

# Cheap Thrills

(A Teenage Miser's Five-Hour Food Marathon)

Let's face it: times are hard. So what's a foodie, especially a 15-year-old-allowance-bound foodie to do? Explore, *naturellement!* Armed with P300 and a tour guide (i.e., my Dad, he of the Street Food Ph.D), I decided to take the plunge and see what the metro had to offer. Here's what we turned up.

## 9:00 am - Breakfast

The first stop of the day was Ka Hiling's, situated beside the meat stands on the Paranaque Market's ground floor. The place is nondescript, as far as palengke carinderias go, but their lugaw is anything but plain.

Most of the stalls sell bowls of generic goto, but not Ka Hiling's. Their specialty, and my all-time favorite breakfast, is lugaw cooked with lube and evilly rich pig brains. And while the ubiquitous tokwa't baboy is usually served as a side dish, here it is eaten with the lugaw, as its perfectly blended, toyo't suka sauce gives the lugaw even more flavor. And the baboy? Ooh...don't even get me started about the baboy. Fantabulously tender and flavorful, I kid you not!

The lugaw goes for P10, baboy for P15, and P21 for tokwa't baboy.

## 10:00 am - Tapsilog Central

Quirino Avenue harbors Tapsilogans like the Old Lady in the Shoe does kids, and if the legends are to be believed, then Maty's Carinderia (in Don Galo) is the *matia bgra*. Maty's claims to be the place where the Tapsilog business started in the 1960's. TAPSI, TAPSILOG, LONGSILOG, et al - you name it. Man you gotta love those acronyms.



Most people associate tapsi with those strips of horse hide sold in the more popular tapsi establishments, but once you've tried Quirino Avenue tapa, you wouldn't even look at anything else (although rumor has it that Quirino Tapa is equine in nature...but I digress).

One does not need a chainsaw to cut through this tapa, for instance. It has a nice, chunky-soft texture and a slightly sweet flavor, complimented by a dunk of spicy vinegar with a little ketchup mixed in. Yum-yum!

But Maty's or no Maty's, my heart (and stomach) remains in Elena's Tapa. It is a little further down Quirino, in the La Huerta district. The prices and serving sizes are the same, but Maty's tapa has a slightly tart aftertaste which doesn't sit too well with me. Hence, Elena's. I don't know, but I'm sure not stopping by Maty's again after this issue goes to print!



### 12:00 nn - Palabok

I've seen a few filthy markets in my day, but this...this was ridiculous. Although it had barely drizzled, the New Divisoria Market's meat section was peppered with foul puddles like so many landmines. Definitely not for the faint-hearted.

However, that malodorous walk proved to be worth it, my reward being in the form of 6 Ladies Carinderia (Pasillo 25). Specifically, their specialty: palabok. But this was no ordinary palabok. Hell no. This beauty had the works: a dollop of squid ink sauce, slivered eggs, crumbled itlog na maalat, tinapa, spring onions, chicharon baboy, and chicharon bituka, all for the ridiculous price of P25. Plus an interesting take on tokwa't baboy, with slivers of raw papaya, also for P25. Brownie points for creativity.

### 1:00 pm - Chinatown

By noon, my poor stomach was reeling from over-work, but I just had to stop by Chuan Kee (Nisavea St., corner Orpin, Chinatown, Manila). Like most of the places mentioned here, Chuan Kee is a childhood favorite. And I am not alone, evidently, as the place is absolutely PACKED at mealtimes. All of the food is good, but here's my typical order: a bowl of Kiampong (brown fried rice) for P18, Chap Chai (clear broth made with squid balls and pork intestines) for P52, Kikiam for P37, and adobo egg for P12. Granted, Chuan Kee is a tad pricey, but it's definitely worth it.

### 1:30 pm - Hopia!

No self-respecting foodie would dare go to Chinatown without making a pilgrimage to Holland Hopia, and we certainly wouldn't want to flout that tradition, would we?

Holland Hopia, in my humble opinion, makes the best hopia in Manila, and the steady stream of customers coming through its sliding doors is a testament to that. At P25 a pack, the price isn't half bad either.



### 2:00 pm - Masarap Na, Mumurahin Pa

A step away from Holland Hopia is 650 Carvajal Street, home of the fantabulous Ten-Peso Siopao. Unfortunately, we won't be able to show a picture of this wordrous artifact, for the Siopao Nazi (the ever-so-cordial Chinese tindera) specifically forbade any cameras in the store. But it's cool, no picture would do justice to it anyway. Imagine this: a delicately seasoned bola-bola core encased by dough so tender it practically melts in your mouth, each morsel a tasty, tasty treat. And it also comes in Vegetarian (also P10), and Special (a little bit pricier, at P12) editions too! *O, di ba?*

### 3:00 pm - Mission Accomplished

So you see, one doesn't necessarily have to spend a fortune to have a good meal or a good time. All you need is a little sense of adventure, and you're all set.

Please do be cautioned, though: avoid drinking the water, or even softdrinks with ice, from the places like ones featured in this article. Amoebiasis and its nasty ilk is not a pleasant way to spend one's weekend.

Have a nice day. ☺

