

Culinary career haven

A school in Angeles City puts together a memorable midday meal

by Sol Vanzil
May 11, 2016 (updated)

Pampangueños love to boast that their province is the “culinary capital of the Philippines” by virtue of the dozens of fiesta delicacies they prepare. Being a proud Caviteña, I always silently contested Pampanga’s claim to fame—until last week when I had the most beautiful, delicious, and well presented lunch I have ever had outside of Manila. Ironically, the meal did not include a single Pampangueño specialty but the dishes incorporated wild plants and herbs unique to the province.

Millionaire’s Meal

Our midday meal was really memorable. It was satisfying but not heavy, rich but not greasy. For starters, the Millionaire Salad had light foie gras paté on brown rice cracker and a mound of lettuce hearts and paper-thin pear slices covered with crisp duck confit and accented with a lobster tail, poached in butter. The soup was New Zealand mussels in bouillabaisse, followed by pumpkin tortellini and a seafood platter, roasted grouper and peppered scallops. The main course took our breath away. A thick plank of mahogany, five feet long, was covered completely with US prime rib entrecote. It was served with sidings of potato fondant, strips of roast beef fat, and baby vegetables.

Green and Lush

Recently, we were at the International School for Culinary Arts and Hotel Management (ISCAHM) campus, a redesigned, repurposed resort along MacArthur Highway in the new growth area of Angeles City. There, the intense summer heat is absorbed and neutralized by thick, edible plants—feathery dill, bushy Italian oregano, purple basil, curly mint, and disk-like leaves of cancer-curing takip kuhol.



Students learn to make butter balls



At ISCAHM, away from malls, event places, and fastfood joints, 80 students from all parts of the country find it easier to concentrate and learn everything they can for their chosen careers.

Topnotch Veterans

Austrian Chef Norbert Gandler, ISCAHM cofounder, is proud of his brainchild, which now has campuses in Metro Manila, Cebu, and Angeles. It has produced graduates who later on worked in luxury cruise liners, hotels, and restaurants all over the world.

Chef Kenneth Cacho, on the other hand, leads the Angeles faculty. He has the distinction of serving nine years aboard the most famous floating palaces in the world, including Cunard Lines' Queen Elizabeth 2 and Queen Mary. With both Gandler and Cacho on the national team, the Philippine entries to international culinary competitions are assured of trophies and medals. On its own, ISCAHM teams bested the competition at the 2015 Philippine Culinary Cup and the 2013 National Food Showdown.

K to12 Opportunity

Always thinking of the communities hosting his school campuses, Gandler saw in the school shift to the K to12 program an opportunity to reach out and open doors of opportunity for the less fortunate. Coordinating with government agencies, ISCAHM received approval to open its doors to Grades 11 and 12 students from public schools using vouchers to pay for their tuition.

Upon graduating, the K to 12 students would be qualified for employment at starting levels in restaurants. Later, they could enrol for more specialized courses, such as pastry and bread making. As of this writing, students from as far as Baguio were reported to be lining up to enrol at the only culinary school accommodating K to12 students.

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