-ordinating of logistics.

A typical meal consists of a starch, protein, a choice of vegetables usually stir-fried and a cordial drink.

By 9.30am the production staff -- all 19 of them -- at the central kitchen in Jalan Sungei Besi are all set to prepare the day's family meal. This is done before preparing any other meals for the day.



Chef Sandy with some members of the Delicious staff during lunch break.



Chef Sandy and Chef Kasdi think family meals are a way to help keep morale high.

Head Chef Asrif Bahari, who is in charge of the central kitchen, takes me around the surprisingly neat and tidy place and explains how everything works.

I saw onions and potatoes being peeled, and fresh meat packed for distribution to the outlets. There was a buzz of energy in the place. I even peeked into the walk-in freezer and smelled fresh meat, lemongrass and pre-made spice pastes.

I was then introduced to Chef Hanafi who is responsible for planning and handling staff meals. And what was on the menu that day? Chicken rendang and fried cabbage. I was already salivating.

"We will be cooking 50 kilograms of chicken for the staff meal today," said Chef Hanafi. When it comes to family meals, he said that he makes sure to plan a balanced meal as well as come up with a different menu every day.



The family meal of chicken rendang and stir-fried cabbage all ready for the staff.

"I do not want the staff to get bored with the same meal so I rotate the dishes," he said. Apparently, the rendang daging tok is a hit among the staff besides chicken rendang.

At a quarter past 9.30am, Head Chef Asrif signalled his staff to start cooking the family meal. First, a big pot is heated up with some oil to fry the paste for the rendang.

On a separate stove, a commis was already frying the 50 kilograms of marinated chicken in batches. These bite-size pieces of chicken will then be added to the rendang paste afterwards.

The chilli paste, garlic and ginger paste and chicken stock is added to the big pot. It is left to cook for at least an hour and a half before the chicken is added.

The food which has been prepared is then kept in a warmer before a delivery truck comes at 12.30pm. The truck and its driver are responsible for delivering the chicken rendang to six different Delicious Cafe outlets including the one at Marc Residency on Jalan Pinang, where I will be joining the staff for lunch at 3pm.

According to Executive Chef Sandy Alan Rowe, the family meal is usually Malay food, seeing that 80 per cent of his staff are Malay Muslims. When asked if different dietary requirements are taken into consideration, Chef Sandy said, "It will be difficult to personalise the dishes based on individual needs."



One of the chefs in the central kitchen starting on the chicken rendang dish.

However, the chef at the outlet will prepare a separate meal for those who can't eat any of the dishes already prepared. Yes, each and every member of the staff is taken care of. "If you're a vegetarian, something will be prepared at the kitchen itself," said Chef Sandy.

During the 3pm staff meal break at Delicious in Marc Residence, the staff headed to a spot outside the restaurant for their meal. The food was laid out on a table together with plain white rice, chicken rendang and fried cabbage.

One of them told me that the rendang was his favourite! There were no restrictions on how much a person can eat and I noticed that everyone had at least two pieces of chicken on their plates.

And how did it taste? Absolutely as good as it smelled while it was cooking. Not unexpected since Delicious is known for serving up great food to its guests! It was also good to see the staff wind down as they enjoyed the meal which had been prepared for them.

Group executive chef Kasdi Dahari said the cost to prepare the family meal is less than RM2 per head. "The staff meal allows us to build friendly relationship with our staff and at the same time, they will not have to fork out money to eat outside, especially when the food around this area (KLCC) can be very pricey," he explained.

The Marc Residence outlet's cafe manager Mohamad Azizi said the staff meal has been accepted very well by the staff. On a personal note, he added that he used to spend at least RM5 to RM11 per meal a day prior to the introduction of family meals!



Part of the production team at the central kitchen.