

Chef™

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From the streets to the china

Some of the most intriguing, exciting and truly delicious foods in the world are found on the street. Not literally in the gutter, but in food carts, at outdoor markets and from roving vendors. The souks of Marrakech, hawker centers of Singapore and markets of Mexico all offer a bounty of cheap eats.

How do you translate these street foods onto your menu? Your customers are wise enough not to pay \$11 for a tamale—unless you take that humble Mexican snack up a notch or two.

But you shouldn't mess too much with tradition, either. The trick is to take the foundation of these great ethnic street foods and elevate them with the finest ingredients, appealing presentations and your own chefly talents.

Do like Matthew Lake, executive chef of Besito Restaurant in Huntington, N.Y. (www.besitomex.com). He offers a lesser-known tamale that uses fresh corn. Unlike other tamales, this derivative doesn't require lard and is made with ground fresh corn kernels instead of masa. Finish your tamale with seared shrimp in chipotle chile adobo as Lake does, and then you can charge \$11 for a tamale.

"Let's face it," Lake says, "if you come into a white tablecloth restaurant, and I tell you your appetizer is a piece of masa with some cheese on it, you're going to think, 'That's not so exciting.'"

We talked with more chefs from around the country who, like Lake, are transporting the world's street foods and cheap eats to fancier digs, from dumplings to empanadas. Read on, and create a virtual hawker center right on your menu.

Creating a worldwide food market on your menu

by Abbie Jarman

Haute dogs

Chicagoans prefer stands, New Yorkers prefer carts. Regardless, hot dogs are America's quintessential street food. At 42, located in The Ritz-Carlton in White Plains, N.Y. (www.42therestaurant.com), executive chef/owner Anthony Goncalves plays on diners' fondest food memories, putting serious touches on very playful foods. The Kobe hot dog small plate at 42 comes with sweet onions, house-made pickles and a grainy mustard (no ketchup—Goncalves is now an honorary Chicagoan).

The kobe dog isn't Goncalves only play on Americana. He also offers a pork belly "B.L.T.," a foie gras lollipop and sweetbreads that look amusingly like chicken nuggets.

Little cravings

Mexican cuisine is replete with quick bites. They even have a category of their own: antojitos, loosely translated as "little cravings." One lesser-known antojito is the tlacoyo, a fried or toasted masa cake stuffed with beans, cheese or meat. "My idea was, I love these, they are cool, no one really knows what they are, how can



Chef Anthony Goncalves' Kobe hot dogs

I introduce them to an audience and make them so they are vastly appealing?" says Besito's Lake. "And that's where the creativity comes in."

Lake's tlacoyos are topped with creamed crab cooked with Mexican oregano, habanero and poblano chiles and roasted corn. They are finished with a traditional Yucatan salsa.

"The salsa is very traditional, the crab is very traditional, and the tlacoyo is very traditional. What's not traditional is taking all three of those and mixing them up and getting that balance right."



Chef Matthew Lake's fresh corn tamale with shrimp in chipotle chile adobo

Meatball medley

Meatballs play a roll in a variety of cuisines, and Matthew Guiffrida, chef/owner of Muse Restaurant, Water Mill, N.Y., brings them all to diners in his Not Your Mama's Meatballs.

The appetizer features four different styles of meatball: The Asian meatball is made with sesame seeds, ginger and sweet chile sauce served on a bed of seaweed. The Swedish is a classic meatball served with sour cream, rosemary and demi-glace. Guiffrida's Italian meatball comes with pomodoro and Parmesan, and the Thanksgiving incorporates cranberry and brown



Chef Charlie Giordano's mini Cuban sandwiches with fried plantain chips

sugar into the meatball and is served with a caramelized onion compote. All the meatballs start with a mixture of pork, veal and beef.

Guiffrida also serves a jumbo shrimp corn dog—U-10 shrimp coated in a pancake-like tempura batter, skewered, fried and served with chipotle cocktail sauce—and the Really, Really Soft Taco, made of barbecued pulled pork that sits atop masa.

Guiffrida loves to play on classic treats like corn dogs and tacos. "There are no new animals, no new grains being produced," says Guiffrida, "so you have to use those things that have kind of been forgotten and make them fun and attractive."

Money bags

It seems every culture has its own bite-size snack consisting of a dollop of filling wrapped up and steamed or fried to order. Dim sum, gyoza, ravioli, pierogi, kreplach... The list goes on.

Dumplings are a blank canvas for a chef to fill with any ingredients he or she pleases. Scrap pieces of meat or vegetables can be used instead of

thrown away, the dumplings can be steamed, deep-fried or pan-fried to the customer's liking, and any variety of sauces can accompany your signature dumpling.

Many manufacturers provide convenient dumplings ready to be fired and sent to the table. Phillips Foods' (www.phillipsfoods.com) Asian Rhythms line features a selection of fried and steamed dim sum. The steamed variety includes shrimp shomai, seafood shomai and shrimp ha gao, while the fried products contains a mixture of shrimp spring rolls, shrimp won tons and shrimp money bags.

Multicultural meat pies

Like the dumpling, turnovers pop up in ovens and fryers all over the globe. Executive chef Michael Gilligan, Atrio restaurant at The Conrad Hotel, Miami (conradhotels1.hilton.com), has created a high-end empanada for the pinxtos menu at Level 25 lounge. He starts by pan-searing 2-inch-thick pieces of foie gras, reserving the fat to mix in with goat cheese, chopped herbs and the foie gras once cooled and chopped. This mixture is placed in 2-inch circles of house-made empanada dough, which is then folded over and fried for less than two min-

utes so the outside crisps and the filling becomes warm and soft. Gilligan serves the empanadas with a mango and orange mojo.

Besides the premium ingredients, Gilligan ensures diners are getting their money's worth with an artful presentation using a wooden box and banana leaves.

"Every culture in the world has a meat pie, which is pretty much what an empanada is," says Gilligan. He also points to the samosa, a similar street food found in India and traditionally filled with vegetables or meat. In the past, he has served a samosa filled with a ratatouille-like vegetable mixture and Indian spices.

On a stick

Don't knock state fairs: Their assortment of foods on a stick is actually quite worldly. Most restaurants have caught on to the popularity of satays and kebobs, and diners just keep asking for more.

"Right now in catering, almost anything you can put on a stick or in a spoon sells like crazy," says chef Charlie Giordano of Duvall Catering & Event Design in Charleston, S.C. (www.eventsbyduvall.com).

If labor and time is tight in your operation, take advantage of prod-



Phillips Foods' Asian Rhythms dim sum

ucts like the boneless wings from Pilgrim's Pride (www.poultry.com). The company's Wing Dings have a golden breading and a mild, versatile flavor to complement your own seasoning or dip, while the boneless Wing-Zings have a peppery kick.

"We make an assortment of satays," says Giordano, "with the grilled beef tenderloin satays with spicy Szechwan peppercorn sauce being the number-one seller. Close behind is the duck breast satay with sesame orange glaze."

Giordano recently worked with a bride who had spent some time in Uzbekistan and wanted Uzbek cuisine incorporated into her menu. "I made spicy ground lamb kebobs served with a honey sesame yogurt sauce," he says. "I've done them a couple of times since then, and they have been a hit every time." 