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World Street Food Congress: 24 hours food tour to digest the cause



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By KF Seetoh, Makansutra



Eating for 24 hours in one stretch is no joke. It's serious business or culture, if you can see it. So, about 25 foreign media descended onto our hallowed makan island last Saturday to embark on a food tour of their life—the 24 Hour Food Frenzy Safari. They were invited by Makansutra and The Singapore Tourism Board for what may be the world's longest press conference event at this 1440 minutes of non-stop feasting on the go. It was to update the media, both local and international, on the upcoming second edition of the World Street Food Congress (April 8-12th, 2015).

It began at 10.30am at the Esplanade and they cruised through 34 stops and scarfed down about 40 items. It took them to all corners of the island through day and night. It also included an early morning seaside washroom and refresher break plus some stretching session (which many were too zonked to bend over and reach the knees to loosen up). There was also a proper one hour media press conference session buried in there somewhere. Four doctors took duty turns on board the food bus to keep things in check, but they really ended up enjoying the feasting party themselves. There were no casualties.



Media curiously hungry at tian tian chicken rice.

Very often, many could not see the opportunities, culture and the craft behind that bowl of laksa or chicken rice in a hawker centre or coffeeshop. So this 24 hour food tour served to give them an idea of what we cannot usually see behind that bowl of kway chap or pig offal stew. They got insights on the business models of hawker centres, supply and supply chains in our land-scarce island where 95% of our ingredients are imported, the irony of a popular food culture that has no proper structure or culture that seeds continuity and even how a comforting plate of nasi lemak can be profitable at a measly \$3.50. They now understand the culture behind why folks would queue for a spicy and spunky bowl of laksa at 7am and the entrepreneurial opportunities in this comfort street food trade.



Nasi padang at Hajjah mona geylang serai.

Tales about the plight, intents and aspirations of a new generation of hawkers were also regaled along the way, showing how this culture can play a big part in social enterprise efforts. All these are part of the purpose and cause of the World Street Food Congress, which had its first event in 2013.

The media came from as far as Britain (the Independent) and the USA (The Daily Meal). There were also regional publications and online sites, plus bloggers from Indonesia (Detik, Femina and Jakarta Post), newspapers in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Thailand, Korea, Denmark, Japan and even our close neighbours from Malaysia.



Ye lai xiang laksa at Woodlands.

They were taken to Woodlands, Bedok Changi, Jalan Kayu and to the shiny and delicious corners in town and saw how fishballs are made and turned into fishball noodles, how roti prata is flipped and made, and they understood the culture behind why folks would queue for a spicy and spunky bowl of laksa at 7am.



It made good footage seeing how prata is flipped at jalan kayu.

Blogger, chef and food host JJ Yulo from Manila was amazed at how safe the trip was. He intends to bring foodie travellers from his country to Singapore and the event opened up his mind to the opportunities in his field of work. Ms Julia Buckley from the Independent in London was bowled over by roti kaya and roti prata, and was particularly amazed at the prices and how it all still makes economic sense adding, "Even if you raised it by 30%, it would still be cheap by the world's standards".



Bak kut teh at Rong Cheng was done using the long dragon ribs.

If you are wondering how the food was, many among the group, which included top local bloggers and writers like Catherine Ling, Tony Johor Kaki and Andrew Wong, fell over for the Ye Lai Xiang Laksa at Woodlands.



Eating and then sleeping in bus at 3am.

And if you like to be part of this exciting planet of world street food culture, check up www.wsfcongress.com for more and also a list of the places and food the group went through in that 24 hour space.



All happy they completed the world's first 24 hour food frenzy safari.

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