

Food Customs

from the Philippines

Mrs. Soledad Payawal, Iowa State research worker,
tells of the favorite foods in her native islands

WE Filipinos constitute a curious group—known as the westernized Orientals. This is reflected in various phases of our life—in our culture, education, language, religious, social customs and in the choice and preparation of our food.

While we have retained our own Philippine foods habits, we have adopted many foreign methods of cookery and food combinations. It is not unusual for a meal to include Spanish, Chinese and American dishes in addition to our own Philippine foods. The Spanish influence is apparent in the use of onion and tomato sauces, red pimientos, garlic, bay leaves and other seasonings.

The use of salads and raw vegetables as relishes is gaining popularity in the planning of modern Philippine menus and this is undoubtedly an American influence. From the Chinese we have adopted a wide variety of food combinations. All these in addition to our own cookery presents a wide choice for even the most discriminate cooks.

Because rice is the staple food, it may be used in all three meals. For breakfast, fried rice is usually served with eggs and some other food like *longanisa* (Philippine or Chinese style sausage), *tuyo* (dried, salted herring), *tinapà* (smoked herring), *dilis* (dried salted small fish), *tapa* (dried beef fried to a crisp) or fried shrimp. The beverage is usually hot chocolate or coffee.

Papaya, a favorite breakfast fruit, is usually served with lime or calamansi, a small citrus fruit. Melons in season or fresh pineapples are typical breakfast fruits and bananas are always plentiful. Avocados, often are served with cream and sugar, are used as a breakfast fruit or in ice cream but are not usually included in salads.

Regardless of the mild tropical climate prevailing in the islands, Filipinos eat rather heavily. Much time is devoted to the preparation of several courses for one meal and there is little difference between the noon meal and the seven o'clock dinner. Each of these two meals may consist of three or more courses and several sources of protein, such as pork, fish, and chicken. Pork is more widely used than beef. Chicken is relatively inexpensive and sea foods which are plentiful are served at least once a day.

LET me describe to you some of my favorite dishes. *Lechon* is a barbecued whole pig stuffed with rice dressing and served with liver gravy. *Adobo* is

either chicken or pork stewed in vinegar and seasoned with garlic and black pepper. *Escabeche* is fish with a sweet-sour sauce. Shrimps and crabs take a prominent part in the Philippine diet. We prefer them either boiled or fried. A favorite sauce that often is used in cooking is *patis*, a clear yellow liquid made of salted shrimp or oyster juice. *Pochere*, a favorite holiday dish, is made of beef, cooked in an onion and tomato sauce and served with boiled bananas, cabbage, egg plant, string beans or other vegetables in season. *Sinigang* is a typical Philippine dish usually made of fish or shrimp and boiled with onions, a sour fruit or vegetable, green mangoes, *camias* or green tamarind and pepper greens. *Pinakisiw* is another dish typical of the Tagalog provinces. It is made of fish cooked in white vinegar and a bit of ginger for seasoning. This usually is served with *patis* or bagoong, a sauce made of small shrimp or fish.

Fresh vegetables are plentiful and are available throughout the year. Most of the vegetables are cooked with meat or dried shrimp and onions but sometimes they are boiled and served with *bagoong*. Among the common vegetables sold in Manila markets are green beans, tomatoes, leaf lettuce, bitter melon, egg plant, spinach, *patola*, squash, radishes, bamboo shoots, sprouted Mung beans and greens of various kinds. Green *papaya* is used as a vegetable and cooked with meat or shredded and pickled.

IN SPITE of the abundance of sugar produced in the islands, the Filipino does not consume as much sugar as the average American. Typical Philippine desserts usually consist of combinations of *malagkit* (sticky rice), coconut milk (the liquid pressed out of grated coconut) and sugar. Grated coconut is used as the primary ingredient in many kinds of desserts. *Leche flan*, a favorite "fiesta" dessert, is a custard flavored with lime rind and baked in a pan lined with a heavy brown sugar syrup. *Guinataan* is made from bananas, sweet potatoes, taro and yams, cooked in coconut milk and thickened with tapioca and rice flour. Among the abundant seasonal fruits which are often sufficient for dessert are the mangoes, atis, guayabano, nanca, rimas, guava, santol, condol and lanzones.

The Philippine diet includes a limited amount of dairy products but their use has increased. I believe that widespread use of these products will be an important contribution toward the improvement of the Philippine diet and general health of the natives.