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Title: A quick chat with the one and only Anthony Bourdain

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“Press Con with AB tomorrow 11am. Please keep venue confidential, thanks.” If you were still wondering, that “AB” happened to be chef and TV personality Anthony Bourdain, who was in town during the World Street Food Congress (WSFC) to talk, do some research, and find potential hawkers for his latest project, Bourdain Market in New York City.

Stated to open in 2019, Bourdain Market will be located in Pier 57 and will feature chefs, operators, street food, and hawker legends from around the world in hopes of bringing them together in one space.

Pampanga’s Intangible Culture Heritage, sisig, and Bourdain-proclaimed “best pig ever” lechon are two items that are musts in Bourdain Market; they will share stall space with Singaporean chicken rice, laksa, fresh produce, fish mongers, meat butchers, shellfish bar, and other hawkers selling affordable food.

The message, in the form of an SMS, was a gentle reminder of the opportunity given to me and GMA News Online around a month ago to pick the brain of the former Brasserie Les Halles executive chef and current host of CNN’s Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown. I personally call him “Uncle Tony,” not only because he used the term to endear himself during one of his TV shows but because he indirectly guided me to become a foodie, traveler, and now writer and storyteller.

Add to the fact that, at 60 years old, Uncle Tony is only a few years older than my real father and the words and insights that comes out from him are treated like nuggets of wisdom. His mere physical presence, at 6’4”, gives him an almost demigod aura and rock star impression, especially from die-hard Filipino fans and, might I say, media alike.

After my quick chat with Uncle Tony, a good number of my family members and friends naturally asked me what AB was like and how the interview went. He was straightforward but sincere enough to answer my queries no matter if these had been asked of him probably a thousand times. Comfortable even with three or four cameras following his every move, Bourdain looked me straight in the eye and honestly answered the five or so questions that I fielded him.

Below are some excerpts of the town hall chat with members of the media and my one-on-one meeting with Anthony Bourdain.

Were there any foods during the (WFSC) Jamboree that you think have the potential to be included in Bourdain Market?

Yes, I don't want to tell you which one, but for sure yes. But sisig for sure, yeah.

KF Seetoh is your technical consultant. Are there other technical consultants that you are talking to, maybe in other cuisines?

Yes. There will be. There either are, or will be.

What's the biggest challenge so far with Bourdain Market?

Oh God. It's such a huge enterprise. You're dealing with city, state authorities. You're dealing with the Hudson River Trust who oversee everything that happens on the river. You're talking with the developers, bankers, hedge funds, foreign [capitalists]. You try to keep the integrity of the original concept, [which] is maybe the biggest challenge.

Are there other street foods that maybe you want to try and incorporate into Bourdain Market?

Yes, of course. I mean, I have a wishlist of things I already love but we're actively looking for new ones, for new ideas. Not necessarily new foods, but things we might now have considered before but which would really work.

What's your earliest recollection of street food, personally?

Oh, my first bowl of Pho in Vietnam was kind of a religious experience.

You've been to Luzon, you've been to the Visayas, how about Mindanao?

I haven't been and I would like to go.

Any plans in Bourdain Market of putting something for Muslims?

Oh absolutely. That's a huge, huge, incredibly diverse cuisine, whether it's Muslim-Chinese, which is incredibly delicious and a passion of mine. Xi'an Noodles in New York is just some of the exciting food I had lately. I've spent many, many happy trips to the Middle East. I'm a passionate lover of just about everything Lebanese, Pakistani. There's so much [that] to ignore the Muslim world, particularly when it comes to food, would be madness. And it's such a vital part of the Singaporean food scene, absolutely essential.

I know that you are a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) practitioner. Is food more important than BJJ, or are they the same level for you?

Well, you can live without BJJ, but you can't live without food. I'm passionate about Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, it keeps me in shape, it keeps me happy. It's a personal challenge that's a very good adjunct to eating. I mean, if you're going to eat a lot like I do, it's really good to exercise a lot, which I also do, and jiu-jitsu is a way that I don't even recognize that I'm exercising.

So, no plans for a Bourdain BJJ Academy?

No, no. Talk to my ex [Ottavia Busia]. She's much better than what I'll ever be. She trains nine to ten hours a day, very innovative, next level area of martial arts that's becoming more and more important to both jiu-jitsu and MMA (mixed martial arts) and grappling. So hopefully she would have an academy of her own with her training partner and team members at some point in the future. I'm just a blue belt, she's a brown belt.

Town hall chat

Why did you decide to put your name to Bourdain Market?

I hate the whole idea. Honestly, it wasn't my idea. I feel embarrassed by the whole thing. I wished that they would come up with something better. [I'm] reluctantly [owning it]. You know, I write books about me. I make television shows about me. I talk about me a lot. And I really don't need my name on the market. That was never the plan. This is a very cool project, it is the sort of thing that New York doesn't have, should've had, in my view, decades ago. I never understood why we didn't and it [using the Bourdain name] was a small price to pay to move this mammoth project on. "The Market" would have been good.

Are you leaning towards authentic flavors that have been around for generations or something more progressive and innovative, reflective of the current culture?

Authentic, I mean, old-school. I'm always uncomfortable with the word "authentic" because what is authentic changes over time. But [yes], old-school. I looking to introduce to New Yorkers to the way things have been enjoyed in the source countries for years. I'm not looking for an exciting new tweak on [Hainanese] chicken rice, I'm looking for chicken rice. Chicken rice that anyone's Singaporean grandmother would find acceptable.

What did you honestly thought about Jollibee, specifically the Aloha Burger (the one with the pineapple)?

Look, my first Jollibee experience made no sense at all to me. First of all, the appearance of a pineapple on a burger sounded like a good idea. The sweet spaghetti was completely foreign to me. It was awesome! My daughter's ten and she eats there a lot. She loves it because she grew up with it.
— BM, GMA News