
Press release

Taking Care of Business – new immersive exhibition in London shopping centre puts migrant entrepreneurs at the heart of Britain’s story

Taking Care of Business, a new exhibition shining a light on the central role that migrant entrepreneurs have played in shaping our lives – and Britain – opens on 9 April at the Migration Museum in the heart of a London shopping centre.

From the food we eat to the clothes we wear, the apps on our phones to the products in our homes, our lives wouldn't be the same without migrant entrepreneurs. So many of the businesses that are most integral to our lives – from M&S to Rimmel, corner shops to apps – are the products of migration.

Entrepreneurship has always been at the heart of the immigrant experience. For many, starting a business is the only way to survive in a new land, whilst others arrive with an idea and a plan. Immigrants are almost twice as likely to found a business as people born in the UK, while almost half of the UK's fastest-growing companies have an immigrant founder.

Yet we so rarely hear this story, with narratives about the impact of migration so often depicting migrants as a drain on wages, jobs and resources.

Taking Care of Business puts this vital story at centre stage, highlighting migrant entrepreneurs past and present across a wide range of sectors, from fashion to tech, finance to nightlife:

- Visitors will journey along an immersive high street in which stories of migrant entrepreneurship are brought to life through personal narratives and interactive art, sound and video installations.
- The exhibition features personal stories of well-known migrant businesspeople past and present, from Marks & Spencer founder Michael Marks to *Dragon's Den*-backed hot sauce maker Levi Roots and Netflix's *Chef's Table*-featured restaurateur Asma Khan, alongside small business owners and emerging migrant entrepreneurs.
- A recreation of an early 1980s corner shop guest-curated by BBC journalist and author Babita Sharma, and an interactive Chinese takeaway by Angela Hui – both grew up in family-run businesses.
- Thematic story trails will enable visitors to explore a wide range of experiences, voices and perspectives: from refugee entrepreneurs to businesses built 'for us, by us', family affairs to second-generation entrepreneurs creating businesses responding to multiple identities.
- Stories of Lewisham-based migrant-founded businesses as part of London Borough of Culture 2022, from fashion labels to greasy spoons, local favourites to London legends.
- The museum shop will be transformed into a Migrant Makers Market, a cause-led concept store and makerspace exclusively selling products from migrant-owned businesses and creators, designed by Studio Lucy Sanderson.

"The skills it takes to leave everything behind and start a new life abroad – risk taking, resourcefulness, adaptability, grit – are the same skills that drive successful businesses. So it's no surprise that, whether out of necessity or choice, entrepreneurship has always been at the heart of the immigrant experience in Britain," says Aditi Anand, Artistic Director of the Migration Museum.

"Migrant founders have shaped and transformed not only our economy, but so many aspects of our society, culture and lives. It's no exaggeration to say that Britain wouldn't be the country it is today without migrant entrepreneurs.

"At a time when we are responding to one of the largest refugee emergencies since the Second World War and reassessing who we are and what kind of country we want to be – and the role that business can play in creating a fairer and more sustainable future – this is a story that needs to be told."

Taking Care of Business opens at the Migration Museum (Lewisham Shopping Centre, London SE13 7HB) on Saturday 9 April 2022. Admission is free, and the exhibition run until March 2023.

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Notes for editors

Visitor information

Dates

Taking Care of Business opens to the public at the Migration Museum on Saturday 9 April 2022 at 11am. The exhibition runs until March 2023.

Opening hours and admission

Taking Care of Business is open Wednesday–Sunday, from 11am–5.30pm (5pm close on Sundays). Admission is free and advance booking is not required.

Address

Migration Museum
Lewisham Shopping Centre (Entrance in Central Square)
London SE13 7HB

For directions and visitor information, please visit: www.migrationmuseum.org/visit.

Contact details for visitors and general enquiries

Telephone: 020 3488 4508

Email: info@migrationmuseum.org

Website and social media

Website: www.migrationmuseum.org

Twitter: [@MigrationUK](https://twitter.com/MigrationUK)

Facebook: [@MigrationMuseumUK](https://facebook.com/MigrationMuseumUK)

Instagram: [@MigrationMuseumUK](https://instagram.com/MigrationMuseumUK)

About the Migration Museum

The Migration Museum explores how the movement of people to and from Britain across the ages has shaped who we are – as individuals, communities, and nations. Migration is a pressing contemporary issue, but there's an underlying story of comings and goings stretching back many centuries. Britain has thousands of museums, but unlike countries from Australia to France, Brazil to the USA, we don't have a permanent Migration Museum. Now more than ever, we need a welcoming space to come together to share stories, understand our connections to each other and explore how migration has shaped our lives.

We are proud to be based in the heart of Lewisham, London's Borough of Culture for 2022 and the UK's first Borough of Sanctuary. As a free museum in the heart of a shopping centre, we welcome tens of thousands of visitors a year from across Lewisham, London and beyond to our exhibitions and events, alongside a far-reaching education programme for primary, secondary, university and adult learners. We have a growing digital presence, encompassing digital exhibitions and high-profile campaigns such as Football Moves People, which reached over 5m people during summer 2021.

We will be based in Lewisham until at least 2023. Longer-term, we continue to seek a permanent site for a landmark Migration Museum allied to a nationwide network of venues and partners, and will continue to expand the reach of our education work so that every child in Britain has the opportunity to learn more about our migration history. For more information, visit: www.migrationmuseum.org.

Data sources

Almost half of the UK's fastest-growing companies have an immigrant founder – [Job Creators: The immigrant founders of Britain's fastest-growing businesses \(The Entrepreneurs Network\)](#)

Immigrants are almost twice as likely to found a business as people born in the UK – [United Kingdom Monitoring Report 2020 \(Global Entrepreneurship Monitor\)](#)

Acknowledgments

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A selection of stories and media assets can be found on the following pages...

Media assets

Selected exhibition stories and images

M&S – Michael Marks (Image: Cardiff market, pre-1901 © Marks and Spencer plc, courtesy M&S Company Archive)



Michael Marks, born into a Polish-Jewish family in Slonim, Belarus, moved to Leeds in 1882. Arriving with little money and speaking only basic English, Marks opened a stall in Kirkgate Market and soon settled on a memorable marketing slogan: 'Don't ask the price, it's a penny.' The model proved a major success and, together with a Yorkshire-born cashier called Thomas Spencer, the duo opened 'Penny Bazaars' in towns and cities across Britain. Michael Marks died in 1907 and the business passed to Marks' son Simon, who grew M&S into the upmarket food and clothing retailer it remains today. Simon named the company's main brand, St Michael, after his father.

Lucky Star – Angela Hui (Image: Angela and parents outside Lucky Star © Angela Hui)



"I grew up in a Chinese takeaway called Lucky Star in the South Welsh valleys. From the age of eight I worked alongside my parents and my brothers, struggling to reach over the counter to serve customers and taking orders over the phone. The majority of Chinese immigrants that came to the UK were from the Guangdong region. They set up takeaways across the country, living above businesses and many taking over old fish and chip shops. Takeaway owners adapted to their British customers' tastes, offering buttered bread, pies and chips alongside Cantonese dishes such as egg fried rice and chow mein. For my parents, like many others, working in a takeaway wasn't about expressing a love for hospitality or cooking – it was about

survival. It was how my parents made money to live and support our family. Sweet and sour pork and chop suey aren't just delicious; they also tell stories of waves of immigration from Hong Kong, China, Vietnam and Malaysia." – Angela Hui

Biba – Barbara Hulanicki (Image: Wendy Faehse working in the Biba store © Courtesy Wendy Faehse)



Biba redefined the style of young people and the high street shopping experience in the Swinging Sixties. As soon as it opened its doors it was the place to be, attracting up to a million visitors a week. Biba founder Barbara Hulanicki was born in Poland and brought up in Palestine, where her father was a diplomat. Barbara's cosmopolitan upbringing had a major influence on her brand: "We lived in Jerusalem, surrounded by amazing buildings – churches and basilicas – and wonderful bazaars where I was fascinated by the way they displayed things. The scale of everything was incredible; some of my friends lived in rooms like palaces. I was brought up in this La La Land, so I think that's why Biba became a bit of a La La Land."

Smokey Joe's Diner – Charlie Phillips (Image: Charlie Phillips in Smokey Joe's Diner © Charlie Phillips/Akehrst Creative Management)



"I was born in Kingston, Jamaica and my parents brought me to London in the 50s. In those days there were a lot of bachelors from the Caribbean and different families used to cook for different people. My mother used to cook for 15-20 people in our home. I started Smokey Joe's in the late 80s. It wasn't a restaurant; it was a diner. It sat 12 people and it was as if people were in my living room. We had a blackboard menu that changed every day – and when we sold out, we closed up and went home. When I wanted to expand at the time, I couldn't get any finance. The bank told me I wouldn't last more than two and a half years. I lasted 11 years and eight months. I was ahead of my time." – Charlie Phillips

Winifred Atwell's Salon – Winifred Atwell (Image: Inside the Salon © Brixton Society www.brixtonsociety.org.uk)



Winifred Atwell was one of the biggest pop stars in 1950s Britain. Born in Trinidad in 1914, she moved to London in 1946, had a string of number-one hits and performed for the Queen at Buckingham Palace. But Atwell's influence extended far beyond music. Black beauty products were hard to find at the time, while there weren't salons specialising in Black hair. Spotting a need and an opportunity, Atwell opened her salon in Brixton in 1956. It proved a big success, and Atwell relocated to Mayfair in the early 1960s, creating what was almost certainly the first Black hair salon in central London. Atwell closed her salon in 1967 and moved to Australia. Her pioneering career paved the way for a whole industry of salons and products catering to the growing Black population across the UK.

Rimmel – Eugene Rimmel and Rose Glazer (Image: Rimmel advert from the 1960s © The Advertising Archives)



The London Look...made by migrants. The history of Rimmel goes back to 1834 when teenager Eugene Rimmel came to England from France and established a perfumery business in London with his father. At the age of 24, he opened a store on Regent Street, selling beautifully packaged perfumes, soaps and bath essences to wealthy elites, including Queen Victoria.

When Eugene Rimmel died, his sons took over the company – until it was sold to another migrant family in 1951. Siblings Robert and Jack Caplin and Rose Glazer were born in the East End of London to Jewish parents who had escaped pogroms in Eastern Europe in the early 1900s. Robert Caplin ran an advertising agency and Rimmel was one of his clients. When the then owner of the company could not pay his advertising fees, he sold Rimmel to Robert, who brought in his sister Rose to serve as managing director and Jack to look after sales. After the Second World War, Rimmel was nearly bankrupt. Rose was responsible for turning around the fortunes of the company and transforming it into Britain's leading cosmetics brand.

Maggie's – Oliver Khondoker (Image: Oliver in Maggie's, with a picture of his mother © Elzbieta Piekacz)



"My mother was born in a small town called Cootehill in Ireland. She met my dad, who was also from an immigrant background, while they were both working at a hotel in Leicester Square. In 1983, mum and dad opened Maggie's, and there began the start of relentless 70-hour weeks. Mum had a vision of a place where you were always welcome. She wanted to serve the community in the only way she knew how – with a warm heart, a kind word, and a cup of tea. Mum passed away in June 2020. We were in the midst of a lockdown and we knew people wanted to come and pay their respects, so on the day of the funeral, we drove the hearse the whole way down Lewisham Road and over a thousand people came out. It goes to show how many

people she touched emotionally throughout the whole community. It was amazing to see." – Oliver Khondoker

Daytimers (Image: Radical Sista DJing at a daytimer event © Tim Smith)



"A number of us got together and said: 'We've got our own culture and we need to be promoting that and creating our own British Asian identity in West Yorkshire.' That's when I came across people like Radical Sista, Mo Hassan, Khalid, and we started doing the daytimers. A daytimer was like a normal disco – but during the day. They started about twelve dinnertime and finished around four in the afternoon. We had our Yorkshire base and we'd all come together for these daytimers." – As told to Tim Smith.

For high-res assets, interview requests or more information, please contact Matthew Plowright:

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