



Alaskan Addiction

Don't you love true stories about people reinventing themselves to follow their passion? Here's a down-to-earth, genuine American whose sustainable seafood business grew directly from a craving for the delectable flesh of the Alaskan snow crab – best served simply boiled, he says, and dipped in melted butter. I caught up with **KEVIN GANTNER**, managing director of The Alaskan Guys, at his Telok Kurau shop.

*By Verne Maree;
photo by Michael
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Where are you from, and what brought you to Singapore 16-odd years ago?

When I was in middle school, my family moved from Indianapolis, Indiana to Adak in the Aleutian Islands, and from there to Bethel, Alaska. During my high school and college years, I also worked in the fishing industry: on fishing vessels, in processing plants and in logistics. After graduating, I took a teaching job at Dutch Harbor – North America's biggest fishing port; that's where I met my friend and now business partner, Dean DeCuir.

Travel called; after teaching in Brazil for two years, I was attracted by Singapore's international flavour and the prospect of adventure travel in the region. I taught at the Singapore American School here for four years, and in Tokyo for five years, before switching to a fertiliser trading job.

And now you have a flourishing business importing seafood. How did it all start?

It's been at least ten years since Dean and I first started talking about doing something like this. In those days, he would airfreight me the occasional "care package" out of Dutch Harbor; and when I asked friends over and threw a few crab legs on the grill, they'd ask me to order some for them, too. The "light bulb moment" was when one of those friends mentioned he'd given it to a private chef to use at his party; the chef had asked where it had come from and how he could get some.

Why Alaskan crab?

I love the stuff, having grown up with it. I'd go out in a boat to catch them, then we'd cook and eat them – simply boiled and then dipped in melted butter. I'd eat so much I'd make myself sick sometimes. More to the point for the business, though, is that king crab is very popular in Asia.

How has the business grown?

In March 2014, I walked away from my other job and incorporated The Alaska Guys, with the intention of bringing in the biggest and the best Alaskan king crab legs I could find. We sold only crab – two types of king crab plus snow crab – and only online. After ramping up the business to include wild-caught salmon, I moved into this shop in December, and opened the retail facility at the end of February 2015. It's been an exciting time!

What makes your salmon sustainable?

Since 1959, Alaska's constitution has mandated that fish be utilised sustainably. Alaska is the only state that has this written into its constitution. Fish farms have been outlawed, and there are season and quota regulations. All our products are air-flown from Alaska; we're not the only Alaskan seafood player in town, but we are the only specialist. Our salmon and halibut is 100 percent wild-caught from trawlers, as opposed to being farmed in huge open nets or sea-nets.