

ES

EXPERIENCE SINGAPORE

APR - JUN 2015 / ISSUE 54
A NEWSLETTER OF THE SINGAPORE
COOPERATION PROGRAMME



Taste Ambassadors

Meet three chefs who are shaping how the world sees Singaporean cuisine



Food and Friendship

Food fests ensure Singapore has a place on the world culinary map



Strength in Synergy

The Singapore Cooperation Programme begins new partnerships



Flavours of the City

How food unites a multi-ethnic Singapore

Ed's Note

Dear readers,

It takes just a quick glance at our local culinary calendar to conclude Singaporeans sure love their food. With internationally-renowned events like the World Gourmet Summit and Singapore Food Festival attracting gourmands in the hundreds of thousands every year to celebrate the nation's multicultural cooking influences, you could say that Singapore truly is a melting pot.



↑ **Food and Friendship** pg8

At the vanguard of this celebration of local fare are three chefs who have made their mark around the globe, as you will read in **Taste Ambassadors**. They each come from different backgrounds but all three are bound by their passion for Singaporean food.

Amid this evolution of our cuisine, timeless favourites remain. In **Flavours of the City**, you will discover that even though some of these dishes originated outside of Singapore, all of them have become completely ingrained in our culture.

Singapore food too has universal appeal, and every year millions of tourists experience this for themselves. As you will read in **Food and Friendship**, international food festivals are attracting larger audiences and globally-celebrated chefs to share their expertise, as well as learn from ours. In the end though, these major festivals are really just a good excuse to eat well!

Indeed, learning from one another is what the Singapore Cooperation Programme is all about, and this is reflected in the opening of two new development partnerships — one with Turkey and the other with Mexico. Read about these exciting new partnerships in **Strength in Synergy**.

We hope you enjoy this sampler of what Singapore has to offer. Bon appetit!

Teo Lay Cheng

Director
Public Affairs Directorate
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore

Keep
in touch!

Share with us your memories,
photos and experiences in
Singapore under the Singapore
Cooperation Programme.
Email us at
mfa@sgmfa.gov.sg

CONTENTS



3 FOCUS

Taste Ambassadors

These three renowned chefs are passionate about breathing new life into the Singapore food scene.



6 IN SINGAPORE

Flavours of the City

Singapore's favourite dishes may have originated in other lands, but over time and with much love they have evolved into the city-state's own fare.



8 JOINING HANDS

Food and Friendship

Singapore's place on the world culinary map is assured, thanks to its plethora of festivals that celebrate local and international cuisines.



10 REFLECTIONS

Strength in Synergy

The Singapore Cooperation Programme embarks on new development partnerships with Turkey and Mexico.



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SINGAPORE

Copyright © is held by the publishers.

All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Printed in Singapore by Times Printers.

www.timesprinters.com. ISSN: 0219-2896

Experience Singapore is a publication of the Public Affairs and Technical Cooperation Directorates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore. The Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) is administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, and is aimed at sharing Singapore's developmental experience with other developing countries.

Publishing Consultant
MediaCorp Pte Ltd



Focus

AT THE CHEF'S TABLE

JANICE WONG

CHEF-OWNER OF 2AM:DESSERTBAR

From her hands come avant-garde desserts assembled with flavoured "clouds", "leathers" and "corals". Yet what Janice Wong loves are chicken curry noodles, *laksa* (spicy noodle soup popular in the cuisine of the Straits Chinese, called Peranakans) and Hokkien *mee* (noodles). "Singapore's local cuisine is simple yet the flavours are very addictive — hence we absolutely *crave* it when we are away from Singapore," enthuses Janice. "The balance of flavours and textures in each of the different local dishes is carefully curated. Take, for example, chicken rice: half a teaspoon of dark soy sauce, chilli sauce, pureed ginger and a few drops of sesame seed oil make such a huge difference to the dish."

The Economics degree-holder made a last-minute career switch that saw her going through an intense year of training, working with some of the world's best chefs including Thomas Keller, Grant Achatz, Spanish chocolatier Oriol Balaguer and →

**MEET THREE LOCAL CHEFS WHO
ARE SHAPING THE WORLD'S
UNDERSTANDING OF SINGAPOREAN
CUISINE, ONE DISH AT A TIME.**

WORDS BY KOH YUEN LIN

TASTE Ambassadors



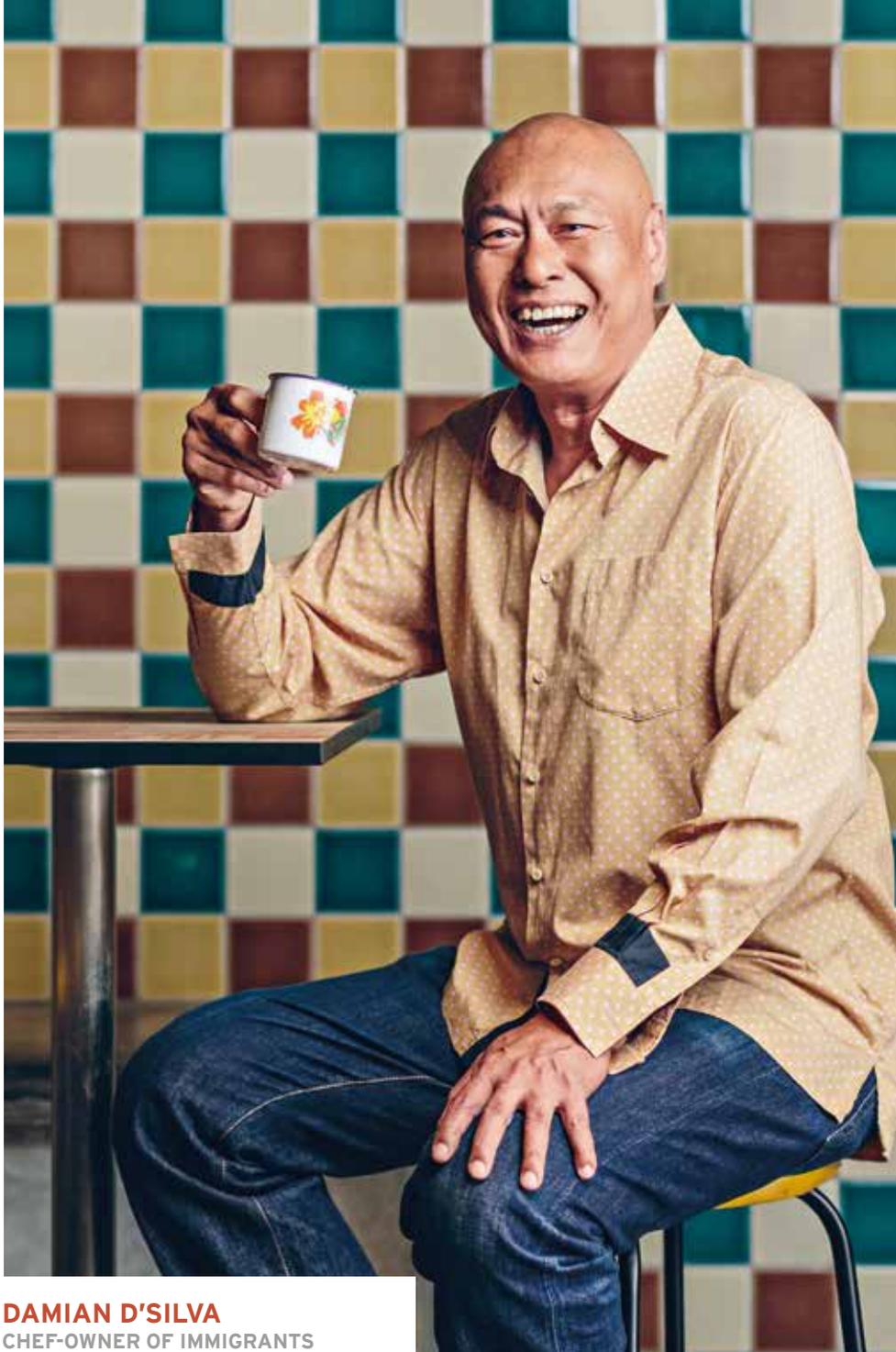
→ renowned French pastry chef Pierre Hermé. Late-night sweets joint 2am:dessertbar was opened in 2007, and Janice was soon winning acclaim for her technically-precise and inventive modernist desserts. In 2013 and 2014, she was named Asia's Best Pastry Chef at the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants awards ceremonies.

The 32-year-old is always eager to learn new food cultures and discover new ingredients from all over the world — especially since she is often on the road for guest chef stints, research trips and trade symposiums. Yet, Singaporean food is always in her heart: "The local diversity of colours and flavours is what inspires me most."

To meld such a wide range of flavours into a dish takes balance, and Janice applies the same balancing of flavour, texture and temperature when creating her edible works of art. In Cassis Plum, a thin cassis mousse shell with aerated yogurt elderflower foam has its fruity sweetness lifted by the freshness of sour plum and candied bamboo shoots. In Shades of Green, the rich sweetness of two distinctly South-east Asian confections, *pandan kaya* (coconut custard) and *gula Melaka* (palm sugar) ice cream is balanced by a light pistachio cake, refreshing coconut foam, a delicately crisp brown butter tuile, a nostalgic *kueh bangkit* (coconut meringue) and sprigs of dill.

Decidedly modernist in form to appeal to a global audience but with hints of nostalgia that resonate with Singaporeans, these creations are indeed true products of cuisine that evolves as Singapore develops into a city of the world.

The balance of flavours and textures in each of the different local dishes is carefully curated.



DAMIAN D'SILVA CHEF-OWNER OF IMMIGRANTS THE SINGAPORE GASTROBAR

He might have worked his way around European restaurants when he decided to switch from aeronautical engineering to cooking in his early 40s, but Damian D'Silva always credits the Singaporean home kitchen as his first classroom. As a boy, the chef of Eurasian descent would observe his grandfather and mother preparing meals for the family. It was from them that he learned the importance of putting love and effort into cooking.

Today, the 58-year-old serves up food from the heart at three year-old Immigrants, a gastro-bar with a difference. Instead of the usual pub grub, heritage dishes from various

Singaporean cultures are served. While his previous set-ups — Soul Kitchen and Big D's Grill — served a mix of European and Peranakan dishes, Immigrants is dedicated to traditional Singaporean fare.

Think a *rendang* (a traditionally Indonesian spicy meat dish) that is slow-cooked for six to seven hours, and stirred throughout the entire duration, just as how Damian's grandfather would do it. Or a novel application of *sambal buah keluak* (Indonesian black nut paste) in fried rice — which might take all of 10 minutes to cook, but five hours to prepare all the components.

Indeed, serving such a menu is

Singapore food is so varied with Malay, Chinese, Indian and European influences. This pairing of ingredients and techniques inspires me the most.

no walk in the park: "Most chefs, after graduation from a culinary institution, would not want to cook local heritage food. The few that take the heritage route often give up after six months because of the intensive labour involved," he says. Yet Damian perseveres, for the tireless champion of local food believes that these dishes — created in the kitchens of Singaporean families — are that which form the backbone of the country's culinary heritage and culture.

"The thing that intrigues me most about local cuisine is the culmination of flavours from all the five major ethnic groups that make Singapore what it is today. A relevant example would be *mee siam* (thin rice vermicelli in a spicy, sweet and sour light gravy).

"We have Malay, Chinese, Peranakan, Eurasian and Indian versions of this humble dish. None is right or wrong but the way it is

↓ **To Chef D'Silva, labour-intensive traditional dishes form the backbone of Singapore's culinary heritage.**



executed tells you how much time and effort went into making the dish unique to each ethnic group," Damian enthuses.

He also shares his fiery passion for heritage Singaporean food with a global audience through invitations to cook at overseas events such as The Melbourne Food & Wine Festival in 2013.



WILLIN LOW, CHEF-OWNER OF WILD ROCKET GROUP

Self-taught lawyer-turned-chef Willin Low's culinary prowess was quickly recognised internationally. Within five years of starting Wild Rocket, a contemporary restaurant serving what he calls "Mod Sin" (Modern Singapore) cuisine, Willin was named one of the world's top 100 emerging culinary stars in the book *Coco: 10 World-Leading Masters Choose 100 Contemporary Chefs*, published in 2010. Willin has been invited to cook in food capitals such as London, New York and Tokyo, and has also appeared on television shows such as *The Martha Stewart Show* and reality cooking competition *Top Chef*.

He however remains a true-blue Singaporean at heart — and in his gut. He isn't just inspired by local flavours, he is passionate about them. His Instagram account (@willcookwilleat) is a visual chronicle of his breakfast/lunch/suppers, all enjoyed in true Singaporean style. Think voluptuous *hee kiao* (minced fish dumplings) dressed in chilli oil, heaped plates from heritage *nasi padang* (steamed rice and pre-cooked dishes) stalls, and hundreds of shots of perfectly-golden curry puffs (chicken and potatoes in a deep-fried or baked pastry) all under the hashtag #thecurrypuffincident.

Willin, 43, laments a decline in the standards of good hawker fare due to the younger generation's reluctance to inherit the trade, which often involves enduring long hours and managing rising costs, but he also observes that Singaporean cuisine is constantly evolving. "I see an increase of regional Chinese cuisine. Vietnamese and Filipino hawkers are also sprouting — one day these dishes will assimilate

into Singapore's local cuisine just as Indian, Malay, Chinese cuisines have done," he says.

"Singapore food is so varied because of the influences of Malay, Chinese, Indian and European flavours. It is this pairing of unexpected ingredients and cooking techniques from very different cuisines resulting in a made-in-heaven gastronomical marriage that inspires me most."

Indeed, to assimilate has always been in the DNA of the Singapore food culture, and Willin highlights this with his modern interpretations of traditional dishes such as Crab Cake with Salted Egg Sauce (salted eggs being a Chinese delicacy), and 48-hour Slow Cooked Beef Short Rib *Rendang*. "These embrace the flavour of iconic local dishes. By using premium ingredients like Australian spanner crab and wagyu short rib, and using modern cooking techniques, I make them into dishes that might not resemble local fare, but are Singaporean in essence," he explains. His guiding principle: "That the food must taste good!"



Flavours of the



SATAY

Their ancestral lineage originated in lands far and wide, but most Singaporeans are unified by at least one thing: the love of food. And with prosperity and sophistication, they have also developed a taste for cuisines from all over the world.

To most Singaporeans however, there is just nothing like 'local' food — the aroma of a fish head curry, the comfort of a plate of chicken rice, or the easy-eating punch of a plate of meaty satay. Indeed, most Singaporeans living abroad will say they miss the food while away.

Experience Singapore highlights three perennial favourites.

Singapore cuisine is the product of foreign influences, and there is perhaps no better illustration of this than the skewered meat dish, satay. It is said that Arab traders who made their way to South-east Asia in the 15th century first introduced the concept of meat skewers. The accompanying puréed peanut sauce has since taken on a local flavour, but the origins of the condiment can be traced to South America, where it was adopted by Spanish colonists before making its way to the Philippines and finally to Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

Known as saté in Indonesia, where it is also a nationally-celebrated dish, satay is available most commonly at outdoor hawker centres where grilling over charcoal is possible.

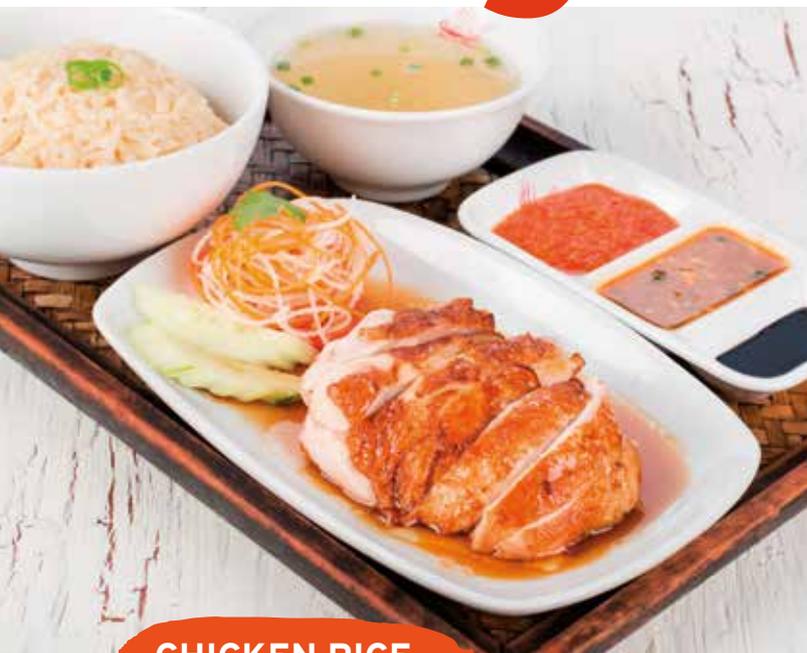
The meat is steeped in a marinade of minced lemongrass, ginger, honey and lime juice before being grilled over a charcoal flame, fanned by hand using a bamboo fan. The quintessential image

of the 'satay man' keeping watch over numerous sticks of satay, flipping them in unison to cook the meat evenly is a sight many Singaporeans can recall from their past. (Incidentally, they still make satay like that.)

Once cooked through on the inside and slightly charred on the outside, the skewers are served with the obligatory peanut-based dipping sauce. Over time, the taste of the meat and sauce alike has adapted to suit the local sweet tooth. While ethnic Malay satay men usually sell chicken, mutton, beef and cow tripe satay, Chinese vendors have evolved the dish to include pork. Vendors of all races meanwhile have been seen grilling large prawns and calling that satay, too. Vegetarians are also catered for, with some eateries making satay out of gluten "mock meat". But whatever the meat, satay is best served with a side serving of banana leaf-wrapped rice cakes called *ketupat*, raw shallots and cucumber slices.

City

As a multi-ethnic city, Singapore is home to a variety of cuisines. Here is but a taste of what the nation calls its favourite foods. **WORDS BY AMIR ALI**



CHICKEN RICE

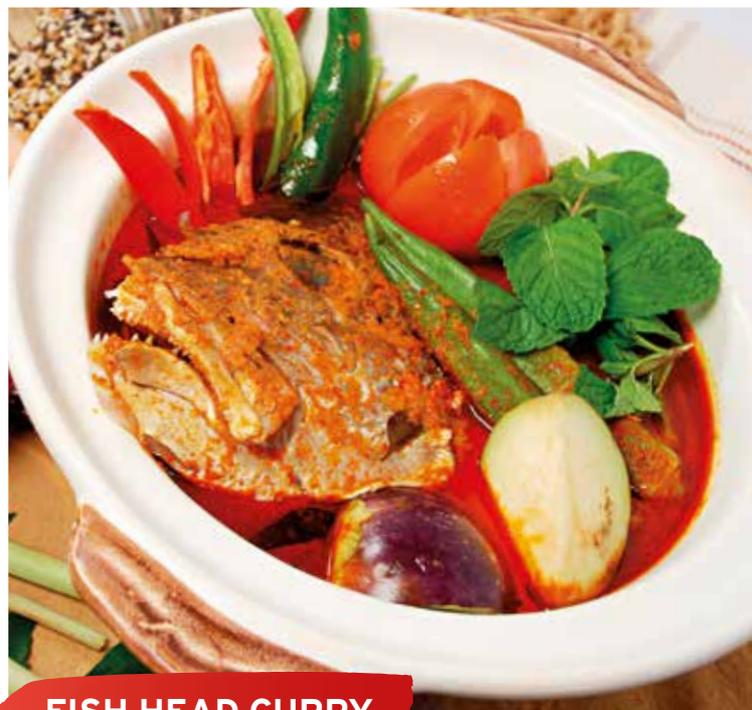
Chicken rice is very closely linked to the Singaporean identity, as there are very few Singaporeans who haven't sampled the dish themselves. As one of those dishes that is served nearly everywhere from open-air food centres to dedicated chicken rice restaurants, it is difficult to come across a badly-done recipe.

Considered by most locals to be Singapore's national dish, "chicken rice is so strongly associated with the city-state that in neighbouring countries, it is referred to as 'Singapore Chicken Rice,'" so says food writer Wendy Hutton in her book, *Singapore Food*, a go-to text on the island's culinary heritage.

The best-known chicken rice recipe was brought over by early immigrants from the southern Chinese province of Hainan. The Hainanese would prepare the dish by steaming or boiling their chicken with ginger, salt and a few drops of fragrant sesame oil or screw-pine leaves, and then using the resulting broth to cook the rice with which the sliced bird is served.

There is no fixed way to enjoy chicken rice — it can be eaten as simply as chicken in one mouthful and then rice in the next, but any aficionado will tell you it is the condiments that make the dish. A garnishing sauce made of soy sauce, chicken broth and sesame oil is a good start. But the chilli-paste dipping sauce is without a doubt the star of the show — reputations of chicken rice restaurants are built on how good their chilli sauce is. Often also on standby are sweet soy sauce and minced ginger, each bringing with them a new dimension of flavour.

Chicken rice has been adapted by races other than the Hainanese originators. Some Malay vendors offer fried instead of boiled chicken, while Chinese and Malay chicken rice chefs sometimes roast their chicken or braise it in soya sauce for yet another twist on a classic.



FISH HEAD CURRY

The exact origins of this dish are not verifiable but as the story goes, the fish head curry Singaporeans and visitors know and love is said to be the brainchild of an enterprising ethnic Indian chef in the 1950s who wanted his food to appeal to a wider audience.

He (rightly) believed that as the Chinese waste no part of any animal, fish or vegetable in their cooking, they would thus fancy eating the heads of fish — but cooked in his own spicy curry. He was right, and his invention — a whole fish head, typically that of a red snapper, cooked in curry — was a culinary hit. Today, the dish is offered at restaurants run by all the major ethnic groups.

Well-known Singaporean food author Sylvia Tan explains that the dish is so popular because of its complexity — as well as its heat. "The spices provide the extra *oomph*, whether it is the trade spices from India or the herb spices from South-east Asia," says Sylvia. "It is also loved for the textural eating it provides, with the gelatinous tasty flesh close to the bone".

Over time and through the interpretations of Singapore's various ethnic groups, the original recipe has evolved. The Indian version tends to be fiery hot; the Malay version made tangier with tamarind juice and even pineapple slices; while the version sold by Chinese vendors tends to be heavier in texture and more creamy thanks to lashings of coconut milk.

Whichever version one prefers, the effect is the same, the dish imparting a sense of heat from the curry and a heightened sense of awareness thanks to the hit from the chilli and spices.



Joining Hands
FINE FARE

Spend any length of time in Singapore and you will discover that eating is a national pastime. Indeed, it is a common thread that binds locals and foreign residents — as well as tourists. The number of restaurants in this cosmopolitan city has jumped in the past few years, with some even being named “worth taking a plane ride for” by food publications.

Fuelling a recent growth in food tourism is a plethora of food festivals that promote Singapore’s dynamic dining scene. From street food vendors to glitzy restaurants helmed by famous chefs, the country’s mouth-watering fare is showcased during culinary events throughout the year. The presence of Michelin-starred chefs from all over the world adds star wattage to these festivals.

These were some highlights in 2015, ahead of Singapore’s 50th birthday (SG50) mega celebrations on 9 August.

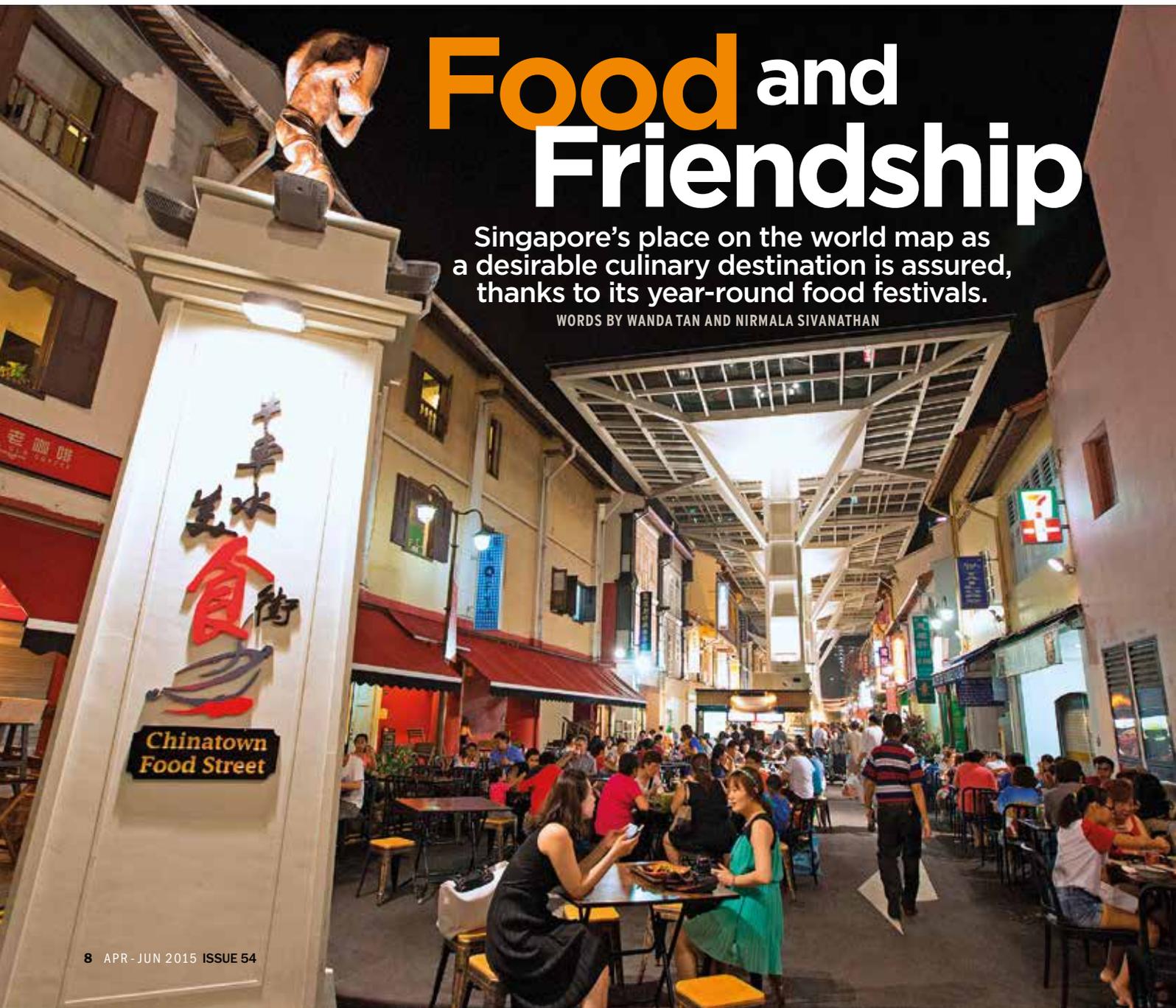


↑ Visitors enjoyed an interactive experience at this year’s installment of SAVOUR.

Food and Friendship

Singapore’s place on the world map as a desirable culinary destination is assured, thanks to its year-round food festivals.

WORDS BY WANDA TAN AND NIRMALA SIVANATHAN



Chinatown
Food Street



SAVOUR

26 – 29 March 2015

Back for the fourth time, this annual event brought together top chefs from Singapore and around the world, and made fine dining accessible to the public through tasting sessions, “live” cooking demonstrations and other culinary activities. The event made CNN Travel’s *World’s Best Food Festivals* list in 2012, the same year it debuted.

This year, Singapore chefs took centre stage. “In line with SG50, we decided to emphasise local talent and locally-based establishments and create more opportunities for them to shine,” said Darren Chen, Executive Director of Savour Events. Out of the 19 award-winning restaurants which served up over 50 signature dishes for the public to sample, only four are based outside Singapore. Among the big-name and emerging local talents were chefs Andre Chiang (Restaurant Andre), Bjorn Shen (Artichoke) and Han Liguang (Labyrinth).

The four-day shindig — which included a 22,000 sq ft Gourmet Market — drew more than 18,000 people. Besides feasting on sumptuous dishes, they attended celebrity chef masterclasses and workshops.

← The nation’s culinary heritage will take centre stage at Chinatown Food Street during the Singapore Food Festival.



→ Right and below: The Singapore Food Festival celebrates traditional foods and modern fare with a local twist.

WORLD GOURMET SUMMIT

6 April – 3 May 2015

Australian newspaper *Sydney Morning Herald* named the World Gourmet Summit (WGS) one of six best gourmet events in the world in 2013 — and with good reason. Jointly launched by local F&B consultancy Peter Knipp Holdings and Singapore Tourism Board (STB) in 1997, the WGS is one of South-east Asia’s premier fine-dining festivals. Each year, top restaurants in Singapore host and collaborate with guest chefs to curate special menus. The line-up also features culinary workshops, master classes and wine-tasting sessions led by internationally-acclaimed vintners.

Almost 30 prestigious guest chefs and sommeliers — including brothers Josep and Jordi Roca of the three-Michelin-star El Celler de Can Roca in Spain — took part this year in a series of sold-out events. Their aim, said Josep Roca, was to take guests on a memorable “journey of gastronomic discovery”. Other key events held were the WGS Awards of Excellence, which honours outstanding F&B professionals and establishments in Singapore and the region, and a charity gala dinner which raised more than S\$700,000 for the less-fortunate.



→ Brothers Josep and Jordi Roca of Spain were two of the celebrity chefs who attended this year’s World Gourmet Summit.

SINGAPORE FOOD FESTIVAL

17 July – 2 August 2015

Organised by STB, the annual food festival celebrates the nation’s rich multicultural and culinary heritage which comprises an eclectic mix of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Peranakan (Chinese-Malay) influences. Some 1.2 million people attended the festival in 2012, with tourists making up more than 300,000 — and larger numbers are expected this year.

One of the dozen or so exciting activities confirmed this year is a tribute to the iconic Old Airport Road Food Centre — where more than 150 food stalls have offered traditional hawker fare since 1972 — as well as a lavish dinner at the Shangri-La Hotel, where old dishes will be reinterpreted. Visitors can also look forward to special meals prepared by top local chefs and workshops conducted by the likes of food author and restaurateur Violet Oon, an STB-appointed ‘food ambassador’.

The Britain-based *World Travel Guide* online portal made a special mention of the Singapore Food Festival as one of the main attractions not to be missed this year in Singapore.





→ The Zocalo Cathedral, a visual spectacle and focal point in the Historic Centre of Mexico City, is also the largest cathedral in the Americas.



Earlier this year, the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) embarked on two new development partnerships with Mexico and Turkey. While these are not conceptually new to the SCP, our inaugural collaborations with the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID) and Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) bring new possibilities to both different regions and South-South cooperation. We were able to pool each country's expertise and resources to design customised programmes that shared our unique development experiences with participants from South America and Africa.

countries believe that access to reliable housing is a basic right that should be met first before cities can move towards pursuing growth in other areas, such as economic growth and employment.

From 23 to 25 March 2015, 28 officials from 21 Latin American and Caribbean countries attended the Mexico-Singapore Joint Seminar on Housing and Urban Development in Mexico City, jointly implemented by AMEXCID and the SCP.

Experts from Singapore's Centre of Liveable Cities (CLC) worked with Mexico's National Housing Commission (CONAVI) to share with participants the basis of Singaporean and Mexican housing

↓ Mr Alex Ho from Singapore's Centre for Liveable Cities gave participants of the Mexico-Singapore Joint Seminar on Housing and Urban Development a broad overview of Singapore's urban planning policies and frameworks.

SHARING SINGAPORE'S HOUSING AND URBAN PLANNING EXPERIENCES

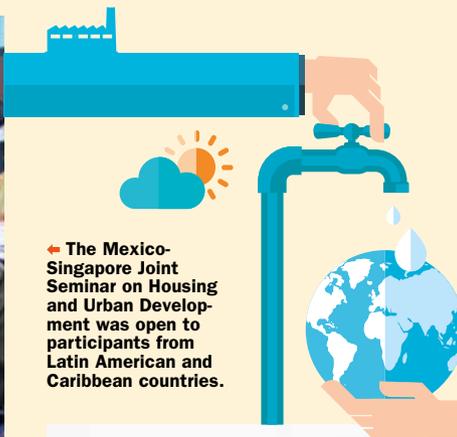
With population densities among the highest in the world — Singapore and Mexico City respectively rank as 27th and 29th globally — both cities prove that dense populations can be managed with skilful administration and effective urban planning. Both



Strength in Synergy

EXPANDING THE SCP WITH
NEW PARTNERSHIPS.





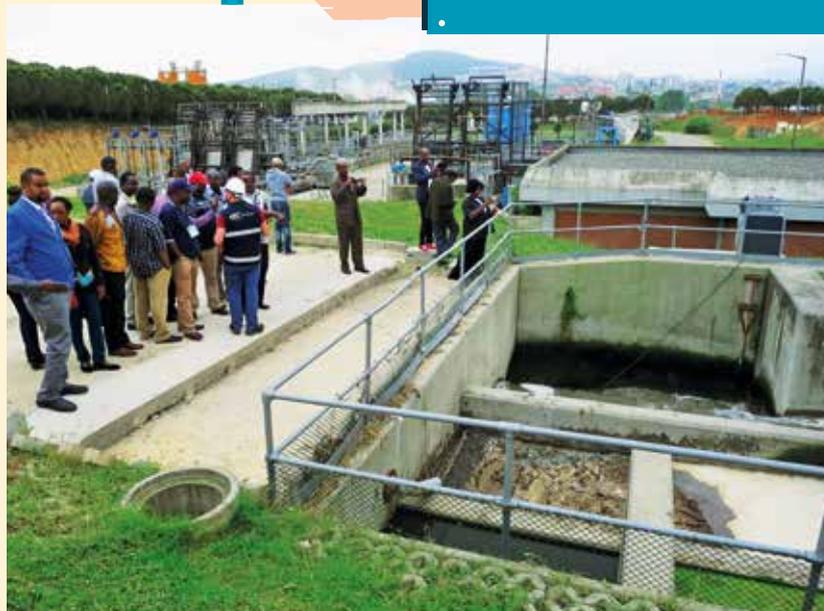
← The Mexico-Singapore Joint Seminar on Housing and Urban Development was open to participants from Latin American and Caribbean countries.

policies, frameworks for integrated urban planning, and innovative public policy. CLC's key "Liveability Framework" is a lens through which participants understood Singapore's urban planning policies — based on ensuring high quality of life, a sustainable environment and a competitive economy. The course included a site visit to the Historic Centre of Mexico City, which gave participants a first-hand experience of zoning and heritage conservation practices in the vibrant Mexican capital.

TELLING THE SINGAPORE WATER STORY

Held in Istanbul, the historical heart of Turkey, our inaugural joint programme with TIKA from 18 to 22 May 2015 was attended by 26 officials from 12 African countries. We invited Mr Ng Han Tong from PUB, Singapore's national water agency, and Mr Wong Kai Yeng from Civil Service College, who have dedicated their careers to developing sustainable solutions to Singapore's water challenges, to share Singapore's water story.

While the Singapore water story has been much-lauded, self-sufficiency in providing clean and reliable water for all Singaporeans is a perennial challenge. Despite the lack of land for rainwater catchment, Singapore has developed effective and cost-efficient methods to augment our water supplies. Participants learned about Singapore's integrated approach to urban water resource management, including our experiences in cleaning up the Singapore River, our NEWater technologies, and Singapore's "Active, Beautiful, Clean" (ABC) Waters Programme.



Likewise, Turkey has also created efficient solutions to maximise their limited water resources for energy, agriculture and drinking. Speakers from Turkey's General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works, General Directorate of Water Management, and the Turkish Water Institute gave participants an insight into Turkey's innovative strategies for dealing with pertinent issues such as floods and droughts, protection of river basins and dam construction. They were also treated to a first-hand view of Turkey's wastewater treatment technologies during the site visit to the Paşaköy Advanced Biological Wastewater Treatment Plant.

↑ Participants of the Singapore-Turkey joint training programme on Sustainable Water Resources Management visited the Paşaköy Advanced Biological Wastewater Treatment Plant in Istanbul, Turkey, to find out more about Turkey's wastewater treatment technologies.

Despite the initial unfamiliarity of our new partnerships, both programmes were well-received by participants and implementing agencies alike. Riding on the success of these two programmes, we look forward to having long-standing and fruitful partnerships with Mexico and Turkey.

Participant George Browne, a town planner from Barbados who attended the Mexico-Singapore Joint Seminar on Housing and Urban Development, appreciated the opportunity to "gain insight on the integrated approach to planning in various countries". As strategic hubs in our respective regions, there lies huge potential for us to pool our diverse expertise together, creating synergies to share our developmental experiences with other countries.



← Participants engaged in conversation with trainer Mr Ng Han Tong from PUB, Singapore's National Water Agency.

