

## Madrid Fusión to introduce PHL food to global market

By [Ma. Stella F. Arnaldo](#)  
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THE best in Philippine agriculture, as well as premium food and beverage products, will be showcased in the first international gastronomy convention in the country, the Madrid Fusión Manila (MFM), which opens today (Friday).

In an interview with the BusinessMirror, Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary for Special Concerns Berna Romulo Puyat said they will introduce the country's best heritage food and agricultural products to the mainstream market. Many of these products include those grown by small farmers and, in showcasing these to an international audience, could result in possible exports, she said.

“We also want to reintroduce ‘slow food’ as an alternative to fast-food dining. The increasing popularity of convenience food has made our traditional cuisine that is deeply rooted in our culture and traditions slowly disappear. As a consequence, we use less and less of the traditional and indigenous local ingredients that make our cuisine distinctly Filipino and mainly produced from smallholder farming,” she added.

The DA will be sponsoring regional lunches that will feature the finest dishes from Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. She said the government agency will be providing all the local ingredients for the local chefs, many of whom are considered the leading lights in the local culinary scene.

Among the chefs cooking up dishes for the regional lunches are Tony Boy Escalante, whose restaurant Antonio's was recently included in Asia's 50 Best Restaurants; Margarita Fores (Cibo/Grace Park); Robby Goco (Cyma/Green Pastures); Myke Sarthou (Alab); Fernando Aracama (Aracama); Ariel Manuel (Lolo Dad's); Bruce Ricketts (Mecha Uma); and Juan Carlos de Terry (Terry's). Executive chef for all the lunches will be New York-based Chef Noel de la Rama.

In a media briefing on Thursday, the Tourism Promotions Board introduced the foreign and local chefs participating in the event.

Chef Elena Arzak of the three Michelin-starred Arzak in San Sebastian Spain, is one of the most hotly anticipated speakers during the gastronomy congress. She said she was “eager to share and learn from fellow chefs at the Madrid Fusión Manila.” She was awarded the Veuve Clicquot World’s Best Female Chef Award 2012 by the World’s 50 Best Restaurants Awards.

The three-day MFM, from April 24 to 26 at the SMX Convention Center in Pasay City, seeks to highlight the Philippines as a culinary center of excellence in Asia. Through its International Gastronomy Congress, trade exhibit and regional flavors festival, MFM presents a unique opportunity for chefs, restaurateurs, food-and- beverage professionals and food aficionados to come together, learn new things, and share their talent, expertise, as well as products, to the market. For just P500 per ticket, the general public can also experience this first-in-Asia gastronomy event, enabling them to check out the trade exhibit, experience some food-and-wine tastings, as well as purchase products on display.

In a separate interview, Tourism Secretary Ramon R. Jimenez Jr. explained the concept behind the staging of MFM: “A country cannot have just a two-dimensional image. You cannot be just a beach, a waterfall or a volcano destination. You have to be a destination that appeals to all aspects of living and lifestyle. That lifestyle would include cuisine and dining, because part of having a good time is eating good food, especially if you are in Asia. Food, therefore, is designed to complete the Filipino image in the eyes of the world.

“But a tourist’s first pleasant encounter of any foreign food always had something to do with that which was familiar—a refreshing alternative to food that he or she already enjoyed back home. Therefore, when we try to introduce Filipino food to the rest of the world, we must first begin with something that is familiar, so that people may gradually acquire the taste for it—and, eventually, fall in love with it,” he said.

Meanwhile, among the slow-food ingredients the DA will showcase at the trade exhibit are the so-called rising stars, such as heirloom rice, calamansi (Philippine lime), sampaloc (tamarind), suha (pomelo), pili nuts (*Canarium ovatum*, endemic in the Bicol region), siling labuyo (wild chili) and dalandan (*Citrus aurantium*), according to Romulo Puyat.

Other Philippine indigenous and slow-food products on display are muscovado sugar (unrefined molasses sugar), dalandan liquor, calamansi liquor and various types of suka (vinegar), such as sukang Paombong (nipa-palm vinegar), sukang tuba (coconut-sap vinegar), sukang Iloco (Ilocos cane vinegar), pinakurat (spiced vinegar from Iligan City, Lanao) and sinamak (spiced vinegar from Iloilo).

The DA booths will, likewise, feature “champion produce” from different regions of the country, such as mango, coconut, pineapple and tuna—produced largely by corporate farmers and fishing companies, as well as “products that reflect Philippine traditions and culture such as heirloom rice, adlai, siling labuyo, batuan, tabob-tabon, kamias, kapeng barako and criollo cacao, and innovative consumer products,” the DA official said. With a number of international calendar events lined up for VPY 2015, the Philippines hopes to attract 8.2 million foreign visitors this year.

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