

# Finding Magic Beyond Madness

**FIRST-TIME VISITORS MAY FIND MANILA DAUNTING AND CONFUSING. BUT LOOK BEYOND THE SMOG, TRAFFIC AND COMMOTION, AND YOU'LL FIND A CITY WITH ITS OWN DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER AND VIBE** WORDS MAIDA PINEDA

From the time you set foot into Manila's airport, the madness begins. The sweltering humidity hits you. The mass of people persistently offering their services and wares becomes too hard to ignore. Bumper-to-bumper traffic on the roads immediately becomes a way of life in this metropolitan city of 11 million residents. Your heart beats a little bit faster. In a country wittily described as '300 years in a convent and 50 years in Hollywood', its capital city is anything but boring.

Still, Manila need not be daunting. There are great places for the most memorable meals, shopping indulgences, and sanctuaries to rest, dream and be pampered. That is, if you know where to look.

in Manila, is truly unforgettable. Some 30 years ago, Dona Ramona 'Moning' Legarda regularly threw lavish dinner parties. After Dona Moning passed away, her granddaughter Suzette continued the tradition by serving her grandmother's heirloom recipes of Filipino dishes like pancit molo, oxtail kare-kare and lengua in white wine sauce for guests by reservations only. The ancestral home retains its Old World charm, boasting paintings by three national artists, old train sets, antique cameras and collectibles. The maids and cook that the old lady trained remain with the family, now serving guests with the same grace and elegance they had decades ago. Set menus start at P1,500 per person. 315 San Rafael Street, San Miguel Manila. Tel: +(632) 734-2146. Dinner by reservation only, no walk-ins accepted.

**Le Souffle French Mediterranean Restaurant & Wine Bar** Whenever Manila's elite throws dinner parties or lavish weddings, they rely almost exclusively on Jessie Sincioco and her team at Le Souffle for their food. When this French Mediterranean restaurant and wine bar opened 16 years ago, it

**WHET YOUR APPETITE**

**La Cocina De Tita Moning** If you are nostalgic for a taste of Old Manila, dine at the Legarda mansion, a stone's throw away from the Malacanang Palace. The experience of dinner in this 1930s house, one of the first Art Deco homes



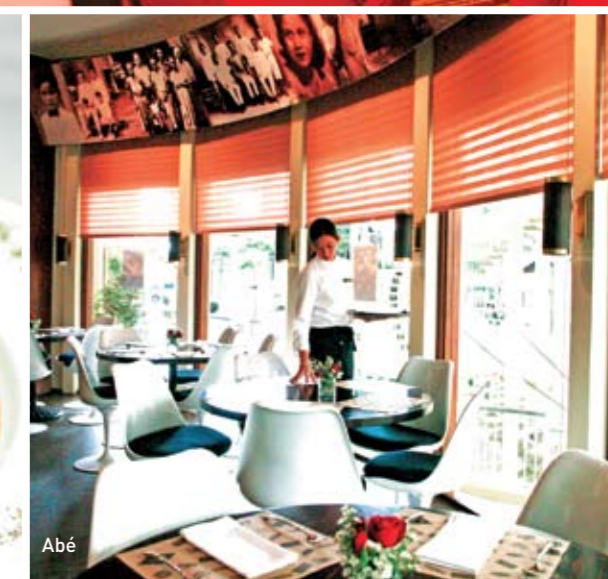
La Cocina De Tita Moning



Martinis Bar



Enjoy excellent pan-fried goose liver at Le Souffle



Abé

became the first fine dining restaurant outside hotels to serve foie gras. The pan-fried goose liver in raspberry honey sauce is a delicate, melt-in-your mouth indulgence masterfully executed, and counts as the restaurant's signature dish (mains from P400). Now located in one of Manila's exclusive residential buildings in Rockwell, its latest address best exemplifies its classy elegance. Of late, apart from good food, the restaurant has also gained a reputation for being the location for future grooms to spring their wedding proposals. Le Souffle Rockwell, G/F Amorsolo Drive, Rockwell Centre, Makati. Tel: +(632) 890-6543

**Abé** Manila's very fickle social set is now flocking to Serendra, a chic cluster of newly opened restaurants. The most popular of them all is Abé, a Filipino restaurant by one of Manila's most successful restaurateurs, Larry Cruz.

Cruz dedicates this restaurant to his late father, Emilio Aguila Cruz, the legendary writer, editor, painter, connoisseur and bon vivant. Abé is thus lovingly decorated with black and white photos and memorabilia of Emilio's finest years. But the greatest tribute is in the home-cooked Filipino favourites served here. Try the lamb adobo, a stew of vinegar, soy, and spices (P350); bamboo rice, rice steamed in a bamboo with shrimp, wood ear mushrooms and bamboo shoots (P195); and the sugpo sa aligue ng talangka, a decadent dish of jumbo prawns simmered in olive oil and lemon (P475). Manila's most famous (and infamous) celebrities, politicians and artists are regularly spotted here.

G/F Serendra, Retailer Area Bonifacio Global City, Taguig City. Tel: +(632) 856-0526

**Martinis Bar** Finally, Manila has a chic bar for those who want to knock back a few in style. The Mandarin Oriental recently opened the first martini bar in the country serving 40 different martini concoctions. The choco-chilli martini, lychee martini, calamansi martini, wasabi martini, and sake martini (from P350) are popular choices here. Business travellers and discriminating drinkers can't get enough of its classy laid-back ambience. Take a sip and watch the world go by on the CBD's busiest street. Mandarin Oriental Manila, Makati Avenue, Makati. Tel: +(632) 750-8888

**Circles Event Cafe** Filipinos are attracted to buffets for the never-ending quantity of food they can consume. No surprise then that hotels are aggressively trying to outdo each other with bigger, better buffets. But Circles stands out, not just for its expansive spread but also for its food quality.



High Street



Tiendesitas



Greenbelt 4



Mandarin Oriental Manila

In addition, the dining experience gets reinvented practically every month, with visiting chefs to satiate your cravings. Prices start from P980. Makati Shangri-La, Ayala Avenue corner Makati Avenue, Makati. Tel: +(632) 813-8888

#### SHOP THIS WAY

**Greenbelt 4** Who needs Rodeo Drive when you can have Gucci, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Salvatore Ferragamo, Burberry and the finest fashion boutiques all conveniently located under one roof? Greenbelt 4 mall is every fashionista's dream. The picturesque garden and lovely museum a few steps away are bonuses. Makati Avenue, Makati

**High Street** This outdoor mall is set amidst palm trees, manicured lawns and an abundance of space, making it a refreshing change from the norm. You will also find specialty stores like Crocs, Crumpler, Von Dutch and Nike in this relaxed setting, along with a number of coffee shops and the first Krispy Kreme outlet in the country. High Street, Fort Bonifacio, Taguig

**Greenhills** This is the favourite shopping destination for returning Filipinos for the bargains it offers: cheap clothes, discounted electronics and jewellery. Enterprising merchants sell strings of

pearls for a fraction of the prices found elsewhere. But one must learn the art of haggling or bring a Filipino friend to negotiate the best prices. Greenhills Shopping Centre, Greenhills, San Juan

**Tiendesitas** Antiques, furniture, clothes, crafts and even pets can be found under this roof. Tiendesitas was created with tourists and overseas visiting Filipinos in mind. Hence, you will find attractions like the kalesa, a horse-drawn carriage, as well as a raft of food stalls selling Filipino food and native snacks. Collectible coins and old records, hard wood furniture, old statues from around the country and knick knacks from all around Asia give it an atmospheric flea market vibe. Tiendesitas, Ortigas, Pasig

#### STAY THE NIGHT

**Makati Shangri-La Hotel** Located right smack in Ayala commercial centre and at the heart of Makati's CBD, Makati Shangri-La puts you where the action is. While the rest of Manila suffers through traffic, you can joyfully look out from your luxurious hotel room or work the treadmill while enjoying the view. Ayala Avenue corner Makati Avenue. Tel: +(632) 813-8888

**Mandarin Oriental Manila** It is a first choice among business travellers who want to be pampered. Beautifully appointed rooms and top service aside, the hotel has two floors devoted to the best spa in Manila. There is also an in-house yoga instructor who will lead you in the fine arts of yoga and meditation. For more hedonistic pleasures, Paseo Uno and Martinis offer great food and drinks. Makati Avenue, Makati. Tel: +(632) 750-8888 