

# DINING

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# Philippine cuisine

By Natalie Haughton Food Editor

**C**ecilia de Castro, owner of the Academy of Culinary Education (ACE), is out to dispel the common notion that her native Filipino food is "greasy, fried, brown, boring, unhealthy and ugly."

Philippine cuisine is a mixture of Spanish, Chinese and Malay influences, she says. "The trinity in Filipino cooking is garlic, onions and tomatoes, which is in many dishes."

"The cuisine features a combination of sweet, sour, salty and vinegary flavors with a sprinkling of bitter. Contrasting tastes are common such as eating something sour but dipping it in something sweet or eating something salty with a sour fruit condiment," she points out.

The food consists of "lots of vegetables and fresh fruits, seafood (being a country consisting of thousands of islands) and other viandes such as chicken, pork, beef, carabao (water buffalo) and goat." Rice is a staple and noodles are popular, too. "The most common cooking techniques are grilling, steaming, boiling, braising, sauteing (stir-frying), ginataan (cooking in coconut milk) and frying."

Dishes range from simple to exotic, but "for the most part I think the cooking is very simple."

Filipinos love to have many condiments on the table and that's the way diners change or finish the seasoning or the flavor of a dish — with items such as fish sauce, soy sauce mixed with calamansi or lemon, chopped tomatoes, chopped mango, grilled mashed eggplant, cilantro, onions, banana ketchup (sweet or spicy versions) and fermented shrimp (bagoong). "Each diner in a sense is a chef."

The food is also very regional, she continues, adding that the area of the country — Pampanga (20 miles from Manila), where her parents were born and raised — was known as the culinary capital of the Philippines and noted for its pastries and sweets. That's how both sides of the family ended up in the wholesale confectionary business many years ago.

Growing up in a traditional Filipino household, "we ate five meals a day — three main ones (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and two smaller ones (snacks). ... Everyday food (meals almost always started with soup) was a selec-



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— CECILIA DE CASTRO, left, owner of the Academy of Culinary Education

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Cecilia de Castro shares notes on some of her favorite recipes.  
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