

A global food tour to reintroduce Filipino flavors to the world

By Anna Bueno

Updated 15:47 PM PHT Tue, April 18, 2017



“Kinilaw is not a ceviche. I would like to sell kinilaw as kinilaw,” says chef Myrna Segismundo. This year, Segismundo and author and restaurateur Amy Besa will embark on a culinary journey to North America and Europe to let the world know how Filipino food, at its core, tastes like. In photo: kinilaw from a *dampa* in Manila. Photo by GABBY CANTERO

Manila (CNN Philippines Life) — When Spain raced with Portugal in its quest to circumnavigate the globe and to win the chase for the world’s most flavorful spices, it stumbled onto the Philippines and found wealth better than gold: *bawang*, *luya*, *sili*, among others. Back then, the quest was not only to find places for settlement, but also to look for condiments that would enhance European tastes.

Fast forward to a few centuries after, and we’re doing circumnavigation in reverse: two Filipino food advocates are out to tour the world, this time bringing our culinary treasures in the spirit of exploration and discovery that could have animated the earliest *conquistadors* to search for spices.

The comparison may be a bit of an exaggeration, but when you hear the enthusiasm of Myrna Segismundo and [Amy Besa](#) — who are both excited to introduce (or reintroduce) Philippine native ingredients to Europe (for Segismundo) and North America (for Besa) — it’s easy to get carried away.



Chef Myrna Segismundo's (far right) menu during the culinary tour launch included pandenini (griddled pan de sal with assorted fillings), panghimagas (Batangas tamales with latik, suman haba at mangga), and kinilaw sours (shrimps in green mango, tuakang in coco vinegar & dulong in calamansi). Photo courtesy of the CULTURAL DIPLOMACY UNIT/OFFICE OF THE UNDERSECRETARY FOR INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS/DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



Purple Yam Malate's menu for the culinary tour launch included KBL (kadios baboy langka) with Berkshire Pork pata, langka, and kadios from Laguna. Photo courtesy of AMY BESA/INSTAGRAM

The culinary tours, organized by the Department of Foreign Affairs, aim to present the best of Philippine cuisine to the world. As opposed to foreigners coming here to “discover” Philippine cuisine, Segismundo and Besa will be leading two separate tours abroad to bring Philippine ingredients and the cuisine to them.

“This is an offshoot of all the food festivals [abroad] and in the Philippines,” says Segismundo, who serves dishes and holds classes in her restaurant New Manila: A Private Kitchen. Aside from authoring several cookbooks, she has also held food

festivals in countries like Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, India, Israel, and the United States. “I realized, *luto kami nang luto, ang kumakain din naman kababayan natin*. What was our objective *ba*? Could we have a template of dishes that we want to identify and promote abroad?”

“*Sana may* formula for dishes, consistent with the classic and traditional approach,” she adds.

Segismundo will head the culinary tour to Europe from May 26 to June 24, which will cover London, Brussels, The Hague and Amsterdam, and Berlin. Accompanied by chefs Raul Ramos and Jill Sandique, and food writer, author, and columnist Michaela Fenix, the tour will include photo exhibits on Filipino food from a book Segismundo co-authored, “*Kulinarya: A Guidebook to Philippine Cuisine*,” talks, cooking demos with food-tasting, and the preparation of a full-course Filipino dinner.

The launch of the culinary tours on March 28 over at Purple Yam in Malate, Manila — featuring a scrumptious spread prepared by the two — served as a preview to the tours and the ingredients they plan to share abroad. While obviously, Besa cannot bring the KBL (kadios baboy langka) or the *etag* (Sagada smoked pork) with her, she will probably bring the Kalinga white beans accompanying the latter, she says.

And while Segismundo probably cannot bring the kinilaw sours she prepared, she plans to highlight coconut and [calamansi](#) (among others) on tour, while emphasizing our own culinary heritage: “Kinilaw is not a [ceviche](#). I would like to sell kinilaw as kinilaw,” she stresses.

Evident in both Segismundo and Besa is the intent to zoom in on the source of the best of Philippine cuisine, and not just on the dishes themselves.

“I’m excited to bring good news to people there, to let them know what we’re doing here,” says Segismundo. “What better way than to talk about [indigenous ingredients that are found in our dishes?](#) ... It’s not so much about the sinigang, but what goes into the sinigang.”

This is not to say that Segismundo is against fusion cuisine or innovation. But the point is to establish first what flavors are Filipino — not to distinguish ourselves as the best, but to take part in the conversation of what we have and what we can offer.



"You know how Filipinos would recognize each other in the way they look, they talk? That's the same with food," says Amy Besa. "I know it's mine, not because it's better, but because I know it. That's my flavor profile." Photo courtesy of the CULTURAL DIPLOMACY UNIT/OFFICE OF THE UNDERSECRETARY FOR INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS/DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

"If I want to make you taste what Filipino food really is, you have to use ingredients that came from here," says Besa, who, with husband chef Romy Dorotan, has established Purple Yam both in Manila and New York. They also published the seminal culinary book "Memories of Philippine Kitchens." "Those ingredients carry the soil, water, air, and [have] very distinct characteristics. One banana grown in the Cordilleras, or one grown in Bicol, or in Visayas, even if they are of the same variety, they will taste different."

Besa's tour will include visits to New York, Seattle, Chicago, Toronto, and Philadelphia, from Sept. 15 to Oct. 10, and will be led by Besa and chef Dorotan. They will also be accompanied by chefs Raphael Cristobal and Alvin Ralph Cruz of Purple Yam Manila.

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Like Segismundo, Besa also wants to establish what constitutes the Philippines' "culinary DNA." "So when you travel all over the world, you know exactly what adobo tastes like," she says. "You know how Filipinos would recognize each other in the way they look, they talk? That's the same with food ... I know it's mine, not because it's better, but because I know it. That's my flavor profile."

The goal is not to parrot that Philippine cuisine is the best. “I just want to communicate that food is inclusive. If you look at all these food trends — oh this is the best restaurant, this is the best dish — for me, that’s very exclusive. It excludes people,” says Besa.

“I like saying, ‘this is good.’ I would like to identify some things as good ... not because it excludes other things, but because I want you to try this,” she adds. “I want you to be part of this whole experience.”

<http://cnnphilippines.com/life/leisure/food/2017/04/18/amy-besa-and-myrna-segismundo.html>