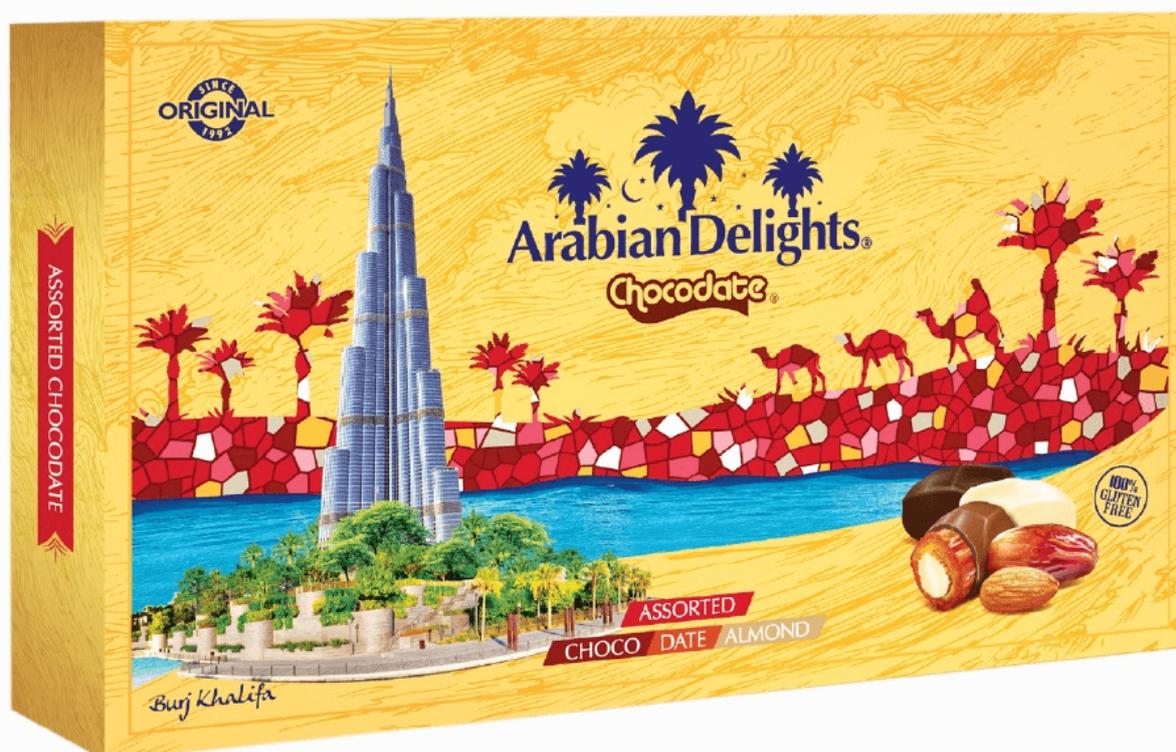


Notions Group expands, bringing CHOCODATE to global TR during TFWA AP Singapore show



As a family-run business, Notions Group focuses on nurturing long-term partnerships with suppliers, clients and employees. With a relentless focus on quality innovation and detail the company is able to pursue its never-ending mission of creating value for our consumers

Notions Group, a family-run business based in Dubai and Saudi Arabia, was founded in 1992 by CEO Fawaz Masri with the aim of crafting unique delicacies and creating unforgettable moments through iconic brands for people of all ages and nationalities. The company's flagship brand, CHOCODATE, symbolizes a fusion of wellness and exquisite flavor, becoming a global favorite.

The company is built on two pillars: La Ronda, a Dubai-based chocolate factory specialized in producing and distributing gourmet CHOCODATE, chocolate and date brands using the latest state-of-the-art technology all under internationally accredited hygienic standards; and Star Foods, a Saudi-based savory snacks factory manufacturing a variety of chips, crisps and other snacks using leading technologies for the most efficient and sustainable methods.

Unique selling proposition

Notions pioneered the chocolate date category, being the first and sole player for over 15 years. Combining traditional date products with the appeal of chocolate, the company created a new category. While the company sees much competition, it remains dominated by Notions because of its continuous innovation in flavors and packaging.



Razan Al Masri, Chief Business Development Officer, Notions Group

"Originally, we offered just dates with milk chocolate. And then smaller players started coming into the market, and all the date companies entered the chocolate category. And everybody in chocolate also wanted to expand into health and wellness. So it became a little bit crowded. But we are still leading the category and we're still pioneering with all the new flavors and all the packaging formats. And when we introduce something sustainable you know we're leading throughout. We also do a lot of private label for our competitors as well as retailers," stated Razan Al Masri, Chief

Business Development Officer, Notions Group.

Notions has just introduced Rouge Rouge artisanal chocolate, which is a gourmet offering with standalone shops the company is looking to roll out within duty free in different parts of the world.

Accommodating taste profiles

Notions has continuously expanded its product range, which now includes not only the original CHOCODATE but also several other varieties. The new pipeline includes a gourmet chocolate date filled with premium nuts like pistachios, pecans and cashews, and also soft fillings like peanut butter, which haven't been introduced before.

"We're trying to address different target groups by accommodating their taste profiles," says Al Masri. "Under Arabian Delights we've got chocolate-covered dates as a category. We've got dates in all their forms. And then we've got chocolate-covered apricots and dried figs. And then we extend into Mamoul and Baraazek, which is a different brand of chocolate-covered dates originally filled with just an almond but now they come in different flavors."

Sampling program

Tastings are key to the company's success. Al Masri says 25% of people who try it will buy it, or one out of four. "Tasting is the best way," she says. "That's how the category became what it is, through sampling. We have a sampling program throughout the year in the UAE; every day there's a sampling program happening."

The sensory appeal of CHOCODATE, combining a thin layer of chocolate with the texture of dates and almonds, has proven popular globally. The company conducts daily sampling programs in the UAE, resulting in a high conversion rate of trials to purchases. Feedback from international expos has been overwhelmingly positive, with many consumers returning for more despite initial hesitations.

"We're very confident that we'll have good feedback," says Al Masri. "We just did Expo West in California. A lot of the clients who were offered CHOCODATE dates as they passed by told us they don't eat dates. We convinced them to try, they'd take it and walk away and then come back and ask for more. That tells you something about the makeup of the brand."



CHOCODATE is in more than 70 countries in the world in the domestic market. In travel retail the company started in the Middle East and is strategizing moving into the rest of the world

Global reach

The company's presence in travel retail began in the Middle East and has been expanding globally, with CHOCODATE a top seller in Dubai Duty Free since 1996. Notions has also been successful in entering new duty free markets like Abu Dhabi with Lagardère, and in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The brand's international strategy focuses on regions where its products are already loved.

"Our outlook has always been regional and now it's becoming global. CHOCODATE is in more than 70 countries in the world in the domestic market. In travel retail we started in the Middle East and we're now strategizing moving into the rest of the world based on our success in Dubai Duty Free especially, and also in Abu Dhabi and in Saudi. CHOCODATE is leader in the Chocolate coverage dates subcategory with the delicatessen category at Dubai Duty Free," said Al Masri.



Further expansion

The company plans to further expand its travel retail presence, leveraging the appeal of its Arabian Delights (pictured above) concept to offer premium Arabian chocolates globally. This strategy includes entering markets where Notions products have already been well received and exploring new partnerships in travel retail to reach every corner of the world.

Al Masri is confident in the global appeal, saying: “The tourist is our biggest consumer. And the tourist here ranges from Russian to Chinese to South African. You should see the trolleys in the supermarkets that target tourists. They load up on chocolate to take back home because it’s well priced. And if you don’t actually say it’s a date, you let the person go through the sensory experience, it’s got nothing to do with just dates. It’s a completely new sensory journey. We’re very confident that that we’ll have good feedback.”

Notions developed the Arabian Delights concept, which elevates the range of products. Abu Dhabi

Duty Free has a large display, and this will roll out in global travel retail, starting with countries where the domestic market is doing well, such as India, Indonesia and Singapore.

“This channel has been a mystery to us for a long time outside of the Middle East,” says Al Masri. “Now that we’re embarking on this new chapter and it’s materializing, it’s really exciting; our CEO’s dream has always been to be in every corner of the world. And being in travel retail is the easiest and the best way to reach that objective. We feel very flattered when travelers would write back to us and say they can’t believe that they stumbled upon something so unique.”



Notions Group is expanding through continuous research, adding new categories and customers without losing sight of what makes the company’s products unique — along with the vision that has always revolved around the consumer