



STRANGERS NO MORE

The concept of sharing a restaurant table with someone you don't know is fast catching on in India. **By Beverly Pereira**

IF YOU WALK INTO RESTAURANTS

such as Indigo Deli or Café Zoe in Mumbai, don't be surprised if you spot a jar with a flag that reads 'Hi' on your table. This is just one of the social initiatives by Mumbai-based start-up, Treetins. Despite 'social' being the buzzword of our times, offline interactions with strangers rarely take place. But this notion is fast changing thanks to Treetins, an online networking platform that's getting strangers to talk to each other not only in the virtual world but also in the real world.

In August 2013, Aditya Dhull, Prince Jacob Thomas, Mohit Narwal and Chandy Thomas left their jobs to develop what would become a networking website for like-minded people to socialise outside their existing social circles. A few days into launching their website www.treetins.com, the team felt that something was missing. "We didn't want to limit the idea to the Internet. After all, haven't we all made a friend for life at cafes, in trains or on airplanes?" says Dhull.

The idea of sharing a table with a stranger came about when the four realised that there had to be an easier way for customers to break the ice and to share a table with someone who has an extra seat or two. This real-world initiative can now be experienced at as many as 35 restaurants across Mumbai.



The participating restaurants are given jars with messages like 'You could bump into someone interesting today', 'Hear a fascinating story', and 'Feel good about helping a waiting person'. If one wants to share a table with a guest waiting for a table, all he or she has to do is flip the flag over to the side that reads 'Hi'.

The restaurants on board include Indigo Delhi, Café Zoe, Woodside Inn, The Pantry, Suzette, Candies, Hard Rock Café, Mocha Mojo and the White Owl, all of which are in Mumbai. Hard Rock Café Bengaluru has also hopped aboard the social bandwagon and more restaurants across India are expected to join in soon.



Dhull admits that it's the participating restaurants that have been the drivers of this idea. "Their positive response was one of the main reasons why this idea caught on so quickly. It's a win-win situation for all. Restaurants don't have to ask customers to wait for a table if a flag is up. It also lightens up the mood at a restaurant," he explains.

Needless to say, customers find the concept quite intriguing. "It's surprising how people open up to random strangers. For instance, one Sunday at Mocha Mojo, my colleague Thomas approached two college kids who had raised the flag on their table. Turns out that they wanted to share a chocolate brownie that they could not finish. They were so surprised when they realised that he was the creator of this concept, and even allowed him to click a photo of them," says Dhull.

With social initiatives such as this one, it won't be long before we go back to simpler times, when sharing smiles, striking up conversations and helping strangers were commonplace.