



Title: 24-Hour Food Frenzy Safari

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24-Hour Food Frenzy Safari

The name '24-Hour Food Frenzy Safari' might, to the untutored, give the impression of something of a greedy teen munchies extravaganza. Well, in truth, it was an extravaganza but the message behind the event was serious.

Eating for a solid 24 hours with no designated sleep breaks is not for the faint-hearted. Two dozen or so enthusiastic food journalists were invited to attend Makansutra's 24-Hour Street Food Frenzy Safari, hosted by the charismatic KF Seetoh. No, we were not chosen from the ranks of the aforementioned juvenility, but we all had a will to enjoy and learn from this unique experience.

The 1440 minutes (someone else did the maths) of non-stop eating and travelling was an extraordinary idea and held to publicise the future second meeting of the World Street Food Congress, taking place between April 8th and 12th, 2015. We were along to taste the diversity of Singapore's cuisine, to be introduced to the faces behind the plates and to hear stories of endeavour, success and fortitude, all woven together with a vibrant tapestry of culture.

The marathon started innocently enough at 10.30 on a Saturday morning at the Esplanade in Singapore. That's where one finds Makansutra's street food centre called Gluttons Bay, with its up-market stalls, perhaps giving a metaphoric taste of the delights to come. We were each presented with a survival kit which proved indispensable and included such well-chosen items as herbal medication for headaches, indigestion tablets and a toothbrush! We counted several qualified doctors in our number but these were for the reassurance of the skittish rather than the rescue of the fallen – their advice was never sought and the medical personnel joined with the group, tasting, discussing, comparing and musing.

Our intrepid throng criss-crossed the island, going from coast to coast and from the tip of Singapore to the border with Malaysia. We journalists from 11 countries were not just offered those dishes deemed to be suitable for foreign palates: we tried and enjoyed everything that Singapore provided to its own population. I doubt that any of us, including many locals, have had the opportunity to eat such a bounty, not only in 24 hours but even in a full adult life!



Our stops, and there were more than 30 of them, presented everything from light snacks such as Kaya toast (a coconut spread, garnishing grilled white bread sandwiched with a cool slab of butter) to Fish Head Curry which proved to be popular with the whole crowd. We were a bunch of passionate eaters who expected to, and indeed did, enjoy even the least-familiar dishes. This was no place for a picky eater. We tucked in but with moderation, being mindful of the length of this culinary journey.

Our mission was not actually to eat our own weight in food but to experience Singapore's street food culture and to consider ways of both promoting and preserving the recipes, skills and its popularity for future generations. We took a short but welcome break from bus or stall seats to lounge in a conference hall. No break from food, however, as chefs demonstrated some contemporary departures from traditional hawker-stall fare.

We heard more about the World Street Food Congress, which had its first event in 2013. Although held in Singapore, which has its own celebrated street food, this was an international event which will be repeated in 2015. The 2013 World Street Food Congress (WSFC) was a symposium and a conference focusing on street food around the world. It aimed to elevate awareness of the state of street food internationally and to consider its future possibilities. Now in its second year, the Congress will focus on the actionable, with the themes of Empower, Engage and Opportunities. There will be networking activities, hawker recipes as well as chef demonstrations, and the World Street Food Awards will be announced shortly after the main event.

Food is a great leveller. We all have food memories and it's those very memories that have driven some to become chefs themselves. Food plays an important part in society and culture but it's a fragile prize that needs to be guarded and nurtured. In the past street food earned little respect and those who toiled over long hours and hot stoves were held in disdain. That has been true around the globe, but things are changing, and there has been something of a street food revival in some countries and an awakening of the realisation that food is culture.

A nation's heritage cannot be preserved by tourists alone. It's refreshing to see this initiative blossom in Singapore and KF Seetoh should be applauded for his vision and driving passion. He provides a platform for debate which we see is already having a positive impact on our perception of a food genre that offers accessible comfort and, hopefully, culinary continuity.

Find more information on the Street Food Congress [here](#)

Learn more about Singapore [here](#)

