



Title: Madrid Fusion Manila madness begins
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Madrid Fusion Manila season is here and you may want to make reservations as early as now for a few celebrity-led dinners.

Coinciding with the Madrid Fusion Congress are dinners at various hotels featuring celebrity chefs called Dinner with Stars.

According to Marisa Nallana, chair of Panceos, the lead private partner in organizing this massive gastronomic congress, the following dinners are confirmed: Sage of the Makati Shangri-La will feature Chef Kevin Cherkas of Cuca in Bali from April 14 to 16; New World Manila Bay will feature Chef Dani Garcia of a two-Michelin-starred restaurant in Marbella, Spain on April 4 and 5; and Asia's Best Chef 2014 David Thompson will cook at the Diamond Hotel on April 8.

There will be more but organizers and hotels are still finalizing details. (Please visit MargauxSalcedo.com for updates.)

Paella Gigante

In the meantime, Madrid Fusion Manila season was formally opened with a kickoff festival at Greenbelt last Sunday with no less than the chefs of Le Toque Blanche coming together to cook a giant paella.

By giant, I don't mean good for a dozen people. This paella was good for a thousand! The chefs could literally swim in the paellera.

To be exact: Le Toque Blanche chefs used 80 kilos (Chef J Gamboa says they used 100 kilos) of rice to fill a paellera with a diameter of 11 feet.

Festivities started around 4:30 p.m. when the makeshift stove under the paellera was lit and cooking started. Cooking lasted a couple of hours and by sunset, dinner was served. Props to the LTB chefs because despite the size, the paella came out pretty good.

This has become an annual festival staged for the benefit of the Sociedad Española de Beneficencia (SEB), a nongovernment organization founded in 1948 by Spanish citizens residing in the Philippines.

Aside from Chef J Gambao, also spotted cooking the paella gigante were some of our speakers at Madrid Fusion Manila last year, including our No. 1 Spanish chef Juan Carlos de Terry and Chef Fernando Aracama; as well as Pastry Alliance of the Philippines' James Antolin, Chef Edward Bugia and Chef Robbie Goco.

Mielle Esteban of Arum, who has worked very hard to bring Madrid Fusion to Manila, was invited to the stage with other VIPs before the paella was served to give a toast.

In perfect Spanish, she congratulated all the chefs for the “spectacular paella.”

Flavors of the Philippines

Department of Tourism Director Verna Buensuceso later took the stage with Tourism Promotions Board's Arnold Gonzalez to promote Flavors of the Philippines, a culinary tourism project of the DOT.

“There are many activities happening all over the country,” Buensuceso shared. “There will be a tapas exhibition at the Met starting March 31. Madrid Fusion Manila of course will be from April 7 to 9 at the SMX where there will be many world-renowned chefs and some representatives from the Philippines who will be sharing their latest innovations in gastronomy. There will also be many festivals all over in different regions of the country ... Many things happening in the months of March and April so we invite everyone to come and go to the different regions of the country and taste the different flavors of the Philippines!

Tapas exhibit

The Tapas Exhibit that Buensuceso mentioned, which is being done in collaboration with the Embassy of Spain and Instituto Cervantes de Manila, will take place at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila.

This sounds really interesting as more than 200 objects and instruments, videos, photographs, and installations will be displayed for guests to explore the interaction between design and gastronomy.

Spain is proud that among the elements that distinguishes its cuisine is the penchant for design.

The exhibit is set to also showcase a number of designs that were produced exclusively for leading restaurants such as elBulli, El Celler de Can Roca, and Mugaritz.

This exhibition opens to the public on April 1 and will be on view until June 16.

Regional festivals

Buensuceso also highlighted the Mango Festival that will take place in Iloilo, the Pomelo Festival in Davao, and the Coffee Festival in Cagayan de Oro. Another event to look forward to is the Coco Spice Culinary Tour of the Bicol Region.

For a complete list of festivals, visit <http://www.madridfusionmanila.com/flavors-of-the-philippines>.

World Street Food Congress

Makasutra also presents the World Street Food Congress, which will be held for the first time in the Philippines from April 20 to 24.

This is another project of the DOT with the Tourism Promotions Board and Ayala Malls.

Heritage and street food maven KF Seetoh of Makansutra is the mover behind this project, which started in 2013. The objective is to “capitalize on all the relevant aspects and opportunities of heritage street food culture around the world.”

The event has three segments: the World Street Food Dialogue, a two day Dialogue/Conference and Hackathon; the World Street Food Jamboree, a five-day street food feasting festival with the best in the world; and the World Street Food Awards, where up to 10 categories will be recognized.

This year, there will be 24 Street Food Masters featured from up to 10 countries, among them Chef Ian Kittichai of the Asian Food Channel and Bangkok’s Issaya Siamese Club. (For event details, head over to wsfcongress.com.)

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Thank God Easter is on March 27 because it will certainly be hard to fast after March 31. With all these activities, April is going to be one filling and uber delicious month. Happy eating!

Updates on Madrid Fusion Manila and Flavors of the Philippines in MargauxSalcedo.com. Follow the author @margauxsalcedo on Instagram and Twitter.

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