



Manila, Philippines

Title: Gastronomy's golden child: Street food

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MANILA — Coffee pork ribs burgers, marmite chicken burgers and lamb roti john will be representing Singapore cuisine next month at the fourth World Street Food Congress held in Manila.

The food fair will feature over 40 street food offerings from 13 countries, and is one of the highlights at the annual World Street Food Congress organised by Singapore's Makansutra.

Street food, said Makansutra's KF Seetoh, is the new pinnacle for food pilgrims. "That phase when it was about three Michelin starred restaurants with starched tablecloths – those are gone, finito. Now, Michelin stars are about street food," he said, pointing out that street food is noticeably infiltrating the menus of top restaurants, pop-up cafes and airlines.

This is perhaps one of the reasons why Philippine cuisine, with much of its authentic flavours found in street food, is starting to become understood and appreciated by the world.

In recent years, Michelin starred chefs have been opening restaurants in Manila and Cebu; the New York Times' and Washington Post's food critics have raved about US restaurants serving up Philippine cuisine; and each year, Manila hosts an Asian edition of the major international gastronomy congress Madrid Fusion.

"A new generation looks for real experiences. Give them the kind of pleasure that thrills and pleases multiple senses, and they are there. People will start recognising humble cooks and humble little places for who and what they are," added Seetoh.

This is the second year that the congress is being held in Manila, supported by Tourism Promotions Board Philippines. Last year's event saw a turnout of 75,000; this year, the anticipated turnout is 100,000.

On top of a slate of dialogues about how street food culture is evolving – one of the speakers lined up is Anthony Bourdain, who will be giving an update on the highly anticipated Bourdain Market project in New York City, for which KF Seetoh is a consultant.

15-HOURS OF EATING IN MANILA AND PAMPANGA

In the lead-up to the World Street Food Congress 2017, Makansutra took TODAY on a 15-hour food tour of Manila and its surrounds, giving us a taste and understanding of Philippine cuisine ranging from the rustic to the avant-garde.

Here's how it went down, for those keen to attempt a food tour on their own:

8am: Bulalo: Hangover beef soup

Arriving at our first stop – a “carindera” or “turo-turo” (“point point”), the local term for a zi char cafeteria – we found a traditional hangover cure laid out for us: Bulalo, a hearty beef shank and bone marrow soup that, according to Chef Sau, is popular with dandies who have partied over-enthusiastically through the night. Not having done the aforementioned, we could not test the effectiveness of this beefy panacea, but the soup, accompanied by side dishes of fried chicken skin, bittergourd, eggplant omelette and white rice, was savoury and rich.

Bulaluhan Sa Espana, Espana Boulevard Cor Josefina St Sampaloc, Manila

10am: Traditional homestyle cooking: Atching Lillian Borrromeo's house

After about an hour's journey, we were in the province of Pampanga, also known as the culinary capital of the Philippines.

Our pilgrimage here was to the beautifully curated house of Lillian Borrromeo, possibly the last of a dying breed of stalwartly traditional cooks. This living local legend and proud dowager, respectfully addressed as “atching”, meaning “big sister”, served up a feast of local specialties including Tidtad (a blood stew of pork and innards), Pindang Damulag (vinegar-cured meat of the carabao, a water buffalo native to the Philippines), Tamales (rice flour, eggs and coconut milk steamed in banana leaves) and a life-changingly delicious Pork Longanisa – garlicky sausages caramelised on the outside and chewy inside. You won't find authentic, heritage dishes cooked with so much spirit anywhere else.

She capped it off with a demonstration of how to make Pampanga's famous San Nicolas cookies.

The story is that the egg and coconut milk biscuits originated during the Spanish colonisation, when churches were being built and egg white was used to paint their walls. The unwanted yolks were given to the townspeople, who used them to make cookies pressed into wooden moulds carved with images of Saint Nicholas, who is a popular saint here. The delicate biscuits go perfectly with Atching Lillian's Tsokolate - hot chocolate hand-whisked with a wooden mallet.

Atching Lillian Borrromeo's House, Brgy Parian, Mexico, Pampanga

12.30pm: Goat and duck stews: Taldawa

At this open-air diner with gorgeous old trees, we sat down under a canopy to a feast of goat and duck stews.

Out of the smoky, old-school kitchen sailed Kalderetang Kambing, a dish of goat meat stewed in tomato sauce; Sinigang Na Kambing, goat meat in tangy tamarind broth; and Adobong Bibi, duck cooked in the popular adobo style, which employs vinegar, soy sauce and garlic.

Each dish was heartier and more delicious than the last. So, although you eat with ducks, dogs, parked cars and flies, you're really none the worse for it – at least, we weren't.

Taldawa, Belen Homesite, Angeles City

1.30pm: Modern Philippine cuisine: 25 Seeds

We arrived to a fanfare of dancing children at Chef Sau del Rosario's newest restaurant, 25 Seeds, a farm-to-table concept.

Chef Sau believes deeply in supporting local farmers and communities. The restaurant, which grows its own greens and uses local produce, is on the upper floor of a beautifully restored heritage house.

Here, Chef Sau gave us a sneak peek of the dish he created for the World Street Food Conference 2017: Sisig Paella. It sounds gimmicky, but it totally works: He has executed a dazzling mash-up of sisig – a traditional dish of pig's head, liver and calamansi – and the still-trendy Spanish rice dish. We cleaned our plate and asked for more.

25 Seeds by Chef Sau, 2F, Dyaico Ancestral House, Sto. Rosario St., Angeles City

3.30pm: Sugar rush: Susie's Cuisine

The late afternoon was the perfect time for a pick-me-up, but our sweet tooth didn't even know what hit it here at Susie's Cuisine, which specialises in "kakanin", sweet desserts made from rice.

There is Sapin Sapin, which has colourful layers; Kalamay Ube, made from purple yam; and the local version of Mochi – sticky rice with a sweet bean filling dipped in coconut milk. But the top seller here is the Tibok Tibok: Smooth, almost buttery carabou milk pudding eaten with a sprinkling of coconut curds.

Susie's Cuisine, Nepo Mart Complex, Angeles City

6pm: Traffic jam sandwich

On the way back to Manila, we hit rush hour and spent hours masticating on what KF Seetoh calls an inescapable local speciality: "Traffic jam sandwich".

7.30pm: An oasis of Singapore food in Manila: Makansutra

We checked in at the Makansutra food court at SM Megamall, where you can find Singapore food ranging from kway chap to chicken rice and everything in between.

10pm: Zubuchon

Finally, we arrived at the last stop on our 15-hour food frenzy for the grand finale: Lechon. A whole roasted pig sat on a table in exalted glory as Chef Sau threw on an apron and got to work carving.

The airy crunch of his knife breaking through the crackling was enough to get our juices flowing. Hot fat, tender meat and crisp crackling were how we ended a sultry night that could only have been made better by another 15 hours of extreme eating.

Zubuchon, Talisay, Makati, 1203 Kalakhang Maynila

The World Street Food Congress 2017 runs from May 31 to June 4 at SM Megamall Concert Grounds, Pasay City, Manila; (www.wsfcongress.com) Discover Philippine specialties from six cities and regions curated by KF Seetoh, as well as street food gems from 13 countries.