



Manila, Philippines

Title: The World Street Food Congress opens

Date of publication: June 1 2017

Author: STANLEY BALDWIN O. SEE

Name of publication: <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/lifestyle/food/612906/the-world-street-food-congress-opens/story/>

It was an unusual but very Pinoy toast—delegates and guests raised their plastic cups full of taho and Tourism Undersecretary Katherine de Castro rang a sorbetero’s bell—that officially opened the World Street Food Congress (WSFC) and its kitchens to the Filipino public at the SM Mall of Asia (MoA) Concert Grounds on Wednesday.

The five-day event, consisting of the two-day Congress and a five-day Jamboree, is actually the second consecutive time that the Philippines is hosting this gathering of the world’s best street food masters, hawkers, chefs, and foodies, all under one roof.

Highlights of Day 1 of the Congress included interesting insights from Culinary Institute of America (CIA) vice president for Strategic Studies and Industry Leadership Greg Drescher; WSFC and Makansutra creator and curator KF Seetoh on this year’s theme “Re-imagining Possibilities”; Philippine team captain and co-host chef Sau del Rosario demonstrating how to make the event-exclusive sisig paella; a panel discussion on the pros and cons of second-generation succession in the food world; and a presentation by Michelin-starred chef Peter Lloyd.

There were also interesting presentations and discussions from India’s Arbind Singh and local blogger Anton Diaz. Singh presented how regulating and, in a way, professionalizing India’s millions of street food vendors can be a model that the Philippine government can replicate. In this way, patrons can be assured that the local fishball vendor, mamang sorbetero, and their favorite carinderia not only prepare the best ingredients using their tried-and-tested techniques and recipes, but also operate in an hygienic environment while maintaining sustainable livelihoods.

It was during the hour-long “hack-a-thon” where delegates pitched in their ideas ranging from local culinary tours to having more access to provinces that are considered culinary hotspots. I personally felt that the ideas were solid and good; unfortunately, not all stakeholders like national and local government units were present to hear to suggestions and comments.

Enough of all the chitchat and formal part of the Congress. The truth is, as a foodie and someone who was unlucky not to eat lunch as the official caterer ran out of food, the real highlight was the first day of the Jamboree, where 40 different street food dishes from 13 countries lined up on a covered stretch of the MoA Concert Grounds.

Jamboree highlights

Only two dishes, the Coffee Pork Rib Burgers (P290) from Singapore's Keng Eng Kee (Stall #2) and Martabak (P280/4 slices, P500/whole) from Indonesia's Martabak Manis "San Francisco" by Mr. Buyung (Stall #28), came back from last year's edition. Both were the public's favorites for good reasons: unique tastes, wonderful flavors, and—unlike the dishes from other stalls—prepared a la minute and served warm.

I loved the Martabak because the pancake itself was not sweet, but the dense texture goes well with the toppings like chocolate, Oreo, Green Tea Kitkat, Nutella Almond, and even grated cheese. I ordered the Coffee Pork Rib Burger for my sister and she wasn't disappointed with the smoky aroma and juicy meat of this modern, boneless interpretation of Singapore Coffee Ribs.

I also got my mouth and fingers messy by munching on the Bali BBQ Ribs Warung Sunset by Chef Yudi (P300, Stall #26), covered with an intense Balinese spice marinade and highly recommended by Seetoh. A word of advice: if you plan on ordering this dish, remember to ask for napkins or bring wet wipes because this is messy and finger-licking good food.

Something new, something weird

One particular vendor, Pasillo de Humo (Stall #6) stands out not only because of its good-looking chef, Adam Mendez, but also because of his and his mother's signature dish of Pork Trotters Black Bean Tostadas (P280). Unlike a soft tortilla taco, tostadas are fried and have crispy textures; Mendez's tostada is topped with pickled trotters (pig's feet), avocado, radish, black beans, and fresh herbs that he plucks from a container with soil just before serving.

Rice (Mochi) Dumpling with Candied Chrysanthemum (P220) from China's Big Brother Hong Kong Cuisine Restaurant (Stall #19) was a dish that was actually ordered by two new friends I met during the first day. Malacca-based friends Jennifer Tan (owner of Donald and Lily in Makansutra in SM Megamall) and Lorna joined the table where I was sitting and invited me to "makan," or try the dishes that they ordered.

One of them was the Mochi Dumpling, which was hard to spoon and eat but tasted like a boiled, plain version of a buchi. The dumplings have a soft exterior, black sesame seed stuffing, and were swimming in a ginger and candied chrysanthemum light syrup.

How about something local?

Stalls #12-17 served local street foods from different regions with a twist. There are 14 dishes in all, but I only got to try Chef Sau del Rosario's sisig paella (P230). Other dishes are quite familiar to Filipinos who travel to eat: Pinakbet Pizza (P260), Longganisa & Bagnet Pizza (P320), and Cheese Empanada (P150) from the Ilocos Region; La Paz Batchoy (P200) from Iloilo; Piyaya (P180) and Chicken Inasal with Pita Bread (P250) from Bacolod; and Pork Monggo (P240) and Bicol Express Risotto (P260) from the Bicol Region.

Honestly, I skipped most of the local fare because of the slightly high prices. Knowing that the dishes taste better when done in their original kitchens also dissuaded me. Instead, I focused on food from outside the 7,107 islands of the Philippines.

Speakers and presenters lined up for Day 2 of the Congress include Ruth Alegria (Mexico), chefs Malcom Lee and Shen Tan and Richard Tan (Singapore), Odilia Winneke (Indonesia), Ulf Tassilo Muench (Germany), six regional representatives from the DoT, Mai Pham and Professor Nguyen Nha (Vietnam), and David Yip (China).

Here are the schedule and the menu for the WSFC's Jamboree, which is open to the public for only P150 (consumable):

June 1 - 4:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

June 2 - 4:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

June 3 - 1:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

June 4 - 1:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.