

## A DAY IN THE LIFE



# At your service ...

‘From dealing with customers to cleaning tables, servers like Ashley are always prepared’

By Ben Garcia

**O**n visiting any fast-food, high-end or cozy restaurant in Kuwait, you will surely meet at least one Filipino who is either a server or a chef. Filipinos dominate the hospitality/service industry in Kuwait mainly because employers trust Filipinos with their customers, and also for being reliable and service-oriented people. Just like people of other nationalities, Filipinos love communicating, and even when they work extended hours, they still wear a great smile on their faces.

Michael Ashley Bautista is a 26-year-old server, one of the many Pinoys enjoying his daily routine in the service industry in Kuwait. “I came to Kuwait in 2012 after completing a hotel and restaurant management course in the Philippines. Although I couldn’t imagine living without my mom, I was determined to work abroad as I couldn’t have achieved my dreams if I had stayed in the Philippines,” said Bautista, who prefers to be called Ashley. “People tend to confuse me with a girl on looking at my nametag,” he grinned.

In 2012, Ashley started working as a server at an American restaurant in Kuwait. But just before his contract was about to end in 2014, his family was struck with a tragedy. “My elder brother died due to a ‘medical error’. He was suffering from a gallbladder problem but died when the doctor mistakenly removed something from inside his body,” he said. “I was devastated; my brother and I were very close - we shared almost everything and had no secrets. We were planning about our future and getting married. In fact, I had bought him a second-hand car,” he recalled.

After a year of being terribly affected by the death of his brother, he decided to embark to Kuwait once again, and this time accepted a job as server in an East Asian cuisine inspired restaurant in Salmiya. “This time, I only wanted to save money for my business plan back home. I have a very

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good location for my small-time restaurant business, which is for my mom, who is a well-known cook and runs a small canteen. People trust her with their favorite dishes. I don’t spend a lot of money because I am saving it for my expansion plan,” Ashley said.

Ashley enjoys working both shifts every day. Besides being a waiter, he also acts as cleaner and makes sure that everything on the dining tables are in the proper place and ready for customers. He works on to tables assigned by his supervisor. He attends to all his guests’ needs and handles them perfectly, according to General Manager Mohammad Ismail. “I work eight hours daily; if my shift is in the morning, I start at 8 am for morning preparation. If there are no customers, we engage ourselves in the ritual of cleaning our station (station is the assigned tables). We have to maintain cleanliness at all times because of surprise municipality checks,” he said.

As a server, he has encountered countless customers - from the most annoying to the kindest people. “I am always prepared to encounter all sorts of customers; we all undergo a training session, so I anticipate the worst,” he said. “Once I came across a customer who was annoying everyone in the restaurant, and as I was not feeling well, I shout-

ed at him and he left disappointed. But he came back the following day and asked for an apology, and we became friends,” he said.

Ashley said in dealing with customers, especially of various nationalities, servers like him should always be prepared physically, mentally and emotionally. “We are doing this on a daily basis, so we are always ready - from the restaurant utensils to the recipes and the crowd. I always come prepared to my job. I wake up early to prepare for my eight-hour shift; grooming takes a lot of time, plus I prepare my lunch or dinner too,” he said.

According to Philippine Embassy records, there are approximately 66,427 Filipinos on visa 18 (work visas) in Kuwait; many of them are in the hospitality/service sector. Some of them work from 8 to 12-16 hours a day - some get paid overtime, others don’t. The hospitality industry in Kuwait has been booming since 2004, immediately after the Iraq war. In fact, Kuwait is known as an emerging capital of foreign restaurants in the Gulf. Since people have very few alternative places to visit, plus the fact that there’s no nightlife, restaurants remain the top place to pass time in Kuwait.