



Title: World Street Food Congress 2015

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### ***World Street Food Congress 2015***

I have been fortunate enough to have been able to spend time in Singapore, in fact every year for the past 3 years. I am an unashamed supporter of this my favourite country. I adore the weather, even the humidity which I find more tolerable than that of London, which tends to be vertical and cold. The locals are for the most part friendly and engaging – many folks speak English – and it has a rich heritage.

I suppose the majority of tourists to Singapore are there only en route. It seems an exotic shopping opportunity, and it is. It's considered a colourful stop-over, and that's right, too. But there is also the food that should, to my mind at least, be given a lot more credit.

So how exactly does the food tie in with the aforementioned heritage? Well, let us consider that whatever nationality we are, food plays a great part in our lives. I have the privilege to interview the finest of international chefs. My opening question will usually be 'What are your earliest food memories?' The answer will likely be, 'My nana's cheese and onion pie', or it might be if the chef in question is British. My next question: 'What encouraged you to become a chef?' The answer might be the same: 'My nana's cheese and onion pie.'

That lasting and comforting memory of food isn't confined to chefdom. Ask almost anyone about fond memories and they will tell stories of steaming pots of soup after school on a winter's day. There will be memories of Sunday lunch and that special gravy that mum made. There are also foods that remind us of particular places and events. The pasty at the football match, the fish and chips after that block-buster movie, and jellied eels by the coast. Many people profess to have little interest in food as they don't cook. In truth they love food but they just don't cook. So that's our connection to street food.



Singapore has that rich heritage not only of buildings, history and diversity in its citizens but also the food, which is hard to overlook or avoid even if one wanted to, and why would anyone want to? Its food culture has been born of a practical evolution, providing cheap and nourishing food for hard-working locals who didn't have much cash to flash. The dishes are as varied as the population itself.

A few years ago the government had a campaign to clean up the streets and to consolidate the street-hawkers into centres. These cavernous spaces are dotted all over the city and house hundreds of hawker stalls selling everything from Malay specialities to Fish Balls, from Nasi Lemak to Nasi Padang. There are a few innovations but locals know what they like and each stall has its loyal followers.

Street food is an institution here and workers often eat out four or five times a week. The meals are economical and well-cooked. There is continuity and tradition here and now there is security in organized food halls, with running water and clean tables. I know that they are trying to formalise street vendors in India and other countries too, so that they and their customers can also be assured of good facilities and regulation of standards and practices.



The World Street Food Congress is powered by the World Street Food Council, which is the brainchild of dynamic KF Seetoh, founder of Makansutra, the organizers of the event which will be taking place again between 8th and 12th April 2015 in Singapore. The World Street Food Congress is a celebration, conference, demonstration and showcase for street food from all over the world. Singapore has the finest example of the genre but this style of casual but sophisticated dining shows up in almost every country, or it once did.

The aim of next year's event is to raise awareness about the preservation of street food, professionalisation of its exponents, and possibilities for street food culture in the future. The Congress will focus on actions such as empowering, engaging and opportunities. Street food is alive only because there are people who work long hours every day, but a new generation of cooks needs to be tempted to join their number. This is big business and could be the lifeline to those needing work and respect.





The associated 2-day conference and networking event will feature international speakers who will offer their perspective on skills, opportunities and new ideas for promoting street food culture. Each country has its own issues but this is a form of accessible and sensual pleasure that should be available to all. Street food has always been available in Asia but now western countries are reviving their own street-food traditions. North America in particular has embraced the concept. We are all familiar with the small street carts in New York selling hot dogs and knishes, but Portland Oregon has fleets of food trucks (there has got to be a better word than 'truck') offering American favourites as well as dishes from every other continent.

I spend my days in delightful fashion. Yes, I am lucky. I travel and I eat. Michelin-star meals thrill, and every country offers charm and education of some sort. But what do I crave while home or away? Comfort food. We are in real danger of losing sight of real, honest food, proper food. We need to provide an environment in which existing vendors, hawkers, sellers can thrive. We need to develop structures to entice young and enthusiastic cooks who will develop new dishes that will someday become 'classic'.



World Street Food Congress 2015 is a 'must visit' event for any lover of good food. It will be fun, but there is a serious purpose. I whole-heartedly support this and hope that it becomes an unstoppable movement. It's 'people power' and deliciously so.

World Street Food Congress 2015 An event by Makansutra. Visit [www.wsfcongress.com](http://www.wsfcongress.com)

Date: 8th – 12th April 2015

Venue:  
Bugis, grassland next to Tan Quee Lan Street,  
Singapore