



BRINGING A TASTE OF SINGAPORE TO THE WORLD

What do you do when you miss the taste of home while abroad? Take things into your own hands, of course, as these three overseas-based Singaporean chefs do.

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First, it flickers in your mind as a memory. Then, it sparks into an insatiable hunger. If you're lucky, you'll find a restaurant nearby where you can satisfy this craving for the taste of home. Otherwise, you'll probably find yourself crouched down along the aisles of an international grocery store, scouring the shelves for the ingredients

needed to recreate the dishes that transport you back to the smells, sounds, and flavours of your childhood.

Those who have lived abroad know this reality. And while most people in this situation simply end up mastering a few comfort food dishes, some take it a lot further. From conducting cooking classes to running full-fledged restaurants, three overseas-based

Singaporean chefs have turned their cravings for home into endeavours where they get to tell the world all about Singaporean food. The cherry on top? Never having to miss their favourite dishes from home again.

The nasi lemak at Makan Madeira brings a taste of Singapore to the archipelago of Madeira, Portugal.



SOPHIAN HOE, MAKAN MADEIRA

As if procuring Southeast Asian ingredients wasn't tricky enough in Portugal, Sophian Hoe upped the challenge by deciding to skip big cities like Lisbon or Porto, opening his Singaporean restaurant on Madeira, an island off continental Portugal instead.

Makan Madeira, a joint venture with fellow Singaporean Steve Selva, launched in late 2024. Hoe, a self-proclaimed "tropical boy", left Lisbon's wet winters for Madeira's warmth in 2022. He first fell in love with Portugal during a layover en route to Morocco: "Portugal just felt like home."

It was the lack of good Southeast Asian restaurants that spurred Hoe (who is not a chef by training) into starting supper clubs in Lisbon. "I remember eating at a Malaysian restaurant and thinking, 'I can definitely do better.'" And so he did. Beyond just satiating physical appetites at his dinners, Hoe also satisfies emotional ones, by adopting a storytelling approach that highlights the intersections between Portuguese and Straits cuisine. "For example, did you know that kaya, rendang, *epok epok* (savory fried pastries), and chillies all came about because of the Portuguese?" he shares excitedly.



(Clockwise from top left) At Makan Madeira, sago gula melaka (palm sugar) is coloured blue the traditional way — using butterfly pea flowers; co-founders Steve Selva (left) and Sophian Hoe; Milo Dinosaur Mabuk puts an adult twist on the Singaporean childhood favourite by infusing Milo Dinosaur with vodka and Kahlúa.

Expanding his supper club into a restaurant in Madeira has been “a huge learning curve” for Hoe. With Selva, they had to tackle complex bureaucracy and overcome staffing challenges; as many young Madeirans leave for opportunities elsewhere, the two had to hire staff from Lisbon instead. Procuring ingredients has also been a masterclass in planning: The shipping distance means Hoe has to order his ingredients at least a month in advance. To alleviate some of these pressures, Hoe has skilfully managed to cultivate herbs like Vietnamese coriander (also known as laksa leaves) and pandan.

Despite these challenges, Makan Madeira has flourished, becoming a destination restaurant that now serves tourists, expats, and a growing number of locals. “Talk about Asian food and most Portuguese only know spring rolls, pad thai, or sushi,” Hoe notes. With most Portuguese preferring food that they know, Singaporean food can feel rather alien.

The sweet spot, Hoe has found, is anchoring the foreign in the familiar. “To explain what *ngoh hiang* (fried meat fritters) is, we use keywords like ‘spring rolls’ and ‘tofu [skin]’, which the Portuguese already know,” he says. When the days get tough, it is this love for sharing about the kaleidoscopic diversity of Asian cuisine that keeps him going. “I want people to know how multicultural our food is,” Hoe says.

Of course, Hoe is realistic that the food at Makan Madeira will never be the same as that which you find in Singapore. With the need to get creative about substitutes, it’s inevitable that the food tastes different. Yet, if the very essence of being Singaporean means to embrace differences, then the food at Makan Madeira, even if it is produced halfway across the world from its origin source, is fully and authentically Singaporean.



(From top) At Makan Madeira, diners can try the quintessentially Singaporean cocktail, the Singapore Sling; the Pandan Basque Cheesecake is prepared using pandan cultivated by Hoe himself.



Mrs Selva's Lamb Rendang is cooked using an heirloom recipe from co-founder Steve Selva's family.