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SEVEN DISHES TO EXPERIENCE FILIPINO CUISINE (AND WHERE TO TRY THEM)

In Philippine cuisine, rice is the undisputed protagonist. But don't be fooled: this kitchen has a huge variety of typical dishes with oriental and even Spanish influences.



The Filipino pancit, a loaf of bread and I could be friends. MARÍA SANAHUJA

MARIA SANAHUJA 08/03/2020 - 07:50 CET

Aviso, warning, achtung: The reader is warned that you can find in this article references to paella with sausage, squid and prawns. Without saffron nor big white beans, nor a sad piece of rabbit meat: but yes, with many prawns. Before starting with fainting, insults and threats, we must clarify that this is about Filipino paella. Undoubtedly with originS in the Valencian dish, but currently has nothing has to do with the premier rice dish in our cuisine.

Rice is the staple food in the Philippines. So basically, it is taken at all times and at all meals, which are usually three: *almusal*, *tanghalian* and *hapunan*, or the usual breakfast, lunch and dinner. Rice in a tube (suman?), even as afternoon snack, which in Tagalog translates exactly the same. It is not surprising then, that it is one of the countries in the world with more diabetes, if adding to the huge amount of rice ingested, we sum up a diet low in vegetables and a mostly sedentary lifestyle.

Being a bit of a sucker, we could say that in the Philippines you eat mostly rice with something else. But it would also be very wrong, because in the more than 7,000 islands that make up this country a vicious amount of culinary techniques and dishes with influences ranging from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, America and India, to Spanish cuisine itself, is employed. The first settlers were mainly Malaysians and Indonesians, but the trade routes brought the Indians and the Chinese, who introduced the mother of all Filipino sauces, the patis - a fish sauce made with anchovies and salt, sautéed in pan and oriental style soups. The dishes of these cultures were not simply copied but were Filipinized in each area in a different way, causing for example that someone from the capital, Manila -which is in the north-, may neither be accustomed nor know how to cook more typical dishes from the south, like *kinilaw*, the Filipino ceviche.

Raisa Mabayo, Vice Consul of the Philippine embassy in Madrid who has lived in countries such as Chile or the United States, clarifies to us that the strongest culinary influence is undoubtedly that of Spain, which was present in the Philippines for more than 300 years. Products such as garlic, widely used in its cuisine, onions or tomatoes, which traveled there throughout America, are eternal.

And in this list of dishes influenced by the Spaniards, there is also, of course, the paella. Mikel, the supreme chief *Comidista*, had already warned us of its canned version, but we fear that it is not just that which is eaten. The Filipino paella would make any self-respecting *fallera* (girl from Valencia from the term *Fallas* de Valencia) cry because it is a gastronomic *cajon de sastre*.¹ In some places they put olives, while in others, sweet sausage, and in almost all of them, they add prawns or shrimps. Ralf Roldan, who works for the Philippine cultural promotion in Spain² assures me that it is very good, that this has been practiced for and that a lot of cultures have passed through this country, and they have kept the best of each.

Perhaps that is why the list of typical Filipino dishes is longer than *Sálvame*³, and includes putting together ingredients such as *longganisa* - Filipino sausage, *kaldereta* - meat in tomato sauce, *kare-kare* - oxtail and vegetables cooked in peanut sauce, *lumpia* - fresh or fried spring rolls, the *hamonado* - sweetened pork in pineapple sauce, the chicken adobo - which we already talked about here, the *crispy pata* – fried pork leg, or the *sinigang* (seafood in sour broth). There's a bit of everything and they're varied, with special devotion to pork, for which the *lechon* is identified as the national dish. They fill it with salt, lemongrass, white and black peppers and onion leaves, and cook the skin with soy sauce until it becomes crispy.

Be very careful when reading the menu, because nothing is as it seems. The *turon* - banana roll - is not sweet nougat, and one of the best desserts is the *puto mamon*. The *puto* is a pastry, frequently made of rice – and steamed. There are many varieties, and in almost all of them, coconut milk is added. The *puto lanson* is made with grated cassava, the *puto seko* is crumbly, while for the *puto maya*, rice is mixed with coconut milk, salt and ginger. The *puto mamon*, which is the only one in which no rice is added, you combine egg yolk, salt and sugar, and it can be eaten as a snack, dessert, or for breakfast. Listed below are seven typical Philippine dishes and several restaurants we suggest you to try, so that you can discover the cuisine of this Asian country anytime you want:

LUMPIA



Take note especially of the *Lladró* porcelain plate. MARÍA SANAHUJA

You might think you have tried the best rolls in the world until you try some *lumpia*. They have no more science than Vietnamese or Chinese rolls, but it is in their simplicity, as well as in the sauces to accompany them, where their greatness lies. They mostly dipped in soy sauce with vinegar and calamansi juice, or sweet and sour sauce. Miguel de Jesús, who arrived in Spain from Manila in 2010, tells me that he always triumphs at dinner with friends when he prepares them. *Lumpiang shanghai* are thinner and elongated and are usually

¹ Cajon de sastre is a Spanish expression meaning a 'set of diverse and disorderly things' and 'person who has, in his imagination, a great variety of disorderly and confused ideas'

² A mistake by the author, Consul Ralf Roldan handles Consular matters while Consul Raisa Mabayo handles Cultural Affairs

³ Meaning "save me," one of Spain's longest-running TV programs

stuffed with pork, accompanied by sweet chili sauce or sweet and sour sauce, while *lumpiang gulay* are stuffed with vegetables.

Mabuhay Alonso Restaurant. C / Carretera, 12. Guadiaro, Cádiz. Tel .: 650 36 88 10. Map.

Pass Pass. Carrer del Comte Borrell, 80. Barcelona. Tel .: 933 25 15 15. Map.

Yatai Market C / Doctor Cortezo, 10. Madrid. Tel .: 911 38 41 13. Map.

PORK SISIG



I'm having a really bad time writing this caption at 12 in the morning. MARÍA SANAHUJA

This dish is a full-fledged *cochifrito* (Segovian-style fried pork dish). These are pork head meat with liver, cooked and seasoned with vinegar, *calamansi* juice and chopped onion, served in a hot plate. The dish is topped with a raw egg, which is cooked with the residual heat of the plate. In the province of Pampanga, where it originates from, *sísig* means "to be bitter", and was originally a cure for hangover and nausea. Some restaurants add brains, crushed pork rinds and even mayonnaise. It is blunt as few, and we do not know if it is the definitive cure for a hangover, but it is very close.

Dominguez restaurant. C / Batalla del Salado, 4. Madrid. Tel .: 912 22 49 25. Map.

Manila fil. Carrer Ramelleres, 3. Barcelona. Tel .: 931 43 42 13. Map.

PANCIT PALABOK



Who am I and why do I have a sandwich for lunch instead of this pancit. MARÍA SANAHUJA

Pancit is made from noodles that, you might not believe it, are made of rice. Specifically, they are made from rice flour. They are combined in a thousand ways, and the establishments specializing in them, generally those offering street food, are called *panciterías*. In this case, prawns or shrimps, pork, boiled egg and *tinapa*

(smoked fish) are added. They also add bean sprouts and is one of the elements that suggests that it is a dish of Chinese origin. They say that during the Spanish occupation it became the first fast food dish in the country, with the *panciteros* selling it in the tobacco factories to the women who worked and did not have time to cook. And from there to the *panciterías*.

Fabiola restaurant. C / Bravo Murillo, 297. Madrid. Tel .: 915 72 11 82. Map.

Thousand Islands. Bahía Mar Shopping Center. The Port of Sta. María, Cádiz. Tel .: 634 06 39 91. Map.

KARE-KARE



Behind the green vegetables hides the fat. MARÍA SANAHUJA

This time bomb has it all. Oxtail, ox leg and tripe. Do not be fooled by the top layer of vegetables, which are usually eggplants and green beans, although sometimes also banana. The meat is stewed with garlic, onion, peanuts and, of course, a little (powdered) rice to thicken. But the list does not end, because we also add *alamang* (salted prawn sauce). More than a single plated dish, it is a real *handaan* (a feast). And if there is something we share with the Filipinos, it is the passion to spend hours around a table before, during and after eating.

Dominguez restaurant. C / Batalla del Salado, 4. Madrid. Tel .: 912 22 49 25. Map.

Kasarap Carrer del Consell de Cent, 141. Barcelona. Tel .: 634 88 56 93. Map.

BICOL EXPRESS



Please note that the Bicol (express) does not lie far behind in the ranking of dishes with sauce to dip our bread. MARÍA SANAHUJA

This is a stew made with long peppers (*siling mahaba*, in Tagalog) added with coconut milk, garlic and onion, pork and fish paste. It is one of the few examples of Filipino spicy cuisine, originally from the Bicol region. If we combine to the flavor of the onion the garlic's strength and the potent taste of the fish paste, it will be easy for us to understand why there is practically no salt used to season the Filipino dishes. Many argue that the name comes from the train that linked Manila with Bicol, but others have traced the origin of the dish to Cely Kalaw's restaurant in Manila.

K-Family. C / Bravo Murillo, 297. Madrid. Tel .: 672 93 08 07. Map.

Brothers. Carrer Villarroel, 26. Barcelona. Tel .: 931 40 93 41. Map.

CRISPY PATA



They creak more than the beds of a cheap hostel. MARÍA SANAHUJA

Raisa tells us that, as a child, if she woke up with animals crying in the garden it meant that there was going to be a party at home and that they would eat *lechon* or *crispy pata*. This is the back of the pork leg, cooked over low heat, which is allowed to cool overnight in the fridge and fry the next morning, getting a super crunchy effect. It is usually accompanied with soy vinegar sauce and served with some greens to keep up its aspect. Don't be fooled: it's as greasy as it is delicious.

Jimmy Bar C / Hilarión Eslava, 5. Madrid. Tel .: 915 43 14 56. Map.

Myramar Carrer Valdonzella, 56. Barcelona. Tel .: 934 63 56 18. Map.

Mar Ali restaurant. C / Comandante Paz Varela, 1. Jerez de la Frontera, Cádiz. Tel .: 956 31 03 44. Map.

BUKO PANDAN



A scoop of vanilla ice cream is not bad at all. MARÍA SANAHUJA

Filipino desserts are not especially sweet, and this case is no exception. *Buko* – or coconut – is shredded and mixed with *pandan* leaves, a tropical plant that is widely used as a condiment in Southeast Asian countries. And now comes the wig snatching, because the smell that it gives off, although it may remind you of vanilla, also resembles that of freshly-baked bread or popcorn. The fault lies with a compound called 2-acetyl-1-pyrroline, one of the compounds that are generated when we golden brown our food, as occurring during Maillard reactions. We add only three more ingredients to coconut and pandán leaves: jelly, milk cream and condensed milk. It is crowned in some restaurantes with vanilla ice cream on top and served very cold, so that we can fish bits of jelly.

Dominguez restaurant. C / Batalla del Salado, 4. Madrid. Tel .: 912 22 49 25. Map.

Kasarap Carrer del Consell de Cent, 141. Barcelona. Tel .: 634 88 56 93. Map.

The Port Tambayan. Carrer de Ses Rrafaletas, 1. Palma de Mallorca. Tel .: 601 16 11 09. Map.

Do you know other good Filipino dishes or restaurants? Tell it in the comments and join us on this gastronomic trip.