



Manila, Philippines

**Title:** Bringing heritage cuisine into the street-food culture

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As soon as the clock stroke the 4 p.m. mark of the opening day of the five-day World Street Food Congress and the gates finally opened, legions of foodies eager to chow down some of the world's finest culinary delights conceived for the streets quickly came bursting at the SM Mall of Asia Concert Grounds on May 31.

As the savory smoke sizzled the open-air venue with an inviting aroma, fervent diners are then treated to the sight of an assortment of rich-colored cuisines, cut and sliced varyingly, and accompanied by a wide assortment of ingredients bursting with flavor.

It didn't took long before the vibe turned into notches bustling with hurried activities of customers giving out orders, head chefs barking instructions and servers explaining the various intricacies of their menu.

Making a selection amid the verbal exchanges of animated food discourse soon became part of the experience. It is like a big chunk of the global street-food culture rained down on this part of Manila and everyone present were fortunate enough to consume all of it, literally by chops and figuratively by the rest of their senses and minds.

### **'Re-Imagine Possibilities'**

With this year's running theme: "Re-Imagine Possibilities", the 2017 World Street Food Congress aims to collectively raise awareness about the potential of the industry to become an important part of a country's culinary character and come up with a better vision for both the festival participants and leading industry players, to create a bigger appetite for heritage street-food opportunities around the world.

"Hawkers, or street-food cooks, today are seen increasingly as vendors of food culture, especially in countries that have a rich history of street food. They lend a culinary brand to a place, offer a dish that is a part of their culture, be it old or progressive," said KF Seetoh, the creator and curator of the World Street Food Congress and founder of Makansutra, a Singaporean company holding the truncheon in the promotion of street food culture.

## **World Street Food Dialogue**

An intimate two-day conference kicked off the 2017 World Street Food Congress and featured an acclaimed roster of speakers, such as celebrity Chef Anthony Bourdain, Seetoh, Chef Sau del Rosario, Chef Claude Tayag, plus other talented chefs, food consultants and social entrepreneurs.

During the program, Seetoh expressed his desire for the street-food culture to grow more in the Philippines and to mirror the hawker's settings of Singapore, where every street-food parks are closely monitored and regulated to guarantee the health aspect of it.

Del Rosario alluded to the importance of infusing heritage cuisines into the street-food culture as it present a good opportunity of showcasing a recipe handed from many generations to more people. He backed up his point by presenting a cooking demo and letting the audience taste his Sisig Paella creation.

Celebrity Chef Anthony Bourdain, who spoke on the second day of the conference, shared an update on his much-awaited Bourdain Market in New York City. The "Parts Unknown" host promises one thing "[Bourdain Market] will not be some Disneyland version of McHawker or HawkerWorld. We're talking about the widest selection of the real deal".

On street-food culture, Bourdain emphasized its importance in generating a lasting first impression and cultural identity of a country. This is also the reason he wanted to feature Filipino street foods in his Bourdain Market in New York. "Filipino food is definitely underrated worldwide. In New York it doesn't have hipster credibility yet. But things are changing, and I hope to be a part of that change." Bourdain said.

## **Street-food feast**

Almost 30 food stalls participated in this year's World Street Food Congress and presented street foods from different countries, such as the Philippines, India, the United States, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Japan, Thailand, Germany and Mexico.

For five days, foodies were treated to a gastronomical experience trying out the numerous street foods from the participating countries and even from the other regions of the Philippines.

Culminating in a gastronomic high and a new set of knowledge that now crests on everyone's minds—a fact that street food doesn't always have to be dirty—for it can be as sumptuous and as refined as the gourmet dishes served at expensive restaurants.

With the resounding turnout of the 2017 World Street Food Congress, it is safe to assume that street food have never enjoyed this much positive street cred than ever before.