

From jackfruit experiments to chilli-laced almonds, Kochi-based chocolatier Jacob Joy is ditching mass production for small-batch, custom creations

Anasuya Menon
anasuya.m@thehindu.co.in

At Jakobi Chocolatier's kiosk at Hotel International in Kochi, the shop assistant offers me a milk chocolate bonbon. The velvety chocolate marbled melts in my mouth. Jacob Joy, the founder, urges me to try a dark chocolate orange peel dragee next – rich dark chocolate with a twang of citrus. "I was watching your face to see if it was conveying what the chocolate was meant to do," he says. "Chocolate is the medium through which we express joy."

A trained chocolatier, who is also a seasoned ultra-endurance cyclist, chocolate is pure passion for Jacob. "I just love working with chocolate. If I am stressed, I can just go back to the (chocolate) factory and sit for a while and I am okay," he says.

Jakobi launched four years ago with a chocolate Advent calendar. Since then it has established itself as an artisanal chocolate brand, with a range of products including truffles, bonbons, bars and slabs in various flavours and textures.

"Over time, we have learnt that customers appreciate not just the chocolate, but the effort that goes into the packaging," says Jacob, who is also the director of JJ Confectionery Pvt. Ltd, his family business, which was making candies. "We had a very large plant, which was doing about 600 tonnes of sweets a month at one point. And we had over 300 people working with us," says Jacob. The infrastructure helped when Jacob launched his own brand. "A friend was planning to do something new and I said I was looking at chocolate. So, the two of us started a chocolate brand together, called Liso," says Jacob.



Sweet tooth Melted chocolate; Jacob Joy and a box of chocolates by Jakobi Chocolatier. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

well. So we are trying white chocolate now," he says. Customisation is their strength. "We have caramelised almond and chocolate, but a customer wanted chilli in it, so we made a batch of caramelised almonds with a tinge of chilli," says Jacob.

Among the many customisation experiments was a box they did for the Kerala Kalamandalam. "We themed it on the navarasas. Each chocolate in the box was supposed to bring out one of the navarasas on the face. It was challenging, because the navarasas were not all pleasant and I always want my chocolate to leave a nice feeling. So, we worked with ingredients such as aswagandha, moringa, which were not easy to work with," he adds.

But the fact that they are challenging makes him want to try new flavours. "I am trying to push the boundaries; these experimentations require creativity and that is what makes it exciting. It is about making an ingredient such as moringa in chocolate taste good," he says.

Many of Jacob's ideas have come to him during his cycling expeditions. The landscapes, cultures, and flavours from his rides often make their way into his creations. "I think about chocolate and flavour combinations and when I cycle. I sometimes carry some of my new flavours with me to try on my co-riders," he says.

Jacob says Indian chocolate has come a long way, with people starting to appreciate craftsmanship. "Chocolate is the fastest growing segment globally and in India, the chocolate market is maturing. Everyone is talking about artisanal chocolate and customers are willing to experiment," he says, adding "we have just never had this kind of interest in chocolate before."

Jakobi Chocolatier has outlets at Hotel International on MG Road, Noel House at Kakkanaad. It can be ordered online as well.

How to be art aware



Prussian Blue Art Hub is organising an art awareness session for children. Aimed at nurturing their imagination, the free two-hour session is open to parents, as well. "It is important that parents understand the value of art education in order to be able to support their children in their artistic pursuits," says Suresh TR, founder of Prussian Blue.

The session would look at art not merely as a subject but a powerful medium of expression, observation, and thinking. Participants will be introduced to the fundamentals of visual art – shapes, forms, composition, light, and colour. How to develop creativity, imagination, and observation skills among other things.

It will include the various learning paths in art – from basic practice to advanced training, career opportunities in fine arts, design, illustration, animation, and more.

The session will include discussions and demonstrations. The focus is not on technical perfection, but on building confidence, curiosity, and a genuine interest.

It will be held on April 11 at Prussian Blue Art Hub, Elamkulam from 11am to 1pm. For information, call 9446383123.

A bite of joy



A few years down the line, however, Jacob wanted to focus on the luxury segment. So he moved out. "I knew I would be able to pull it off, because whenever I made chocolate, I found that people loved them. My dad used to call me Jacobi and I decided that my brand would be called that," he says.

Journey into chocolate When Jacob left for Germany to study chocolate, he wanted to study the chemistry of confection. He did

a diploma in industrial chocolate making from ZDS (Central College of the German Confectionery Industry) and began thinking more seriously about artisan premium luxury chocolate. He also wondered why in India, we still waited for chocolates from abroad.

"I learnt industrial manufacturing, but I wanted to understand what chocolate was, so I travelled the world for a few years, trying to understand everything about chocolate – from the plantations in South America to cocoa processing in Belgium to Australia, you name the place and I've probably been there. Working under chefs, studying under masterchef judges," he says.

The beginning Jakobi's atelier is a vibrant space offering unexpected combinations – there is blueberry and caramel, mango and caramel, coffee bean, orange peel. "I don't use flavours, only extracts. We are now working with ripe jackfruit. Jackfruit and milk chocolate do not combine very

Lore of Fort Kochi

The two-day event will unravel stories that have influenced the neighbourhood's culture

The Shore Remembers, a two-day celebration, curated by ARPO traces Kochi's legacy that derives from its many cultural fusions. Through immersive exhibitions, talks by experts, and live performances, which will be an exploration of music and traditions that have shaped Fort Kochi's unique identity.

Video installations, archival films, a curated 16-frame photo exhibition apart from talks by researchers and collectors apart from live performances.

As part of the events of the

two days, Merged Sessions will present three musicians whose music is rooted in their identities - Rocky Jacob (@papa Rocky), Lami and Vishnu Das (@daszii). The Little Flower Band, Palluruthy, will also perform. Ship Building in Old Kochi, will have historian Bony Thomas talk about the industry. He will lead a talk and interactive session on the era that saw vessels such as the Saint Catherine of the Mount Sinai (1511-13), Phuttel Barry, Allum Ghir (1861) and Lord Castlereagh (1803).

Apart from these, there will be



an exploration of Mattancherry's vintage mehfil, kaikotti paatu traditions and the legacy of legends like Gul Mohammed. Aneesh Rahim and Nabeela Hakeem, up and coming talents from Fort Kochi will perform classic timeless songs from Hindi films.

On April 11-12, at David Hall Art Gallery, Fort Kochi; entry is free. For details and information @arpo.in on Instagram.

Ripe for the picking

Athira M
athira.m@thehindu.co.in

Like many other banana farmers, Mohamed Poothalparambil also used to discard the trunk or pseudostem after harvesting.

Not any more. The 65-year-old farmer from Vazhakkad panchayat in Malappuram now takes out the edible, tender-white or pale green stems or vazhappindi from inside these trunks and supplies it to a unit where juice is extracted from these stems, bottled and sold. Once the harvest is done, the stem must be used in three days.

Mohamed is now a regular supplier of banana stems to the manufacturing unit of Banaza Enterprises, which is the agri-business partner of Greendom, an FPC (farmer producer company), which has over 450 banana farmers as shareholders.

"I had no idea about the product till the people from the company got in touch with me," says Mohamed, whose family has been into banana farming for several decades.

Malappuram district leads in banana cultivation in Kerala, with farming concentrated in Vazhakkad and Vazhayoor panchayats, where more than 1,100 farmers are cultivating the



Value addition A few products from Banaza Enterprises; farmers harvesting banana stem. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Banaza Enterprises in Malappuram manufactures value-added products from banana, the highlight being stem juice

crop on over 200 hectares.

While banana fibre is used to make eco-friendly products and vazhappindi predominantly goes into the preparation of different side dishes, Kerala is yet to warm up to the idea of extracting juice from the latter.

"Even though bananas are grown extensively in Malappuram, farmers do not get enough profit by selling just the fruit. That was when we thought of introducing value-added products, and one of them is the stem juice. Not many in Kerala have thought about extracting juice from it, despite its many health benefits," says Basheer PP, vice chairman of Greendom, and an office-bearer of Banaza, which has a five-member director board.

Untapped potential

Technical know-how and training is provided by ICAR-NRCB (National Research Centre for Banana) at Trichy, Basheer says, adding that the company has the support of Startup India and Kerala StartUp Mission.

The drink comes in four flavours – ginger, fennel, nannari (Indian Sarsaparilla) and mint. It has sugar and



sugar-free versions, with stevia used in the latter. There is a plan to introduce a blueberry-flavoured drink as well.

The daily production capacity of the unit at Kottupadam is 1,000 litres. It is currently being sold only in Malappuram district, especially to hospitals, sports centres, post-pregnancy care institutions etc.

Besides stem juice, the unit manufactures other value-added products from banana such as banana fig chocolate, biscuits, chips (peri peri and Spanish tomato), jam, health drink mix, and banana powder, all made from the fruit.

Basheer adds, "We have another plan in place. The residue after extracting the stem juice will be dried and powdered to be used in cookies."

Except robusta, all other banana varieties are used to make the products. "States such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are exporting stem juice, mainly to Australia and Malaysia," he says. The drink comes in 250ml (₹60 for the one with sugar and ₹70 for the sugar-free drink) and 500 ml bottles.

Contact: 9072800205

STEP OUT

A splash of colour

Fort Kochi is still soaking in art. Check out Echoes of Colours, an art showcase by Malavika, which invites visitors to experience colours in their own ways. On till May at Lila Art Cafe, Fort Kochi.



On the stage

An actor workshop at Lokadharmi on 'Meisner technique' will be facilitated by Devika Hemanth, alumni of NSD, Delhi. Participants will be limited to 15. Registrations are open till April 15. At Lokadharmi Nadakaveedu, Nayarambalam. April 16 and 17. For information, call 9746694534.



Fun times

The summer camps have started at Regional Sports Centre, offering structured training in 27 disciplines of sports and games. The sessions are handled by experienced coaches. Out of the trainees,

24 outstanding boys and girls in badminton, tennis, table tennis and swimming will be selected for the Prathibha Scheme. At the Regional Sports Centre, Kadavanthra. On till May 31.



Summer shop

Shop from a collection of over 100 handpicked saris, dresses and chains at Mela, a capsule collection of ajrakh at Salt Studio. From April 10 to 12 at Salt Studio, Panampilly Nagar, 11am onwards.

