

SPECIALTY COFFEE HAS ARRIVED IN THE PHILIPPINES IN THE LAST FEW YEARS. BUT WHAT I EXPERIENCED IN A RECENT TRIP TO MANILA WAS UP THERE WITH THE BEST. WITH THE LIKES OF TOBY'S ESTATE HAVING SEVERAL CAFES ALREADY AND THE WELL-ADVANCED CAFÉ CULTURE OF SINGAPORE JUST TWO HOURS AWAY, THEY'RE OFF TO A FLYING START.

I was there on the invitation of Savoroso, our distributor, to exhibit Barista Bibles at a trade show, give a talk on training and judge a coffee cocktail competition. With book signing, talking and judging over, Danee and Sheila, my very kind hosts, showed me around Manila's food and coffee culture in the evenings.

What I found particularly interesting about the coffee industry was its close alignment with the bar industry, somewhat like its origin in Italy. So in many cafes, along with the usual quota of espresso equipment and brewing devices of all kinds, would be an extensive range of alcoholic beverages and syrups covering the back wall. Filipinos, I learnt have a 'sweet tooth' so are very fond of sugary additions to their coffee and syrups are a big hit. In judging the coffee cocktail competition, I noticed too that the trainee baristas display a lot of courage and creativity in the ingredients they put together. And with great success. I was told this is due to the combination of Asian and European taste receptors in the Filipino people.

I also learnt about 'flair' – the art of juggling bottles, cocktail shakers, and spoons – anything you can toss in the air and catch in your hand really. These are polished performances that require considerable athletic skill and practice to

execute. So ask for a coffee cocktail in Manila, you might also see group handles and tamps flying about to the latest in popular music. You will wait for your coffee, but if you're not in a hurry on your way to work in the morning, or are avoiding peak hour in the evening, this kind of entertainment fills in the time.

Café crawling in Manila will be just that – unless of course you are with locals who know how to dodge the traffic hot spots by taking a route through back streets and when to avoid peak times lasting several hours. Enjoying long conversations over dinner, it seems, is a national pastime for those wanting to achieve the latter, which was perfect for an Australian wanting to learn about Manila and its social culture.

If you stay in the heart of the Makati district, as I did, you can explore several specialty cafes on foot. So grab a map from your hotel desk and get them to help you mark the locations of the following cafes.

Two Toby's Estate Cafes are within walking distance in Makati – at 125 LP Leviste Street, Salcedo Village and on the 3rd floor of Century City Mall, Kalayaan Avenue. Arrive right on breakfast, lunch or dinner times and you may get caught in the rush as the meals are healthy and the coffee exceptional.

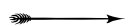
Habitual Coffee specializes in brewed coffee

made mostly from Filipino beans. You can also shop for some artwork while sipping your coffee, as everything on the walls is for sale. It's at 2135 Chino Roces Avenue, Legaspi Village.

Curator Coffee might be a bit hard to find unless you are forewarned as it's tucked away behind a cocktail bar at the front – on the corner of Legaspi and Don Carlos Palanca Street, Legaspi Village. I arrived late after the morning rush and enjoyed a ham and cheese croissant and a fine filter coffee served by super-friendly staff with time to chat about the different coffees they offer.

Restock Coffee is a beautiful homely space full of natural light and tasteful arty things. You could mistake it for an art gallery and you won't find an espresso machine there, but Gia, the barista, will make you an awesome drip or filter coffee. On her recommendation I tried the cold drip, which went down well in the midday Manila heat. You will find it at 7635 Guijo Street, San Antonio Village.

Local Edition serves only Filipino beans and you'll never get bored with the décor as its linked to a design studio whose budding designers change the interior décor every few months I was told. At 116 Perea Street, Legaspi Village, the resident cat will greet you in the garden at the front.





At Yardstick Coffee, 106 Esteban Street, Legaspi Village, the focus is not on coffee cocktails nor artwork nor anything other than coffee served from a bright red La Marzocco. The coffee was exceptional and the food is both modern and healthy. Andree is a SCAE certified trainer and his lovely space includes a training room as well.

In the direction of Quezon City to the north, there are more specialty cafes less than an hour away (or three, if your timing is out). But you'll need to go by car. I'd recommend using Uber for a hassle-free way of getting around, as the drivers of cabs hailed down in the street will want to take you to one of the many Starbucks the minute you say 'café' or 'coffee'.

Craft Coffee was the first specialty cafe in Manila. The original café is a cosy space where Danee and I chatted with Peter, the owner, who explained how the coffee industry has evolved in Manila. Two Filipino WBC trophies sit on a shelf above his tables. He now has four outlets with two in Quezon City – at 65-66 Broadway Avenue and 88 Esteban Abada Street.

The Coffee Empire is beautiful and spacious, with a big roasting room on one side and a lovely bar with low stools on the other. As well as a variety of exotic coffees and devices it can be made with, you will find fine food as well. Ernest, the owner/barista was trained as a chef and was keen for me to try his French-style salmon, which was delicious.

EDSA Coffee Design Group refers to their beverages as 'liquid cuisine'. It's an even larger two level space, with a roastery on the lower level and interesting café spaces on the upper. With

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a vision 'to be the leading expert for specialty beverages in the Philippines', the team of 16 baristas and roasters take experimentation and discovery of new ideas to a level that certainly impressed me.

At Department of Coffee you may find Mark, the Filipino Latte Art Champion and experience the occasional latte art smackdown. The owner Myles, trains all the staff himself, having learnt from baristas and roasters in Portland. He set up his first shop in 2013 and has recently moved to a larger location at 87a Don A. Roces Avenue Quezon City. Don't do as I did, and turn up at the old address in Wilson Street, which I got from the internet!

There's Gloria Jeans from Australia, Costa Coffee from the UK, Second Cup from Canada; a myriad of coffee chains from all over the world can be found the length and breadth of Manila. But the one that stood out is UCC, the Japanese chain. It has several locations and is successfully taking on specialty coffee and doing it very well, it seems.

Since we spent a lot of time chatting over

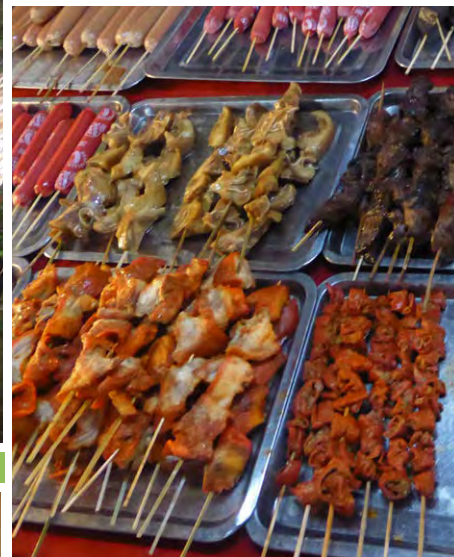
meals, it would only be fair to recommend some of the places I enjoyed.

The Flour Market has a few outlets around Makati and is instantly recognized by any foodie or tourist as a place they might want to try. It's a bakery concept offering a good proportion of 'wheaty' options with a modern take on things like pasta and pizza. Those like me who try to dodge the wheat, however, will find plenty to choose from. I enjoyed a side of duck confit sitting on a sizeable portion of potato mash and pea puree.

For simple authentic Filipino food in Makati, Sarsa was recommended. So long as the alphabet is the same, I can generally navigate the menu in most countries but somehow I've managed to escape any knowledge of what to order on a traditional Filipino menu. I went for an unlikely combination of soup and a plate of curried vegetables. Authentic or not, I'll never know.

When I was dining with locals to help me understand what to order, I learnt that when in doubt, choose pork. It's usually slow cooked and served with generous portions of crackling. And it's very, very tasty. I enjoyed a lovely selection of Filipino food at Blue Wave that also included lightly crumbed calamari, an omelet, an eggplant dish, fried chicken and pork belly.

Keen also to try a Filipino breakfast, I enjoyed a large portion of lightly flavoured rice, a fried egg and a chunk of fried chorizo. The chorizo, of course, hails from the Spanish connection and comes with choices – with garlic, with extra fat, with chili, for example. Or you can have 'regular'. I sense some American influence has crept in here too!



A trip to any Asian city is not complete without a visit to a night food market. There I was to learn another feature of the Filipino menu – unlike other Asian countries, there's a lack of vegetables. The night market presented an impressive and colourful array of meat and seafood of all kinds, stall after stall with not a vegetable in sight. Plenty of rice, though.

I also visited the Intramuros area, meaning 'within the walls'. It's the original Spanish settlement dating from the 16th century, featuring several ornate churches and a good proportion of educational institutions.

Certainly not specialty, but lovely because of its

tranquil ambience is a cafe in a leafy courtyard at the back of Barbaras, a tourist restaurant with a cultural show. So if in need of a quiet place of rest and reflection and a simple (and very inexpensive) something to eat, this café is the place to go. If you'd like more sophisticated surrounds with your meal, *Illustrado*, a little further along the street might be your best choice. It's considerably more pricey, however. I believe some of the monasteries and convents also have restaurants, but finding them will have to wait for next year's visit to The Philippines, when I will also visit the areas including beaches and coffee plantations beyond Manila, which I'm told are very beautiful.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Christine Cottrell is a widely travelled coffee enthusiast with a passion for writing and photography. She's the author of the *Barista Bible* (now in its 2nd international edition) and the *Perfect Espresso Training System* – a series of coffee books and training materials that are now selling globally. www.perfectespresso.com.au