

Andrew Zimmern: Filipino food is the 'next big thing'

Written by Veronica Meewes
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Andrew Zimmern, host of "Bizarre Foods." (Photo by Veronica Meewes)

Few types of cuisine are hard to find anymore.

Mexican and Tex-Mex are readily available, Indian buffets are standard fare, sushi just seems to keep growing in popularity, and Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese are easily accessible.

And food experts claim that Peruvian and Korean cuisine are the fare du jour.

So what's the next fad food?

Andrew Zimmern, host of "Bizarre Foods" on the Travel Channel, has a theory: "I predict, two

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years from now, Filipino food will be what we will have been talking about for six months ... I think that's going to be the next big thing," he told TODAY.com.

"I want to go on record — this is not something that's hot now somewhere and will get hot everywhere else," he said.

"It's just starting. I think it's going to take another year and a half to get up to critical mass, but everybody loves Chinese food, Thai food, Japanese food, and it's all been exploited. The Filipinos combined the best of all of that with Spanish technique. The Spanish were a colonial power there for 500 years, and they left behind adobo and cooking in vinegar — techniques that, applied to those tropical Asian ingredients, are miraculous."

Filipino cuisine has a variety of foreign influences.

The impact of China is evidenced in their use of noodles (pancit), fried rice (sinangang) and spring rolls (lumpia), as well as the soy sauce and fish sauce found in many other dishes. Indonesian and Malaysian influence can be seen in the use of coconut milk and rice, particularly in desserts, as well as the use of chilis (though most Filipino food isn't very spice-heavy).

The Spanish were responsible for bringing bay leaves, tomatoes and garlic, as well as the technique of sautéing with olive oil.

Longanisa is a sweet pork sausage (similar to the Spanish longaniza) which can be found in Filipino dishes.

Other Spanish dishes often found on Filipino menus are flan, paella, and adobo, a method of braising meat in garlic, vinegar, peppercorns, and soy sauce.

Filipino food isn't on the radar of mainstream America, but Zimmern thinks that's going to change.

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“San Diego is now a big enough ethnic population of Filipinos that chefs are going there and seeing stuff. I think it’ll creep up into Los Angeles and from there go around the rest of the country,” he foresees.

Cristina Quackenbush is the head chef and proprietor of Milkfish, a popular Filipino pop-up restaurant found inside Marie’s Bar, a Marigny neighborhood favorite in New Orleans.

“I have grown up cooking Filipino food from my mother and learning homemade-from-scratch fare from my grandmother. She had 20 acres of land in which she had planted every fruit and vegetable you can think of!” she told TODAY.com.

Before relocating to New Orleans 12 years ago, Quackenbush lived briefly in San Diego, where she encountered most of the Filipino restaurants she’s seen in the States.

“I also found a little one in Tennessee once,” she recalls.

“I have not encountered any other than those! This is why I want to bring it to the forefront. It is such a wonderful cuisine that must be shared.”

Quackenbush’s menu at Milkfish is split into three categories: appetizers, small dishes and dinners.

She also offers vegetarian twists on classic Filipino dishes, such as vegetarian mechado, which traditionally appears as a marinated beef dish.

She describes her cuisine as the soul food of Southeast Asia.

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“I definitely think (Filipino food) is gaining popularity,” she affirms.

“I have never encountered anyone that I have fed that did not like it!”

Spam started being used in Filipino cooking during World War II and remains a popular ingredient.

The following recipe is a typical breakfast dish, served with an over-easy egg.

Try it and you might just be pleasantly surprised (I was!).