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Let the feasting begin

Now is not the time to be watching your waist, with the Singapore Food Festival in full swing and the World Gourmet Summit around the corner. CHEAH UI-HOON checks out what's on the menu.

BT Weekend, 6 April 02



FOOD is a big passion here in Singapore, which naturally spells big business, to the tune of some \$8 billion a year. And for the past few years now, April has been the ultimate food-lover's month. This

year it's the World Gourmet Summit (WGS) from April 7 to 13, and the month-long Singapore Food Festival that kicked off last week. For the industry, there's Food and Hotel Asia from April 9 to 12, which will see 2,650 companies from 67 countries showing off their innovative food products.

One hopes that our waistlines do not grow along with these food festivities showing such vital statistics: 10 to 38 to 55. That's the increase in the number of programmes offered in the annual Singapore Food Festival in three years.

The \$1 million WGS had four 'safaris' last year, increased to 10 now. They invited 12 top chefs last year, and this year, there will be 16. Organisers Peter Knipp Holdings and Singapore Tourism Board are expecting 15,000 people to attend the 28 functions.

'Singapore still doesn't compare to Hong Kong in terms of expenditure on food, but it's catching up,' says Mr Knipp optimistically. 'As far as the six-year old Summit is concerned, our events management has been duly recognised,' he says.

The 2001 Summit won the US-based International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA) Grand Pinnacle Award last year, as well as bagging a silver for the IFEA's Best New Events section (within an existing festival).

Big business

Where the industry is concerned, Food and Hotel Asia which brings hoteliers and restaurateurs together with food manufacturers, has

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grown hundred-fold since the event first started in 1978.

'This year, there's an 8 per cent increase in exhibitors. Food manufacturers obviously see the potential of the food industry in Asia,' says Lindy Wee, director of marketing communications and conferences for Singapore Exhibition Services.

According to Ms Wee, Singaporeans spend \$2,625 per capita on food compared to \$3,341 in Hong Kong.

Unfortunately, FHA isn't open to the public, so what are some of the programmes that we can really sink our teeth into? The WGS events, for one, which will illustrate the fine art of dining this year.

Top chefs visiting our shores this year will come from the US (Arun's/Chicago, Aquavit/New York, Padovani's/Hawaii), UK (Mosimann's and Mezzo from London), Japan (Ritz-Carlton/Osaka), Spain (La Broche/Madrid), France (Four Seasons Hotel George V/Paris), Australia (Restaurant VII/Sydney), China (Green Tea House/Beijing), and India (Taj Mahal Hotel/Mumbai).

The Summit, true to its name, offers the chance to taste world-class gourmet food in the convenience of our own backyard, so to speak. But in the spirit of celebrating our local cuisine, the Food Fest is the one that will reach far and wide - what with a chilli festival and flavours of Chinatown.

Makansutra, which has participated in the Festival since 1998, is doing its part this year with a hawker food safari. 'Eating is something that everyone loves to do and talk about. We just want to celebrate our local food culture like what the French and Italians do with theirs,' notes KF Seetoh, the 'makan guru'.

And maybe one day, Singapore food will really go global, beyond the Singapore fried bee hoon and Singapore slings.

For detailed information on events, please check out www.singaporefoodfestival.com and www.worldgourmetsummit.com



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