



Manila, Philippines

Title: What to expect at this year's World Street Food Congress

Date of publication: May 17 2017

Author: Joko Magalong

Name of publication: <http://news.abs-cbn.com/>

MANILA -- For KF Seetoh, this is the perfect time to be celebrating street food.

"This is a turning point for heritage street food," the Makansutra founder enthused.

He should know. The Singaporean street food consultant and advocate, TV celebrity, food writer, and journalist is at the forefront of the movement working on giving street food global prominence.

"The opportunities are just ready to open up—Bourdain Market, this World Street Food event, hawker market pop-ups around the world," he told ABS-CBN News ahead of the WSFC, which is happening from May 31 to June 4 at the Mall of Asia Open Grounds.

"And Asia is at the center of the heritage street food and heritage food cuisine."

Apart from establishing the World Street Food Congress (WSFC), he has appeared in various TV shows to talk about street food and was tapped as a consultant in Bourdain Market, the much-awaited street food park in New York of culinary celebrity Anthony Bourdain.

In an exclusive interview, we asked Seetoh's about the changes to this year's WSFC and his recent food hunting trips around the Philippines.

Excerpts from the interview:

Q: What made you want to bring back the WSFC in the Philippines?

A: I don't bring it back. It was the people who wanted it back. We underestimated -- and I apologize - the crowd that came last year. It was crazy! Filipinos are mad people lah! in terms of food.

So this year, we'll make it bigger, and in a very nice location in MOA, as nice as BGC. And more than ever, we are inspired to do more with the Philippines to fire up the new breed of street food chefs and cooks, and opportunities.

Q: Any new things or changes that you're doing this year?

A: This year, we have a better carpark. Half of the location is a carpark and there are other carparks around the area.

[Last year], the queues were crazy, around the back, around the side. So this year, when you come in, you will see all military-style. You will see 35 lines, and pick what you want. And if you have a group of friends, spread out!

We requested that most or all the hawkers sell two items, so after queuing after an hour, you have an excess of two items. So if you have four or five friends, everybody can bring [dishes], [it's a] 10-dish boodle!

And also, we are introducing a small corner for children. There is a playground now, where they can play while the parents line up for the food.

Q: How many hawkers are coming to this year's WSFC Jamboree?

A: It's 35 this year [from] 24 last year, 10-20% of the hawkers are the same but they're offering a different item; 90% of the dishes are different. I can think of two or three dishes that were demanded back—definitely the chocolate murtabak [from Indonesia], and the barbecue ribs from Bali.

Some exciting things include authentic fish and chips from the UK, poutine from Canada, bratwurst and currywurst from Germany, and some food that Manila hasn't seen before like dumplings from Guangzhou.

Chef Sau del Rosario's Sisig Paella is one of the featured dishes at WSF 2017. Photo by Jeeves de Veyra

Q: You went on a culinary hunting trip recently with the DOT. Anything interesting from around the Philippines coming to the WSFC?

A: Last year, it was mostly recommendations from DOT. I said, this year, why don't we dig deeper into what this country truly offers. We went to Davao, Pampanga, Iloilo, Bacolod, Iloilo, and Bicol.

I challenged Chef Sau [del Rosario] to move the game, to come up with a new dish. And I said, 'sisig paella.' It was my idea! When we went to Bicol, your Bicol express, we turned into a risotto with chicharon! We also went to Iloilo and I came up with this idea of doing an inasal, but an inasal shawarma and I think Chef JP [Anglo] would be doing that. It's something to look out for. And also, of course, Chef Rafael [Jardeleza II] from Iloilo is doing batchoy ice cream.

We bring the traditional stuff. A carinderia in Davao cooks their mongo with lamb, one of the President's favorites, I am told.

In Pampanga, we are also bringing a small, small carinderia. She cooks very little dishes—duck adobo, duck sinigang, and lamb adobo. She just cooks duck and lamb sinigang and caldereta.

We're also bringing this halal dish—satti Tausug—a spicy biryani wrap with chicken roasted in black roasted coconut, pianggang. Something for the halal group.

From Ilocos, there's the cheese empanada, bagnet and longganisa pizza, and pinakbet pizza. Crazy, man!

Q: The Bourdain town hall event will be during the WSFC Dialogue. Can you tell us more about the Dialogue Because a lot of people think that the WSFC is only about the Jamboree.

A: The Dialogue is the reason that I do this. The Dialogue is the one that will fire up opportunities, and all the big speakers like Bourdain, and Greg Drescher, the vice president of the Culinary Institute of America where Bourdain studied, will be there to give a keynote speech. Also a lot of cooking demos from a lot of great chefs.

Q: There's also the Hackathon, can you tell us more about that?

A: Hackathon is a traditional segment [in the WSF Dialogue]. Every day, two hours or an hour and a half, towards the end of the day, [it's] for anybody who has a burning two-minute speech to talk about anything -- opportunities, environment, anything!

All day long, the delegates are encouraged to stick on a little note pad . In 30 words, tell us what you're going to say, as short as possible, and stick it on an idea wall or hack wall. We will be fleshing out the juiciest and the most common themes, and we [will] call the guy up.

Q: One of the things that changed in how you do the WSF Dialogue is that you're co-moderating it for the first time with a team captain from the host country, chef Sau del Rosario. Why did you decide to do that this year?

A: I felt that there are great chefs here in the Philippines and there should be a face to it. Otherwise it'll be, "Who's this guy from Singapore that's trying to change our food?"

And I'm fortunate enough to have Chef Sau come and do this. He will be captain, and he will lead and start this new thinking about what traditional heritage food can be moving forward. Have you been to his restaurant 25 Seeds in Pampanga? He doesn't do much to the food but it is in how he presents it.

Q: So how do you see the Philippines' street food or heritage food progressing?

A: The Philippines is a damn exciting market because there is no street food culture. [But] this heritage food can be easily turned into street food culture.

All the street food culture that happened in other countries -- a lot of the dishes came from home -- so it's time to bring out the great flavors from the kitchen [of the Philippines], and bring it out for all the world to love -- newly created, efficient, food parks, or perhaps even a hawker center? Manila needs more hawker centers!

The theme [of the Dialogue] is 'Reimagined Possibilities.' Michelin has just given two one-dish hawkers in Singapore Michelin stars. They are rock stars around the world now. And if it can happen in Singapore, that means it can happen anywhere, even in the Philippines. Can you imagine the possibilities?

Q: But we do have some street food. We have the carinderias.

A: Yes, the 'carinderia' is the soul of the street food in your country.

Q: You're talking about changing or evolving heritage and street food, can you truly reinvent without forgetting traditional heritage food?

A: Well, I'm fortunate enough to have been brought up eating street food, and I spent many years as a photojournalist and a writer, and I realized that when I eat something, people tell me this is Indian, Peranakan, this is Chinese... and for the longest time I was like, 'What the h*ll!' Then when I started studying, I realized that I opened a can of worms. Our Singapore heritage street food, and in many countries too, do come from a source, a heritage, whether it's migratory, fusion, or progressive food, or authentic food. Food culture has evolved, so what we're eating today, it might look authentic, but this didn't exist 50 years ago, it came from somebody's heritage.

People change and create new things based on where they came from, and that's what I mean with evolving, modern heritage street food.

Q: So, it's not a question of authenticity?

A: Authentic is a movable word.