

The Ultimate Guide to
**FILIPINO
 FOOD**



Aaron & Colene

Hey, we're Aaron Palabyab & Colene Tan!

Aaron is a filmmaker and a photographer specializing in travel-oriented content. He also works as a cameraman and videographer traveling around the Philippines and the world.

Colene is a professionally-trained chef who has worked both in the Philippines and abroad. Having been in the food and beverage industry for more than 10 years, Colene has focused on deepening her knowledge in sustainability, local agriculture and regional Filipino cuisine.



In this course, you'll discover the underexplored world of Filipino cuisine.

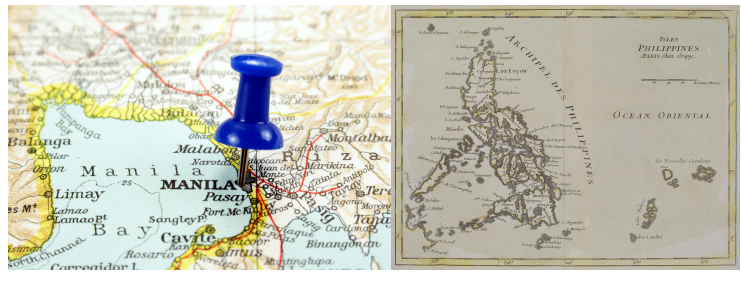
This course guide summarizes everything we talk about in the video. This is a digital file you can download and print out or keep on your phone, tablet, or computer.





The History of Manila

Manila is a metropolis made up of:
16 CITIES & 1 MUNICIPALITY



This city has a rich, surprising history, and so much yet to discover, especially when it comes to food. And, in an archipelago of 7,641 islands, it's the place where all the country's cuisines converge.

A Brief History

In 1565, the Spanish established control of the islands that would be called the Philippines. In the same year, Manila became the capital.

The Spanish built a fortress city, called Intramuros, in the capital of Manila. The walls of Intramuros still stand today. Spain held their rule over the Philippines for the following 333 years.

Then, in 1898, America snatched the Philippines away from Spain in a largely shambolic, symbolic naval battle in Manila Bay. The U.S. brushed off the local revolution for independence, and made Manila their headquarters.

Manila was the world's second most devastated city in World War II after Warsaw, Poland.

In 1946, Manila became the capital of the newly independent Republic of the Philippines. The city was rapidly rebuilt with US aid, and underwent a Golden Age, earning it the nickname "The Pearl of the Orient."



What is Filipino Food?

Pinoy ~ Filipino

“ (Pinoy food is) honest, without pretense, or ambition.
Words from a local chef



The First Major Influence: Resourcefulness

So many Filipino dishes originated out of a need to be resourceful. Filipino cuisine was developed as a way to find creative ways to use unwanted cuts of meat, preserve precious food, or make cheap ingredients go a long way. The vast majority of Filipinos still live on humble means, and stay resourceful to this day.

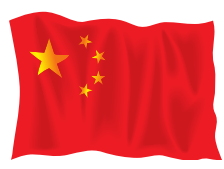
The Second Major Influence: Foreign Ties



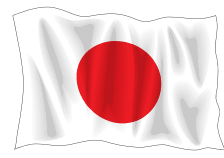
From the Spanish, we got feasts and banquets. Fiestas dedicated to town saints are a huge part of our culture. We even adopted the word “merienda” which means afternoon snack.



From the USA, we got our love for canned, junk, and fast food, and candy. The Americans also brought over sodas, ketchup, and mayonnaise, all of which are heavily used now in marinades and recipes. Some regions even use soda to tenderize and caramelize their meats.



From China, we got noodles. Long before the Spanish arrived, China had always been around as a trading partner. Immigrants from the southern provinces of China came to the Philippines in search of greener pastures during the 19th and 20th centuries. We see a lot of their influence in the noodles we eat, called “pancit” including bihon, miki, sotanghon, and miswa, to name a few.



From Japan, we got sauces. Japan influenced our trademark dipping sauce, which is a mix of soy sauce and calamansi (a local citrus fruit). We also adopted Miso to be used for “sinigang,” our most beloved soup. Japan even gave us a key component of our most famous dessert.

The Components of a Filipino Meal

1 Kanin (Rice)

Rice goes with everything. Filipinos don't consider a meal complete unless there's rice, no matter how many other carbohydrates you might be having!

2 Ulam (Meat)

The most common meat we use is pork — the Philippines is pork paradise! We also have an abundance of fish, seafood, and chicken. Beef is rarely used because it's expensive and more difficult to come by.



3 Sabaw (Soup)

The sabaw usually contains portions of meat. It's often sloshed right onto the rice. This is a way to make a meal with lots of rice and little meat tastier with every bite, making a few ingredients add up to a lot.

4 Sawsawan (Dipping sauce)

There are many different kinds of dipping sauces, which are combined in small bowls or on the plate by each individual eater.

How to Eat Filipino Style

Salu-salo ~ a typical Filipino get-together centered around a meal.

Mixing is key.

We pile all the different meats and rice onto one plate, then mix everything together with the soup and sauces, so that every bite contains all the flavors and textures of the meal. We don't leave it to the cooks to decide the final mix: each mouthful is unique and "sariling timpla" — your own mix.

As a result of all this mixing, we use utensils differently. We don't usually use knives. Instead, we have a spoon in our right hand and a fork in the left. The spoon is used as a kind of shovel for the already mixed meat, rice, soup, and sauce. It's also used to break apart and scoop up bits of meat. We don't usually need a knife for this because many of our dishes already use bite-sized tender chunks of meat.

When eating noodles, we don't twirl, but rather chop them up using a criss-cross motion with the spoon and fork. And then we shovel the bite-sized noodles into our mouths.

The quintessential way to eat Filipino food is with your hands. We use one hand to scoop up meat and rice, mix it all up, and dunk it in our mouth. This is the preferred way for many Pinoys to enjoy a good meal!



Sawsawan, Explained

1 Calamansi

Calamansi is a citrus fruit. It's a staple in every Filipino dining experience, and it's best eaten with noodles, soups, grilled meats, and seafood.



2 Toyomansi

Toyomansi is a mixture of soy sauce and calamansi, often served with local chili, called "labuyo", for an extra kick. This is best paired in almost every meat or seafood dish, especially if it's grilled or fried, as it helps brighten up the dish.



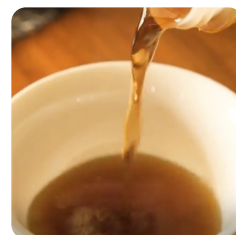
3 Bagoong

Bagoong is fermented fish or shrimp paste. This salty, and sometimes sweet, mixture is often paired with green mangoes, kare-kare, ginataan, and various vegetable dishes.



4 Patis

Patis is fermented fish sauce, a by-product of bagoong production. This liquid condiment is also rich in umami and is used in various soups, stews, marinades, and sometimes mixed with your toyomansi.



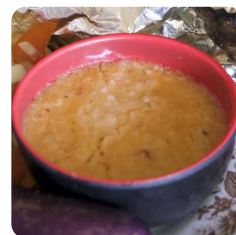
5 Suka

"Suka" are vinegars that are found all over the country. From sugar cane, palm and coconut to fruit vinegars like banana and pineapple, each vinegar has its own distinct taste and use depending on the recipe and whatever is available in the area. These vinegars can also be added to your own sawsawan.



6 Buro

Buro means "to pickle" and it could be anything from vegetables to mangoes, but most commonly it usually refers to fermented rice paste. Buro pairs well with vegetables and any deep-fried dish as its acidity cuts through the rich and fatty flavors.



Watch the locals to see if the Sawsawan are self-serve, or if you need to ask the waiters to bring them to you. If you don't know what's in each container, don't be shy to ask.

Must-Try Filipino Dishes



Adobo

Adobo comes from the Spanish word “Adobar” which means to marinate. Adobo usually means chicken or pork marinated or stewed in vinegar. The “standard” version uses soy sauce, but sometimes coconut milk or other sauces are used depending on the region. This saucy, sour, and salty stew is a Filipino favorite as it pairs so well with rice.

Sinigang

Sinigang comes from the word “sigang” which means to stew. The most popular variety is one that is made with tamarind or “santal,” along with the meat, seafood, and vegetable of your choice.



Lechon

Lechon is our famous roast pig. The Philippine Lechon comes in two versions; the Manila version and the Cebu version. The Cebu version uses a lot of lemongrass, citrus fruits, and various other herbs and spices that require little to no sauce. The Manila version does not have as many aromatics and stuffing, but relies heavily on the liver sauce it comes with.

Sisig

Sisig is a favorite of many visitors and our most popular bar chow. To make sisig, you boil, grill, and chop up a pig's head. Add onions, chilies, and soy sauce, serve it on a sizzling plate and you've got sizzling sisig! This combination of rich, crunchy, and chewy textures has made its way to every Filipino menu. It can be eaten with rice or on its own with beer.



Kare-kare

Kare-kare is a peanut-based oxtail stew that usually has banana heart, vegetables, and sometimes beef and tripe. The rich taste of roasted peanuts blended into a thick hearty stew makes it the perfect comfort food. Some speculate it could have been the local take on the Indian curry, while others say it dates back to pre-colonial times. In any case, this rich stew is best eaten with a little bagoong.

Filipino Desserts

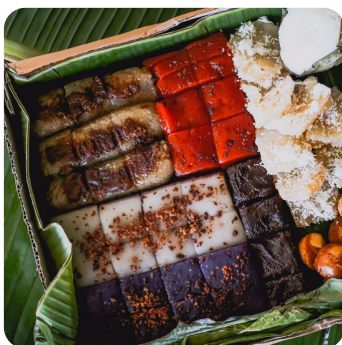


Halo-halo

Halo-halo is the emblematic Pinoy dessert. Literally translated to “mix-mix,” this shaved ice dessert comes with a range of toppings, from fruits, beans, and jello, to ice cream, milk, and leche flan. It’s believed that the Japanese introduced a dessert that had shaved ice with beans during the war, and that became the base for halo-halo.

Sorbetes

Sorbetes is Filipino ice cream. Sorbetes is often sold by vendors on the street, called sorbeteros. Sorbeteros have colorful carts containing a few different ice cream flavors, sometimes even cheese-flavored ice cream. A very Filipino way to eat sorbetes is between two pieces of bread, like an ice cream sandwich.



Kakanin

Kakanin comes from two words which are kain (to eat) and kanin (cooked rice). Combined, kakanin usually refers to rice cakes. There are many types of kakanin that vary from region to region. These rice cakes can be sticky, like biko, suman, sapin-sapin and kutsinta, or soft like puto and bibingka. All these rice cakes are usually steamed or boiled and made with lots of sugar. They can be quite hard to make but their colorful appearance makes them a staple for celebrations.

In true Pinoy fashion, each kakanin comes with its own “sawsawan,” or topping. One of them is called “Latik,” which has two different meanings. If you are from the north, it refers to toasted coconut milk curds. If you are from the southern Visayas region, Latik means a caramelized coconut cream syrup.

How & Where to Get Filipino Food in Manila

1

When going out to look for food, we recommend downloading offline google maps for the Manila area, so that you can navigate more easily around Manila.

2

We recommend doing research to find the best restaurants. Be sure to take a look on Google, check out local food and travel blogs, and watch some vlogs. Two of our favorite sites are: [Our Awesome Planet](#) and [Spot.ph](#).



The Philippines is the #1 user of Facebook in the entire world so most businesses have a Facebook page, and most of us use it to search, comment, advertise, and leave reviews. Once you find somewhere that you want to eat, you should follow up with a quick check on their Facebook pages to see if 1. They're still open, and at what days and times and 2. If the reviews are actually good.

Where to find Filipino food

Binondo

Binondo is the first and oldest Chinatown in the world. Located in the heart of Manila, this is the center for the fusion of Chinese and Filipino cuisine. The Chinese brought their food and culture here and adapted it to local taste. The food here is both unique and delicious. The best places are often unassuming, so it's wise to research, or bring a local who knows the good spots.

Intramuros (Old Manila)

Old Manila is home to the historical walled city called Intramuros. With its cobblestone streets, this charming site is home to a lot of Spanish-Filipino cuisine. Nearby is Malate, an older nightlife and red light district that's slowly becoming a little Koreatown.



How & Where to Get Filipino Food in Manila

Pasay (Manila Bay)

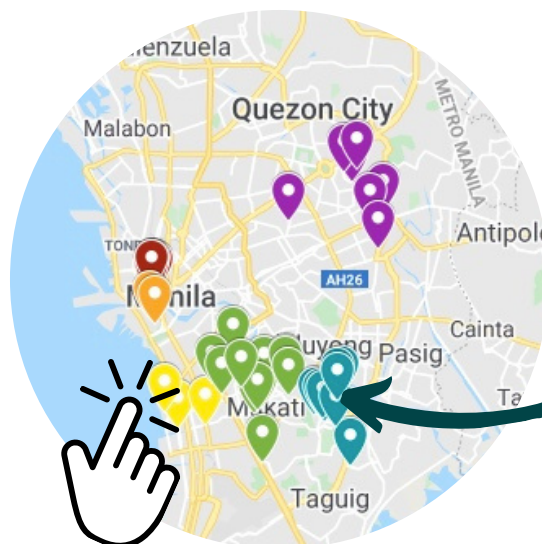
If you head down to Manila Bay, you can try some fresh local seafood at the Dampa. Dampa usually refers to a live seafood market where you can have them cook whatever you buy on the spot. Things are weighed and sold similar to a fresh seafood market, then you proceed to look for a restaurant that will cook it the way you want. Just remember that the price of the live weight of the seafood is separate from the cooking fees (and this is usually indicated in the menu).

Makati City

Makati City is the financial district. Here you can find a mixture of cheap and high-end dining. There are a lot of different cuisines in the area to accommodate all kinds of business travelers. Greenbelt and Rockwell Mall are the most convenient options, both with plenty of good restaurants and shopping. The Legazpi district also has some hidden gems, as well as its popular Sunday market. Poblacion is the newest gentrified area of Makati, as it is located in the red light district, which is now also the main backpacker district in Manila.

BGC (Bonifacio Global City)

BCG is the newer financial and lifestyle district with lots of modern buildings and US-style grid city planning. Here you can find a lot of modern fine-dining and upscale bistros, that are usually worth the extra pesos. There are also interesting speakeasies if you're looking for a little nightlife. Alcohol is much cheaper in the Philippines than in most western countries, but in the BGC you'll notice that the alcohol prices are a little steeper.



Be sure to check out our interactive map of this course, that lists great places to eat in Manila, divided up by region.

Eat Like a True Local: Street Food & Fast Food



Street food in the Philippines is not as formal and organized as our other Asian neighbors. It can be found on any random roadside and it would be best to go with a local who can verify its safety. A lot of our street food consists of grilled skewers and other light snacks.



Balut

Balut is a fertilized duck egg that's boiled and eaten in the shell. To eat it, you crack it open, peel off the inner membrane, and begin by sucking up the 'soup'. Then, you season it with some salt and suka, peel the rest of the shell, and take a bite of the yolk.

A few of our street food favorites:



For next level street food, you can look into carinderias — humble eateries by the roadside — and public markets serving extremely cheap, home-cooked meals for the masses. Just like home, the menus vary day to day and place to place. They are found everywhere, all over the country, and the rule of thumb to find the best ones is to follow the crowd, whether it's people, taxis, or pedicabs.

Ordering at a carinderia is easy, as these places are also called "turo-turo," literally "point-point." Point at one or two ulam that you want, order a cup of rice or two, and usually, there's a free cup of steaming hot salty broth to slosh on top of it.



Jollibee

Jollibee is a Philippine fast-food juggernaut (it's our answer to McDonald's). The must-try is the iconic Chickenjoy — their signature fried chicken with gravy and rice. As their ads say, it's "crispylicious" and "juicylicious."

Useful Tips for Dining in Manila

English is spoken everywhere. That said, knowing how to say a few Tagalog words can go a long way in winning over the locals.

Salamat ~ Thank You!

Masarap ~ Delicious!

For vegetarians and vegans, it can be a little harder to find dishes that don't contain meat or animal products. Ask that meat and fish be removed from any veggie dish because they almost always contain them or are cooked with them.

Food allergies are rarely considered here. It's possible, though not usual, to ask the cook to remove or change certain ingredients. So, try if you must, but don't expect this.

Expect all drinks to be very, very sweet, including cocktails, and our beloved 3-in-1 instant coffee. Feel free to adjust things to your taste, or ask that no sugar be added.

Don't drink tap water! Although "house water" is free in nearly all restaurants, make sure it's filtered, or else stick to bottled water. If the glass comes with ice, you may want to remove it to be safe.

Always bring cash, preferably small bills! While some higher-end commercial establishments accept credit cards, the vast majority will not. The simpler the restaurant, the smaller the change you should have ready. Don't try to buy street food with anything bigger than a 100-peso bill!

Tips are optional, and we usually leave a 20 or 50 peso (\$1) bill. High-end places include service charge in the bill, but you can also leave tips if you'd like.

Glossary

The Classics

- Boiled/ steamed
 - Nilaga - usually refers to a broth of either beef or pork.
 - Sinigang - a sour soup with meat, vegetables, and sometimes seafood
 - Tinola - ginger chicken soup
 - Balut - hard boiled fertilized duck embryo
 - Bulalo - beef shank and bone marrow soup
- Stewed
 - Adobo - a vinegar-based stew usually made with pork and chicken, most often with soy sauce
 - Kare kare - a peanut-based oxtail stew often paired with bagoong
 - Dinuguan - pork's blood meat stew
 - Paksiw - to poach in a vinegar broth
 - Kaldereta - tomato-based meat stew with liver spread added to it
 - Ginataan - cooked in coconut milk
- Grilled / Roast
 - BBQ - pork, fish, chicken, organs, etc
 - Inasal - grilled chicken marinated in vinegar
 - Lechon - roast pig
- Fried
 - Lumpia - fried spring rolls
 - Pancit - palabok, canton, malabon, etc - various kinds of noodle dishes
 - Sisig - boiled, grilled and fried pork mask chopped up and served on a sizzling plate
 - Lechon kawali/ bagnet - deep fried pork
 - Crispy pata - deep fried pork shank and knuckles
 - Chicharon - pork rinds
- Salted/cured
 - Longanisa (regional specialty) - pork sausages with different varieties per region
 - Dried fish - tuyo, daing, danggit etc
 - Buro - a fermented condiment that usually has rice and seafood
 - Bagoong - a fermented shrimp or fish condiment

Sweets, Breads, and Pastries

- Rice cakes
 - Puto - steamed rice cake
 - Bibingka - charcoal baked coconut salted egg rice cake
 - Sapin-sapin - colorful sticky layered glutinous rice cakes
 - kutsinta - brown sticky rice cake
 - Puto bumbong - steamed purple rice cakes
 - Palitaw - flat coconut and sesame coated rice cake
 - Suman - sticky rice steamed in banana or palm leaves
 - Espasol - coconut rice cake coated with toasted rice flour
 - Biko - wholegrain sticky rice cake

- Breads and pastries
 - Pan de sal - sweet milk buns
 - Pan de coco - sweet coconut filled bread
 - Ensaymada - brioche topped with grated cheese and sugar
 - Mamon - a type of sponge cake
 - Ube halaya (palaman) - purple yam jam
 - Coco jam (palaman) - coconut jam
 - Polvoron - compressed toasted flour, milk powder and sugar cakes
- Hot
 - Champorado with tuyo - hot chocolate drink paired with dried fish
 - Taho - soft tofu, brown sugar syrup, and tapioca pearls
 - Turon - deep fried and caramelized bananas and jackfruit spring rolls
 - Banana Que - caramelized banana skewers
 - Ginataan bilo bilo - glutinous rice balls in coconut milk mixed with fruits and other toppings
 - Buko pie - young coconut pie
- Cold
 - Leche flan - caramel custard
 - Buko pandan - coconut milk, pandan jelly cubes, and tapioca pearls
 - Halo halo - shaved ice, milk, and various toppings
 - Maja Blanca - coconut and corn pudding
 - Mais con yelo - shaved ice, corn, milk, sugar, and caramelized bananas

Chinoy Food

- Arroz Caldo -chicken rice porridge
- Batchoy (Chinese: 肉脆) - pork offals noodle soup
- Hopia (Chinese: 好餅) - bean-filled moon cake
- Kiampong (Chinese: 鹹飯) - a variant of fried rice
- Kikiam (Chinese: 雞捲) - bean curd wrapped sausage
- Kwapau (Chinese: 割包) (cuapao) - pork belly in steamed buns
- Lomi (Chinese: 撈麵) - sticky noodle soup
- Lumpia (Chinese: 潤餅) - spring rolls (FRESH AND FRIED)
- Machang (Chinese: 肉粽) - sticky rice and various toppings wrapped in bamboo leaves
- Maki mi (Chinese: 肉羹) - pork, beef or fish in a thick cornstarch-based soup
- Mami (Chinese: 馬麵/肉麵) - a noodle soup invented by Ma Mon Luk
- Pancit (Chinese: 便食) - noodles
- Siomai (Chinese: 燒賣) - steamed pork dim sum
- Siopao (Chinese: 燒包) - steamed buns with various fillings
- Taho (Chinese: 豆花) - soft tofu, brown sugar syrup, and tapioca pearls
- Goto (Chinese: 牛肚) - rice porridge with ox tripe
- Bicho-Bicho (Chinese: 米棗) / Shakoy (Chinese: 油炸粿) - youtiao -twisted and deep-fried dough coated in sugar
- Tikoy (Chinese: 甜粿) - glutinous rice cake often fried with egg