



# FILIPINOS MAKING Waves

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TORONTO, CANADA



## Celebrating Christmas – Filipino Style

Filipino traits, values and traditions come into focus during the Christmas holiday season. Filipinos, wherever they are, bring in the many customs from homeland Philippines. Filipinos put emphasis on faith, family, food, feast and fun.

### THE WORLD'S LONGEST CHRISTMAS SEASON

Christmas celebrations in the Philippines are deeply rooted in Catholic traditions, a legacy of Spanish colonial rule from 1521 to 1898

In the Catholic Church, the Christmas season liturgically begins on the first day of Advent, observed on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, and continues until Three Kings' Day, celebrated on the Sunday between January 2 and 8. Today, the Philippines is renowned for having the world's longest Christmas season, which starts as early as September 1.

Here in Toronto, we start to hear Christmas carols around a week before the annual Santa Claus parade which was held on November 24 this year. In the Philippines, Jose Mari Chan's 1990 release, "Christmas in Our Hearts," has become the quintessential Christmas anthem in the Philippines. Widely



**Belen is a Spanish word that refers to a nativity scene that depicts the birth of Jesus Christ. The word comes from the Spanish name for Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Assembling the belen is among the traditions in Filipino homes. Photo by Waves.**

associated with the start of the holiday season, it is frequently played in homes, shopping malls, and on radio stations as early as September.

### PAROL

As iconic to Filipinos as Christmas trees are to Westerners, *parols* are a cherished part of holiday traditions. *Parols* are star-shaped lan-

terns derived from the Spanish word *farol*, meaning "lantern" or "lamp." These lanterns symbolize the Star of Bethlehem that guided the magi, also known as the Three Kings (*Tatlong Hari* in Tagalog). One would observe Filipino homes and buildings beautifully adorned with these bright lanterns now in a wide array of shapes and styles. Materials like cellophane, plastic, rope, capiz shells, glass, and

even recycled items are used in the craft of assembling the *parol*. Making *parols* is a popular folk craft, and many Filipino children create them as school projects or simply for fun, keeping the tradition alive across generations.

### BELEN

Another cherished Filipino Christmas symbol is the *belen*—a nativity scene or tableau depicting the Birth of Christ. The term *belen* comes from the Spanish name for Bethlehem, and these displays traditionally feature the infant Jesus in a manger, surrounded by the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, shepherds with their flock, the Magi, stable animals, and often an angel, a star, or both presiding over the scene.

Introduced by the Spanish in the 16th century, *belen* have become an iconic and ubiquitous part of Filipino Christmas celebrations. Many churches in the Philippines transform their altars into elaborate *belen* during the holiday season. These nativity scenes are also commonly displayed in schools, which often host nativity plays, as well as in government buildings, commercial establishments, and public spaces.

(Continued on page 5)

# Philippines is “Pearl of the Orient Seas”

“All art is autobiographical. The pearl is the oyster’s autobiography.”

— Federico Fellini



Published by Villamor Quebral

Each country is called by its well-known name. For example, Korea is known as “The Land of the Morning Calm” while Japan is known as “The Land of the Rising Sun”. Thailand is called “The Land of Smiles” and Malaysia is known as the “Land of Beautiful Islands”. What about our country – the Philippines? It is significantly called as “The Pearl of the Orient Seas”. What is the reason behind this? Let me expound on this later, but first let’s take a little knowledge as to how natural pearls are formed.

[Pearls.com](#) provides a very simple but explicit answer. It says: “**Natural Pearls form** when an **irritant** – usually a **parasite** and not the proverbial grain of sand – **works its way into an oyster, mussel, or clam**. (Pearl experts say that pearl rarely forms in clams. Usually they are formed in oysters, and this makes clam-grown pearls rare and expensive.) As a defense mechanism, a **fluid is used to coat the irritant**. Layer upon layer of this coating, called ‘**nacre**’, is deposited until a lustrous **pearl is formed**”.

## The Stark Symbolism

Upon reading this natural process about the forming of a pearl, a strange idea struck my mind. Isn’t this a symbolical description of how the Philippines was “formed”? A perfect symbolism of the **hardships, exploitation and colonization** (the irritants) this “little gem” of the Orient Sea has to encounter until finally, it became an independent nation (a **rare pearl**).

Through the pages of history, we can read that the Philippines was conquered by the Spaniards and became a Spanish colony in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was under the Spanish rule for 400 years, more or less. Nevertheless, the claim that it was them who “discovered” this country is debatable. Because, exigent volumes of documents prove otherwise. Long way before the coming of Ferdinand Magellan, this beautiful Archipelago (with an ancient original name) has been known as a prosperous “trading center” in the East. There are archeological traces that traders from the different parts of the world were coming here to do business. It has been a country then known for its rare spices, gold, silver, pearls and different gemstones.

Afterwards, the United States took it as a result of the Spanish-American War. The following testament would tell us that the Philippines was literally bought by the Americans from Spain:

“*Apart from guaranteeing the independence of Cuba, the treaty also forced Spain to cede Guam and Puerto Rico to the United States. **Spain also agreed to sell the Philippines to the United States for the sum of \$20 million.** The U.S. Senate ratified the treaty on February 6, 1899, by a margin of only one vote.*” (Office of the Historian)

What drove the United States to buy the Philippines for the sum of \$20 million? Well, this is something we don’t really know. One thing is clear: the Philippines has its own “value” among the Americans. Whatever it is, it would certainly define why the Philippines is called the “Pearl of the Orient Seas”.

*Just to feed your mind: The largest sea pearl found by a fisherman in Palawan, Philippines is currently valued at stunning \$100 million.*

Before the real Independence of the Philippines, World War II began and another country occupied it which is Japan. The so-called Japanese Occupation commenced in 1942 and ended in 1945, when the Japanese finally surrendered to the might of the United States. It was then that the Philippines was liberated from its third and last foreign invader, and it was then that its real independence was gained. (I think we should rewrite our own history books)

Why did those countries tried to conquer and occupy the Philippines? What’s in it that seem to magnetize these foreign colonizers? Many agree that it was because of its well-known natural beauty and richness in natural resources. I definitely agree with them.

## Why The Philippines is The Pearl of the Orient Seas

The following natural creations define why the Philippines is the “Pearl of the Orient Seas”:

The Philippines is “The second-largest archipelago in the world,” writes The Lonely Planet,



### Breathtaking Banaue Rice Terraces

The Philippines is home to some of the world’s marvelous creations. The Banaue Rice Terraces in Ifugao has been called the “Eighth Wonder of the World.” The total outline of this architectural wonder, or “stairways to the sky,” is about 13,500 miles long, or about half the globe’s circumference and ten times the length of the Great Wall of China.



**Mayon Volcano** in Albay has the distinction of having the world’s most perfect cone. Upon seeing the Bicol landmark in 1903, distinguished British traveler-writer A. Henry Savage Landor wrote: “Mayon is the most beautiful mountain I have ever seen, the world-renowned Fujiyama (Mt. Fuji) of Japan sinking into perfect insignificance by comparison.”



**Taal Volcano.** Another global record: Taal Volcano, a 406-meter-high crater, is said to be the world’s smallest volcano. It is described as “a crater within an island within a lake” because it stands as an island at Taal Lake. The lake was formed after the volcano, with used to be much larger, collapsed.



Mount Apo, a dormant volcano situated in the boundaries of Davao City, Davao del Sur and North Cotabato, is the county’s highest peak (2,954 meters or 10,311 feet above sea level). Mount Apo is flat topped, with three peaks, and is capped by a 500-meter wide volcanic containing a small crater lake. Its name means “master” or “grandfather.”

which also described the country as “one of the great treasures of Southeast Asia.”

Actually, there are 200 volcanoes in the country, 22 of them are said to be active. Camiguin, for instance, has more volcanoes than municipalities. The province has only five municipalities (Catarman, Guinisliban, Mahinog, Mambajao, and Sagay) but it has seven volcanoes (Mount Vulcan Daan, Mount Mambajao, Mount Karling, Mount Uhay, Guinisliban Peak, Tres Marias Mountain, and Mount Hibok-Hibok). As such, it has earned the distinction of having the most

(Continued on page 4)

## WAVES NEWS—PHILIPPINES

## Mary Jane Veloso on Indonesia death row recalls a stunning last minute reprieve and 'miracle' homecoming

Jauhn Etienne Villaruel,  
ABS-CBN News

MANILA — On Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024, former overseas Filipino worker (OFW) Mary Jane Veloso finally returned to the Philippines following over 14 years of imprisonment in Indonesia due to drug trafficking.

While many Filipinos only learned about Veloso's case in 2015 shortly before her scheduled execution and the extraordinary last-minute reprieve granted by the Indonesian government, the OFW's legal ordeal, and the diplomatic complications attached to it, started years earlier and dragged on for over a decade, spanning 4 Philippine presidents.

### • 2010

Veloso was apprehended by customs officials at the Audisucipto International Airport in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on April 25, 2010, according to a timeline by Migrante International and the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL), which served as one of Veloso's legal counsels.

Prior to her apprehension in Indonesia, Veloso was with her godsister and recruiter Ma. Kristina "Tintin" Sergio in Malaysia, where a job was supposedly waiting for them. When the alleged job suddenly became unavailable, Sergio sent Veloso to Indonesia, along with a bag that concealed 2.6 kilograms of heroin, allegedly without Veloso's knowledge.

On May 12, Veloso finally informed her family that she was in jail in Indonesia.

It was only in August that Veloso's family sought the assistance of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and informed the government agency about her ordeal in Indonesia.

In October, Veloso's prosecution in Indonesia started to move. She was represented by a court-appointed pro bono lawyer said to be recommended by the Indonesian police.

On Oct. 11, the District Court of Justice of Sleman



Mary Jane Veloso (R) listens to court interpreter at a court in Sleman in central Java island during a hearing of judicial review on March 3, 2015 after a plea for clemency was rejected by Indonesian President Joko Widodo. *Suryo Wibowo, AFP Photo/File*

in Yogyakarta sentenced Veloso with the death penalty. In the same month, the Philippine government finally hired a private law firm in Indonesia to appeal Veloso's case.

### • 2011

In February 2011, the Court of Appeals of Yogyakarta upheld Veloso's death sentence. The Philippine-hired lawyer then filed an appeal to the Supreme Court of Indonesia to reverse the ruling.

After 3 months, on May 31, 2011, the Indonesian Supreme Court affirmed Veloso's death penalty.

In August, President Benigno Aquino III asked then-Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhono for clemency for Veloso. Yudhono imposed a moratorium on executions during his term.

There was no significant

movement in the case from 2012 until late 2014.

### • 2014

In October 2014, then Indonesian President Joko Widodo rejected all requests for clemency for convicts sentenced to death.

### • 2015

In February, Migrante International confirmed with its Indonesian counterparts that a certain "Mary Jane" was put on the death row after Veloso informed her family that she was set to be executed soon.

On February 9, Aquino reportedly appealed Veloso's case during the state visit of President Widodo to the Philippines.

On April 24, Veloso was transferred from her the Yogyakarta prison to Nusakambangan Island ahead of her looming execution by



Mary Jane Veloso is escorted by Indonesian police as she arrives at the court in Sleman in central Java island for a hearing of judicial review on March 3, 2015 after a plea for clemency was rejected by Indonesian President Joko Widodo. *Suryo, Wibowo, AFP Photo/File*

(Continued on page 4)

## 'Hinay-hinay': DOH Warns vs Too Much Salty, Fatty, Sweet Treats this Holiday Season



Rows of lechon for pre-paid and last-minute customers on display in Barangay La Loma in Quezon City on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2023. *Mark Demayo, ABS-CBN News*

By Pia Gutierrez

MANILA — The Department of Health (DOH) on Monday reminded Filipinos to be mindful in indulging on unhealthy food during the holiday festivities, saying that the consumption of too much salty, fatty, and sweet treats will lead to health complications.

"Madaling tandaan yon, ang mga pagkain na dapat iwasan o wag nang kainin kung kakayanin, ay yung mga pagkaing MA: masyadong maalat, mataba, at matamis," DOH Assistant Secretary Albert Domingo said in a televised briefing.

"Yang tatlong yan, yung asin, asukal, at taba ay mga bagay na maaaring maging sanhi ng sakit tulad ng altapresyon, diabetes, o yung mga tinatawag na non-communicable diseases kasama na yung pagiging overweight at obese, na nagiging problema sa ating puso at iba pang bahagi ng katawan," the official explained.

Domingo encouraged Filipinos to eat more fruits and vegetables compared to rice and fatty meats.

"Pwede tayong gumaya sa Pinggang Pinoy. Sa isang pinggan, kapag kumain tayo kalahati nawa ay nasa prutas at gulay ay nakalagay, tapos yung isang kapat ang nakalagay doon yun lamang ang pwede sa kanin... at yung isang kapat ay para sa isang karne at ibang matataba. In order words, hinay-hinay," he said.

The DOH official reminded Filipinos to also include

exercise and discipline during the holidays.

Domingo also reminded Filipinos of the importance of proper food handling and preparation to avoid food poisoning.

It is also important, he said, to exercise caution when taking out food after the parties.

"Siguruhin natin na piliin ang mga pagkain na tuyo, yung mga naihaw, yung mga naprito, kasi wala itong sarsa, mas madali kasing mapanis ang mga masarsa. At doon naman sa may sarsa, siguro kainin nalang natin doon sa party, dahil yung mga tomato sauce, yung mga krema, yun ang madaling masira. At wag tayong lalagpas na dalawang oras na nakalatag ang pagkain sa lamesa... dahil kapag lumagpas ng dalawang oras, lalo na sa mga chafing dish, maaari kang magkaroon ng mikrobyo dahil doon," he said.

Meanwhile, Domingo said the DOH has launched its Iwas Papatok Campaign ahead of the New Year's Eve celebrations to prevent firecracker-related injuries or deaths.

The official reminded Filipinos that community fireworks displays are allowed and avoid the purchase and use of illegal firecrackers for a safer celebration of the New Year.

"Hindi kontra ang DOH sa fireworks basta ito ay sa community at legal lamang," Domingo said. — ABS-CBN NEWS ■

## WAVES NEWS—PHILIPPINES

**Mary Jane Veloso  
...death row to  
homecoming***(Continued from page 3)*

firing squad.

Aquino reportedly had a 5-minute side meeting with Widodo at the ASEAN conference in Malaysia on April 28. Aquino also reportedly talked to the Indonesian foreign minister to spare Veloso, whom he said could become a witness to help Indonesia uncover the drug syndicates in the region. This, after Sergio, Veloso's alleged recruiter who gave her the tampered suitcase, surrendered to Philippine authorities that morning.

On the same night, Indonesian officials announced that the execution of Veloso and 8 others will proceed. Amid protests and vigil to "Save Mary Jane Veloso," the DFA said it had done everything for the OFW.

Early morning of April 29, Indonesian reports claimed that Veloso was spared from the firing squad. It was later confirmed that her execution was postponed to give way for the case against her illegal recruiter.



**Filipino death-row drug convict Mary Jane Veloso poses for a photo with a Mother Mary statue during a Christmas event at the Yogyakarta Women's Prison in Gunung Kidul, Indonesia, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024. (AP Photo/Slamet Riyadi)© The Associated Press**

- 2016

President Rodrigo Duterte, known for his hardline stance on illegal drugs, reportedly gave the Indonesian government the green light to proceed with Veloso's execution.

Duterte was quoted as saying that he will "respect the decision" of Widodo regarding the fate of Veloso.

The DFA leadership at that time also said that Veloso's case was "not urgent."

- 2020

A court in Nueva Ecija [convicted](#) Veloso's alleged recruiters Sergio and Julius Lacanilao of large-scale ille-

gal recruitment, sentencing them to life imprisonment and a fine of P2 million.

- 2024

On October 20, 2024, new Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto took office.

In an unexpected development, President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. announced that Veloso "will soon return to the country" as he acknowledged the diplomacy work of the previous administrations that managed to suspend the OFW's execution.

"After over a decade of diplomacy and consultations with the Indonesian government, we managed to

delay her execution long enough to reach an agreement to finally bring her back to the Philippines," Marcos said in a statement on Nov. 20.

On December 17, on the eve of her return to the Philippines, Veloso in a press conference in Jakarta thanked God and the Indonesian government for her repatriation.

"I thank God. Finally all my prayers were answered today and I will come back to my country. I believe that God has plans for me," a tearful Veloso said.

Veloso was arrested in Indonesia when she was 25. She will turn 40 in less than a month. She asked Marcos for clemency, insisting that

she was innocent.

"Gusto ko na makalaya ako, clemency, mapawalang sala, kasi wala akong kasalanan," she said on Tuesday.

(I want freedom, I want clemency, because I am innocent.)

Marcos earlier said that granting clemency to Veloso was "on the table" given the novelty of the agreement between Indonesia and Philippines.

On Wednesday, December 18, Veloso finally landed back in the Philippines and reunited with her family.

For now, Veloso will be detained at the Correctional Institution for Women. ■



**Mary Jane Veloso reunites with her family after arriving at the Correctional Institution for Women in Mandaue City on December 18, 2024. Maria Tan, ABS-CBN News**

**Philippines is "Pearl of the Orient Seas"***(Continued from page 2)*

The world's deepest part of the ocean is the **Marianas Trench**, which is over 11,000 meters below the sea level. This makes the Mindanao Trench as the world's second deepest spot underwater. The spot, about 34,440 feet (10,497 meters) is in the floor of the Philippine Sea.



The **Tubbataha Reefs** is considered as the world's richest bio-geographic area. In fact, it was declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization as a World Heritage Site. The two atolls are located 92 nautical miles southeast of Puerto Princesa City covering 33,200 hectares.



Also in Palawan is the world-famous St. Paul Subterranean National Park, a massive white rock mountain which rises 1,028 meters above sea level and stretches towards Cleopatra's Needle. Its main feature is the underground river, with 8.2 kilometers of labyrinthine caves carved by rainwater and the waves of South China Sea.



The Philippines is also world famous for its Chocolate Hills in Bohol. It is a series of 1,268 perfectly symmetrical, haystack-shaped hills (each hill rises 30 to 120 meters above the surrounding plateau). A national geologic monument, the hills which are spread out in the towns of Carmen, Batuan and Sagbayan never fails to amaze guests and visitors.



The highest waterfalls in the country is Aliwagwag Falls in Cateel, Davao Oriental. It is a series of 84 falls (count them!) appearing like a "stairway to heaven" with various heights among the steps. One step is measured 72 feet and another is 67 feet. Overall, the falls is 1,100 feet of cascading energy and 20 meters in width – all these in the midst of a virgin forest.

There are other amazing natural creations found in the Philippines that are yet to be mentioned. But for me, there is more than its natural beauty that captivates foreign appetite. Like a woman, the Philippines has its own physical and inner beauty. I believe that it's the beauty that "lies beneath" this country that makes it so appealing to anyone, especially the foreigners. You can discover this "inner beauty" of the Philippines through this blogsite.

The Philippines indeed is aptly called "The Pearl of the Orient Sea" or in Spanish term, it is "Perla del Mar de Oriente" which was first used in 1751. This term became more popular because of the National hero Jose Rizal in his last poem "Mi ultimo adios" before he died in 1896. ([abetterphilippines.com.wordpress.com](http://abetterphilippines.com.wordpress.com)) ■

WAVES NEWS

**Celebrating Christmas—Filipino style**

(Continued from page 1)

Tarlac City, known as the "Belen Capital of the Philippines," celebrates this tradition with its annual *Belenismo sa Tarlac*, a *belen*-making competition involving residents and local establishments. During this event, giant *belen* with diverse themes are showcased along roads and in front of buildings throughout the city, adding to the festive spirit of the season.

**CAROLING**

In the Philippines, children in small groups go from house to house singing Christmas carols, which they called pangangaroling. Makeshift instruments include tambourines made with tansans (aluminum bottle caps) strung on a piece of wire. With the traditional chant of "Namamasko po!", these carolers wait expectantly for the homeowners to reward them with coins and peso bills.

**MISA DE GALLO (aka SIMBANG GABI)**

Misa de Gallo, translated as "Mass of the Rooster," is a cherished Christmas tradition in the Philippines and other predominantly Catho-



The first Simbang Gabi at St. Thomas More in Niagara Falls, celebrated by the vibrant Filipino community in the Niagara region, marked a beautiful beginning to the Christmas season. A meaningful Mass, celebrated by four Filipino priests, was filled with faith, unity, and joy, bringing the community together in a spirit of devotion and celebration. (Photo by WAVES).

lic countries. More commonly referred to as "Simbang Gabi" (Night Mass), it refers to a series of nine early morning masses held from December 16 to 24, leading up to Christmas Day. The term originates from the Spanish practice of holding pre-dawn masses, symbolizing the rooster's crowing at the break of dawn.

Here in North America, the mass is literally held at night rather than at dawn.

Attending all nine masses is

believed to bring special blessings. The masses are often followed by a festive atmosphere, with street vendors offering traditional Filipino delicacies like *bibingka* (rice cake) and *puto bumbong* (purple sticky rice cake). This unique blend of faith, food, and fellowship makes Misa de Gallo a meaningful and much-anticipated part of the Filipino Christmas season.

**BOUNTIFUL CHRISTMAS FEAST**

At the heart of Filipino

Christmas celebrations is the Noche Buena, a joyous feast held on Christmas Eve. Families gather to enjoy a lavish spread of traditional dishes, including lechon (roast pig), bibingka (rice cake), and hamon (Christmas ham) to name a few. The table overflows with delectable offerings, symbolizing the season's blessings and the spirit of generosity.

The Christmas song "Noche Buena" composed in 1965 by Felipe Padilla de León

with lyrics by Levi Celerio, has become a holiday classic in the Philippines, covered by many Filipino artists over the years. The first verse depicts Filipinos' excitement for the bountiful feast:

Speaking of music, this is where Filipinos go extra. As in most Filipino homes, karaoke is set up for fun and entertainment. So, get ready to engage and belt out your favourite classics.

**FEAST OF THE THREE KINGS**

The Filipino Christmas season concludes with the Epiphany, also called the Feast of the Three Kings, celebrated on January 6 or the first Sunday of the year. This occasion honors the visit of the three wise men to the newborn Jesus in the manger, serving as a joyful finale to the holiday season and extending the spirit of Christmas into the new year.

These enduring traditions showcase the richness of Filipino culture, promoting unity and joy among families and communities. By blending faith, festive practices, and the warmth of togetherness, these cherished customs embody the true essence of Christmas in the hearts of the Filipino people. ■

In Loving Memory of Mocha

April 21, 2010 – December 23, 2024

With heavy hearts, we announce the passing of our beloved Mocha on December 23, 2024. Mocha left this world peacefully, surrounded by the loving arms of his parents, Carlos and Jen. Born on April 21, 2010, Mocha was more than just a pet; he was a cherished member of our family. He brought endless joy, love, and loyalty to all who knew him. His gentle spirit and unwavering devotion enriched our lives in countless ways.

Mocha was the cherished brother of Aria and adored grandson of Lyn & Mike and Teresa & Mon. His loving aunts, uncles, and cousins will always remember the wonderful life he lived and join in wishing him eternal rest.

Though his paws no longer walk beside us, his memory will forever live in our hearts.

Rest in peace, sweet Mocha.



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WAVESNEWS—CANADA

# Consumers get much-needed temporary GST/HST tax relief during the Christmas holiday

The Government of Canada has introduced a temporary Goods and Services Tax/Harmonized Sales Tax (GST/HST) break to provide financial relief to Canadians during the holiday season. This measure, effective from December 14, 2024, to February 15, 2025, eliminates the GST/HST on a range of everyday essentials and holiday-related items.

**Qualifying Items:**

- **Children’s essentials:** Clothing, footwear, diapers, car seats, and certain toys.
- **Food and beverages:** Most groceries, prepared foods like vegetable trays, pre-made meals, salads, sandwiches, restaurant meals (dine-in, takeout, or delivery), snacks such as chips, candy, and granola bars, and alcoholic beverages with an alcohol content below 7% (e.g., beer, wine, cider, and premixed drinks).
- **Holiday items:** Christmas trees and similar decorative items.
- **Media:** Physical books and printed newspapers.

**For Shoppers:**

Consumers will automatically receive this tax break at the point of purchase; no GST/HST will be charged on qualifying items during the specified period. If GST/HST is mistakenly applied to a qualifying item, customers can request a re-



fund directly from the retailer.

**For Businesses:**

Businesses are expected to adjust their systems to ensure GST/HST is not charged on qualifying items during this period. This adjustment applies throughout the supply chain, from manufacturers to wholesalers, retailers, and end consumers. Businesses that inadvertently pay GST/HST on zero-rated supplies can seek guidance from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) on corrective measures.

This temporary tax relief aims to ease the financial burden on Canadians during the holiday season by reducing the cost of essential and festive items. ■

**SEASON’S GREETINGS**

# Christmas On The Hilland M-171 – A Motion to Designate December As Canadian Christian Month

**Ottawa, ON** – On Wednesday, December 11, 2024, Jean Yip, Member of Parliament for Scarborough—Agincourt, hosted Christmas on the Hill on behalf of the federal Liberal Caucus. Annie Koutrakis, Member of Parliament for Vimy, shared emcee duties with Ms. Yip.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau provided Christmas greetings and reminded guests that, “No religion tells us to tolerate our neighbours. They teach us to love our neighbours.”

In addition to the Prime Minister, 29 members of the Liberal Caucus from across the country attended. Guests from Ottawa, Montreal, and the GTA were treated to the joyous singing of the All Nations Full Gospel Church Ottawa Choir, led by Lolokamari Tam Harry.

The program included heartfelt prayers led by the Honourable Rob Oliphant, MP for Don Valley West, the Honourable John McKay, Member of Parliament for Scarborough—Guildwood and

reflections from the Honourable Kamal Khara, Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities; the Honourable Rechie Valdez, Minister of Small Business; and the Honourable Filomena Tassi, Member of Parliament for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

MP Yip shared that her motion, M-171, to designate December as Canadian Christian Month, has been placed on notice. ■



DIPLOMATIC CORPS NEWS

### International Forum on Migration



The International Forum on Migration in Toronto, held in honor of International Migrants Day, brought together thought leaders and changemakers. Ambassador Maria Andrelita S. Austria (4th from left) delivered an inspiring speech, emphasizing the significance of migration for global unity, growth, and progress.

December is the Month of Overseas Filipinos. The United Nations also celebrates International Migrants Day on December 18 every year.

The Philippine Consulate General invited Filipinos and Filipino-Canadians to the International Forum on Migration in Toronto held last December 8, 2024 (Sunday), from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Chelsea Hotel, Toronto.

The forum featured resource persons from Philippine agencies serving migrant workers and Overseas Filipinos. It provided participants an opportunity to learn about the Philippine government’s programs in support of our kababayans in Canada. Participants were also given the opportunity to interact with representatives of Philippine agencies, Filipino community organizations and local non-profit groups on issues of relevance to Filipino migrant workers, international students, permanent residents, dual citizens and Filipino-Canadians.



The event also highlighted community organizations supporting the Filipino-Canadian community, such as Compass Careers of Canada (CCC), a skills development project by PLACA (see photo).

The event was an engaging, informative all-day forum that captivated attendees from start to finish. With insightful discussions, the forum’s success was evident as participants remained actively involved throughout the day, demonstrating their enthusiasm and commitment to the important topics covered. ■



### Philippine Consulate General, PTIC Bring Filipino Festive Flavors at the Launch of the DTI-MSME Hub in Toronto



(L-R) The Purple Bakeshop Head of Growth Mark Solis, Mineral Toronto Owner Bruce Ly, Casa Manila CEO, Creative Director and Executive Chef Mila Nabor Cuachon, Deputy Consul General Kerwin Orville Tate, Consul Katrina Isabelle Borja-Martin, Trade Commissioner Mario Tan

The Philippine Consulate General in Toronto in partnership with the Philippine Trade and Investment Center-Toronto launched the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry’s Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Hub or DTI-MSMEHub in Toronto on 27 November 2024.

In his opening remarks, Deputy Consul General Kerwin Orville C. Tate lauded the DTI-MSMEHub as the first such hub in Canada and only the third in the world to date. Citing the potential to do more in the economic space to build on this milestone year in Philippines-Canada relations and capitalize on the 1-million strong Filipinos in Canada, he underscored the Consulate’s intent of making the Hub a regular platform for introducing Philippine products and services, forging new partnerships, and generating collaborative ideas.

Trade Commissioner Mario C. Tani echoed this in his remarks, underscoring the Hub as a flagship initiative of DTI Secretary Ma. Cristina Aldeguer-Roque designed to provide Philippine MSMEs a platform to showcase their finest, export-ready offerings and facilitate business-to-business transactions. With the Hub situated within the Philippine Consulate General, which welcomes many kababayans daily for various transactions, he noted the possibility for every visitor to become an ambassador for Philippine products, helping to amplify their reach into the Canadian mainstream market.



Coinciding with the holiday season, the launch featured Project Beans coffee and Ferino’s bibingka and puto bum-bong—popular Filipino native delicacies (rice cakes) usu-

(Continued on page 9)

FOOD & LIFESTYLE

# Savoring the Flavors of the Philippines: Beloved Dishes from Different Regions of the Philippines

By Teresa Torralba

The Philippines is known for its diverse and flavorful regional cuisine, with each province offering unique dishes that reflect its culture, history, and local ingredients. Each region boasts its own iconic recipes, lovingly crafted with local ingredients and traditional techniques passed down through generations. From the savory stews of Luzon to the sweet delicacies of Visayas and the bold, spicy creations of Mindanao, Filipino cuisine is as varied as it is delicious. In this article, we take you on a flavorful journey across the archipelago, highlighting the

unique dishes that make each province a gastronomic destination. Get ready to explore the heart and soul of Filipino food, one bite at a time!

Here's a list of famous original dishes from the different provinces:

**LUZON: Where Tradition Meets Taste**

Welcome to Luzon, the land where every bite feels like a warm hug from home! From the crunchy goodness of Ilocos Norte's bagnet to the soul-soothing bulalo of Batangas, Luzon's dishes are a delicious blend of tradition and comfort.

Whether you're savoring a spoonful of creamy Bicol Express or slurping noodles from a banana leaf in Quezon, Luzon serves up a culinary adventure that's as diverse as its breathtaking landscapes.

*Ilocos Norte: Pinakbet* - A vegetable stew with bagoong (fermented shrimp paste). Other specialty: Bagnet (crispy deep-fried pork belly).

*Pampanga: Sisig* - Sizzling dish made from pork cheeks, ears, liver, and seasoned with calamansi, onions, and chili.

*Bicol: Laing* - Gabi (taro) leaves cooked in coconut milk with chili. Another favorite: Bicol Express (spicy pork in coconut milk).

*Batangas: Bulalo* - Beef shank soup with bone marrow, slow-cooked until tender.

*Laguna: Buko Pie* - Coconut custard pie with a flaky crust.

*Quezon: Pancit Habhab* - Stir-fried noodles served on a banana leaf and eaten without utensils.

*Ifugao: Inlagim* - Smoked or roasted chicken marinated with native herbs and spices.

**VISAYAS: The Flavors of Festivity**



**Bulalo**

Visayas is where food and fun collide! Known for its lively celebrations and abundant seafood, this region turns every meal into a fiesta. Think crispy, golden Cebu lechon that melts in your mouth or a steaming bowl of La Paz Batchoy that hugs your soul. From the sweet surprise of binagol in Leyte to the smoky, tangy chicken inasal of Bacolod, Visayas knows how to keep your taste buds dancing with joy.

and flavorful meat.

*Iloilo: La Paz Batchoy* - Noodle soup with pork, liver, chicharron, and a savory broth.

*Bacolod (Negros Occidental): Chicken Inasal* - Grilled chicken marinated in calamansi, vinegar, annatto, and garlic.

*Leyte: Binagol* - A delicacy made of grated taro, coconut milk, and sugar steamed in coconut shells.

*Samar: Tamalos* - Served in

*(Continued on page 9)*



**Lechon Kawali**

SEASON'S GREETINGS

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LIFESTYLE

# ‘Malunggay’ to Boost PH Economy, Global Standing in Wellness Industry



**SUPERFOOD.** Moringa leaves in an undated photo. Senator Cynthia Villar underscored on Wednesday (Dec. 4, 2024) the potential of moringa, locally known as "malunggay," in boosting the agricultural sector and enhancing the global standing of the Philippines in the health and wellness industry. (PNA photo by Leilanie Adriano)

By Wilnard Bacelonia

**MANILA** – Senator Cynthia Villar underscored on Wednesday the potential of moringa, locally known as "malunggay," in boosting the agricultural sector and enhancing the global standing of the Philippines in the health and wellness industry.

Villar, who chairs the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform, made the statement during the public hearing on the proposed Senate Bill Nos. 1255 and 2713, or the Moringa Bill, filed by her and Senator Imee Marcos.

She said the bill seeks to provide a comprehensive framework to advance the planning, development, and promotion of moringa, which is often referred to as the "miracle tree" due to its exceptional nutritional and medicinal benefits.

"Moringa has long been a part of our culinary and cultural heritage, particularly as a vital food source for rural communities. However, its potential extends far beyond our borders as a superfood with high demand in the global health industry," Villar said in her opening statement.

The Moringa Bill seeks to position the Philippines as a leading export-

er of moringa products outlining a strategy for industry development that includes research and development to improve production quality; support mechanisms for local farmers and entrepreneurs; sustainable agricultural practices; and a focused export promotion strategy to tap into the international market.

Villar also highlighted the socioeconomic benefits of the bill, such as job creation, increased rural incomes, and overall economic growth, as well its role in promoting health and well-being both locally and globally.

"Today's discussion is crucial to ensuring that this bill meets the needs of all stakeholders. We are here to listen, collaborate, and work towards a future where moringa plays a significant role in our agricultural and economic landscape," she said.

The Moringa Bill has generated significant interest due to its promise of enhancing both local livelihoods and international trade opportunities.

Stakeholders from various sectors, including agriculture, health, and business, participated in the hearing to explore the bill's potential impact. (PNA) ■

## Savoring the Flavours of the Philippines

(Continued from page 8)

*banana leaves with a rich peanut sauce, pipi-an, infused with atsute for flavor and color.*

### MINDANAO: A Spice-Filled Adventure

Get ready to spice things up in Mindanao! This southern gem is a playground for bold flavors and unique dishes you won't find anywhere else. Imagine the rich, smoky taste of Tiyula Itum or the creamy, spicy kick of Maranao rendang. Pair that with tropical delights like durian candy from Davao, and you've got a culinary journey that's as vibrant and exciting as Mindanao itself.

*Davao: Durian Candy* - Sweets made from the famously pungent durian fruit.

*Zamboanga: Curacha with Alavar Sauce* - Spanner crab cooked with a rich coconut-based sauce.

*Maranao (Lanao del Sur): Rendang* - Spicy and aromatic beef or chicken dish slow-cooked in coconut milk and spices.

*Sulu: Tiyula Itum* - A black soup made with beef or goat, flavored with burnt coconut and spices.

*General Santos City: Tuna Kinilaw* - Fresh tuna ceviche marinated in vinegar, calamansi, and chili.

*Bukidnon: Binaki* - Corn-based steamed cake wrapped in corn husks.

Each dish is a culinary gem that showcases the flavors and heritage of its region. Have you tried any of these, or



Durian candies

are you planning a culinary journey through the Philippines?

### Embark On A Filipino Food Adventure!

The flavors of the Philippines are as vibrant and diverse as its culture, and now you don't have to travel far to experience them. This July, the Fun Philippines Food and Music Festival at the Harbourfront Centre and the Fun Philippines Street Festival in Ottawa in May, are bringing the heart and soul of Filipino cuisine straight to you.

Festival revellers and visitors will have the chance to savor authentic dishes from all over the Philippines—from the iconic lechon of Cebu to the rich, coconut-infused flavors of Mindanao, and everything in between. It's not just a feast for the taste buds; these festivals are a celebration of Filipino heritage, complete with lively music, colorful traditions, and warm hospitality.

Whether you're a foodie looking for your next culinary adventure or someone curious about Filipino culture, these festivals promise a delicious and unforgettable experience. Come hungry, and leave with a newfound love for the flavors of the Philippines! ■

## Philippine Consulate, PTIC ...at Launch of DTI -MSME Hub in Toronto

(Continued from page 7)

ally enjoyed at the end of each of the 9-day Novena Masses at dawn in anticipation of Christmas Day. Alvin Causing, CEO and Founder of Project Beans, flew to Toronto to personally share the history of coffee in the Philippines and how his company is continuing to innovate to elevate Philippine coffee on the global stage while supporting the local farmers and communities behind them. Ashley Tamayo of APO, the distributor of Ferino's in Toronto, presented a video on the inspiring story of Ferino's Bibingka and how, since its establishment in 1938, it has become a household name.

The event was attended by over 100 guests from the Filipino-Canadian and Canadian business community, who were treated to free flowing Project Beans Barako and Arabica coffee prepared by Alvin Causing and his wife, as well as Ferino's bibingka and puto bumbong. Toronto- and Mississauga-

based partner establishments also shared how they are making the products available as part of their special menu and product offerings. They whetted the appetite of guests following a sampling of The Purple Bakeshop's ube cake, Mineral's espresso martini (using Project Beans Arabica coffee), and Casa Manila's longganisa tacos.

The Philippines is one of the few countries that produces all four types of coffee beans: arabica, robusta, liberica (barako) and excelsa. Project Beans carries all four types and also produces harmony blends, as well as innovative products such as Coffee in a Brew Bag, Coco Coffee (barako coffee+natural coco sugar+creamy coco cream), among others. Residents in the Greater Toronto Area can purchase and enjoy Project Beans coffee through the aforementioned establishments. For bulk orders and potential partner retailers, contact the Consulate for introductions to the Project Beans team. Ferino's bibingka and puto bumbong are available from Btrust Supermarket North York and from APO Products Ltd /UNOFoods Inc. for bulk orders. ■

### A MESSAGE TO ALL FILIPINOS IN CANADA

LET US BE PROUD OF OUR HERITAGE AND UNITE IN THANKING CANADA FOR GIVING US A HOME AWAY FROM HOME AND FOR RECOGNIZING THE MANY CONTRIBUTIONS WE WORKED HARD FOR IN MAKING THIS DIVERSE, MULTICULTURAL COUNTRY ONE OF THE BEST PLACES TO LIVE IN THE WORLD!.

**Filipinos, let's continue to MAKE WAVES!**

COMMUNITY

DONATION DRIVE BY ADHIKA & COMBAT SCIENCE



In a heartwarming display of community support, the long-standing Filipino organization ADHIKA, in partnership with Combat Science-Warrior Arts of Asia, organized a donation drive for Filipino newcomers to Canada. The event collected winter coats, sweaters, and non-perishable food items to help those in need. JB Ramos, Head Instructor, expressed heartfelt gratitude to the generous supporters and donors, including Teresa and Mon Torralba of PLACA and Mary Acosta, who represented the Fraternal Order of Eagles (Philippine Eagles). Together, they made a meaningful impact, showing the strength of unity and compassion.

**SEASON'S GREETINGS**

**The Filipino Construction Professionals of Ontario (FILCONPRO) Christmas Party**



The Filipino Construction Professionals of Ontario (FILCONPRO) Christmas Party on December 15th at QSSIS Banquet Hall was an unforgettable night of pure joy and excitement! Guests stepped back in time with dazzling 80's Disco attire, bringing energy and flair to the dance floor. The air was filled with laughter, camaraderie, and an overwhelming sense of unity as everyone danced the night away. Among the guests were Brampton residents Luis Carlos - Director of Compass Careers Canada (CCC), and his wife, Evelyn Carlos (inset photo).



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Announcement

Devotions to Our Mother of Perpetual Help

There will be no Devotions to Our Mother of Perpetual Help nor Confessions on Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

The masses on those Wednesdays will be as on a Sunday morning, at 8:30am and 11:00am. The regular Wednesday Devotion schedule will resume on Wednesday January 8th.

Perpetual Help Devotions are also broadcast on Wednesdays on Vision TV at 8:30am & 10:00am, and on Salt + Light TV at 12:30pm.

Pope Francis at Sunday Angelus before Christmas: 'No child is ever a mistake'

By Kristina Millare  
Vatican City, Dec 22, 2024 / 11:20 am

Pope Francis emphasized that "no child is ever a mistake" during his last Angelus address before Christmas Day.

"A child is a gift of life," the Holy Father told crowds of pilgrims on Sunday via a video livestream. "Here, in St. Peter's Square, there are mothers with their children, and perhaps there are some who are expecting a child."

Keeping indoors in his Casa Santa Marta residence within the Vatican due to a cold, the pope urged his listeners to not remain indifferent to the presence of mothers and children.

"Let's bless mothers and give praise to God for the miracle of life!" the pope said.

Marvelling at the beauty of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, the Holy Father asked his listeners to reflect on St. Luke's Gospel account of the Annunciation and share in the joyful encounter of these two expectant mothers.

"Let's pray in our heart and let us say, too, like Elizabeth: 'Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'" he said. "Let's sing like Mary: 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.'"



Pope Francis leads the Angelus prayer and gives an address from the chapel of Casa Santa Marta on Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024, at the Vatican. The pope delivered his marks indoors due to the intense cold, combined with cold symptoms that have manifested in recent days, the Holy See Press Office said. | Credit: Vatican Media

Visit with children from Santa Marta Pediatric Dispensary

Pope Francis shared with the crowds in St. Peter's Square that he visited with

a group of children and mothers to offer them his personal Christmas greetings.

"This morning, I had the joy of being with the children,

with their mothers, who attend the Santa Marta Dispensary in the Vatican, run by the Vincentian Sisters," he said.



Pope Francis visits a group of children and mothers from the Santa Marta Dispensary to offer them his personal Christmas greetings on Dec. 22, 2024. | Credit: Vatican Media

"These children — there were many of them! — filled my heart with joy. I repeat: 'No child is a mistake,'" he said.

Blessing of the Baminelli

Continuing St. John Paul II's Advent tradition of blessing statues of the child Jesus to be placed in Nativity scenes on Christmas Day, the Holy Father blessed his and pilgrims' statues on Sunday, thanking them for their "simple but important gesture."

"I will bless the 'Baminelli': I have brought mine," he said while glancing at a statue of the child Jesus given to him by the archbishop of Santa Fé and made by native Ecuadorian people.

"I heartily bless all of you, your parents, your grandparents, your families! And please, do not forget your grandparents! May no one remain alone during these days," he added. ■



Continuing St. John Paul II's Advent tradition of blessing statues of the child Jesus to be placed in Nativity scenes on Christmas Day, Pope Francis blesses his and pilgrims' statues on Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024. | Credit: Vatican Media

**GENDER REVEAL**  
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## FILIPINOS MAKING WAVES FEATURE

### Sofronio Vasquez: A Filipino Voice That Captivated the World

Sofronio Parojinog Vasquez III, born on November 9, 1992, in Ozamiz, Misamis Occidental, Philippines, made history on December 10, 2024, by becoming the first Filipino to win the U.S. edition of *The Voice*. As the Season 26 champion, he also became the first male Asian winner in the show's history, inspiring millions around the world.

#### Humble Beginnings and Early Dreams

Growing up in the Philippines, Vasquez pursued dentistry as a practical career choice but never let go of his love for music. Encouraged by his father, his first vocal coach and greatest supporter, Vasquez honed his singing skills early on.

Following his father's passing, Vasquez decided to fully commit to his dream of becoming a singer. He gained recognition in the Philippines after competing in the 2017 season of *Tawag ng Tanghalan*, where he made it to the Top 7. Later, he secured third place in *Tawag ng Tanghalan: All-Star Grand Resbak*.

In 2022, Vasquez moved to Utica, New York, to work as a dental assistant and support his family while keeping his musical aspirations alive.

#### Stealing the Spotlight on *The Voice*

Vasquez's journey on *The Voice* began with a remarkable blind audition, where his rendition of Mary J. Blige's "I'm Goin' Down" earned a four-chair turn from all coaches: Michael Bublé, Gwen Stefani, Reba McEntire, and Snoop Dogg. Choosing to join Team Bublé, Vasquez formed a strong bond with the Canadian crooner, whose guid-



ance shaped his performances throughout the competition.

From his breathtaking rendition of Celine Dion's "The Power of Love" in the Battles to his soulful take on Dusty Springfield's "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me" in the Knockouts, Vasquez consistently impressed with his emotional delivery and technical skill.

#### A Triumphant Finale

In the finale, Vasquez delivered two unforgettable performances: Sia's powerhouse anthem "Unstoppable" and the inspirational ballad "A Million Dreams" from *The Greatest Showman*. These electrifying renditions won over audienc-

es and solidified his place as the Season 26 champion.

Along with the title, Vasquez earned a \$100,000 prize and a recording contract with Universal Music Group. His victory also marked a milestone for coach Michael Bublé, who celebrated his first win in his debut season.

#### A Victory for the Filipino Community

Vasquez's success resonated deeply with the Filipino community, both in the Philippines and around the world. Fans celebrated his achievement as a proud representation of Filipino talent on a global stage. Vasquez expressed heartfelt gratitude to his late father, his family, and his supporters, saying their encouragement kept him motivated throughout his journey.

#### A Bright Future

As he embarks on his music career, Vasquez plans to honor his heritage by infusing Filipino culture into his music. He has also expressed interest in collaborating with his coach Michael Bublé and experimenting with various musical genres to showcase his versatility.

Sofronio Vasquez's journey from a small-town dreamer to an international music sensation is a story of resilience, talent, and determination. With his extraordinary voice and inspiring story, he is set to make an indelible mark on the global music scene.

*Maligayang Pasko at  
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## ENTERTAINMENT

## Julia Barretto gives early Christmas treat for 500 scholars



**Anna Cerezo,**  
**ABS-CBN News**

MANILA — Christmas came early for around 500 scholars as Julia Barretto spent a joyful morning with them, bringing smiles through fun games, interactive activities, and heartfelt gift-giving.

The charity event with Project Pearls Learning Center was held in Bocaue, Bulacan Monday morning.

"This is my first on-ground event. But I had been a silent supporter. I learned and had been following them since the pandemic. The impact and work they do is amazing. I feel so blessed to be part of it," she said in an interview held after the program.

Barretto shared that the

event was her way of expressing gratitude and giving back following a rewarding and successful year.

"It is my way of giving back. I had been so blessed and I am just too grateful," she added.

According to the actress, the meaningful bonding moments also served as her recharge before diving back into her busy schedule—starting with promoting her MMFF entry, "Hold Me Close."

"I really love children. I enjoyed. This is such a blessing," she explained.

"Hold Me Close," which Barretto topbills with Carlo Aquino, will hit cinemas on Christmas Day. ■

## The 50th Metro Manila Film Festival

The 2024 Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) marks its 50th anniversary with the theme "Sinesigla sa Singkwenta," celebrating Filipino cinema's vibrancy. The festival runs from December 25, 2024, to January 7, 2025, during which only Filipino films are showcased in theaters nationwide.

Here are some of the featured films:

### And the Breadwinner Is...

A comedy-family film starring Vice Ganda, Eugene Domingo, and Gladys Reyes, directed by Jun Lana.

### Green Bones

A suspense-drama featuring Dennis Trillo and Ruru Madrid, directed by Zig Dulay.

### Isang Himala

A musical starring Aicelle Santos and Bituin Escalante, directed by Pepe Diokno.

### The Kingdom

An action-family-drama with Vic Sotto and Piolo Pascual, directed by Michael Tuviera.

### Strange Frequencies: Taiwan Killer Hospital

A horror film featuring Enrique Gil and Jane De Leon, directed by Kerwin Go.

## Gary V Pulls Off 2nd Night of Concert Amidst Recovery from Dehydration



OPM icon Gary Valenciano performs during Night 2 of his "Pure Energy: One More Time" concert at the Araneta Coliseum, December 22, 2024. *MJ Felipe, ABS-CBN News*

**MJ Felipe,**  
**ABS-CBN News**

Even as he is still recovering from a bout of dehydration, Gary Valenciano managed to pull off the second night of his "Pure Energy: One More Time" concert on Sunday night at the Araneta Coliseum in Quezon City.

The first night of the concert, scheduled for Friday, had been cut short as Valenciano dealt with an illness. Midway through the show, he was rushed to a hospital. On Sunday morning, Valenciano announced that the second night of the concert will push through. "No weapon formed against me will prosper," said the OPM icon.

Valenciano opened Sunday night's show with "Shout for Joy," where he made his entrance by jumping out from a pit in the middle of the stage. He accidentally slipped during the entrance, and had to check himself and his microphone. Valenciano did not appear to be injured and he powered through the opener.

There were no signs of weakness or illness in "Mr. Pure Energy" in his first few songs, but he eventually slowed it down.

"What a challenge it has been to even step on this stage today," Valenciano said as he took some time to rest. "Alam mo, hindi na namin sinundan yung original line-up ng concert. Hindi naman tipong bahala na,

we changed it a bit simply because it was a challenge kasi."

He revealed that they had a deadline of 9:00 a.m. on Sunday to determine if they will hold the concert.

"At 8:15 a.m., (my wife) Angeli came up to me and said, 'You're gonna be great, Gary.' I looked up to her and said, 'I cannot do this concert, I cannot.' But the kind of wife that she is, she was persistent and she believed I could not do it, but God could," said Valenciano.

The show lasted for more than two hours. In between, Valenciano rested and hydrated, even chomping on ice chips. He also excused himself to check his insulin twice onstage, to ensure that his sugar level is fine.

Yet even with the pauses and breaks, the 60-year-old OPM icon still showed off some of his iconic dance moves, made fun of himself, and inspired the audience with his songs and speeches.

"Kapag humihinto ako, at pumupunta ako dito sa tabi I just had to get some ice chips, it was a severe hydration and mouth becomes dry too quickly," he explained to the audience.

He also showed his elbow strap where an IV plug was still attached, in case of emergency.

"I know that God said, 'you're gonna step on that

stage tonight Gary, and you're gonna shine for me,'" he said.

Joining Valenciano on stage were SB19, as they sang a new rendition of "Babalik Ka Rin." Gloc-9 and Jay Durias also performed, as well as Darren and Valenciano's daughter, Kiana Valenciano-Tolentino.

The award-winning group A-Team, the original Maneuvers and its new members, AC Bonifacio, Darren and Gary's son Gabriel Valenciano moved and grooved with him on some of his upbeat hits like "Hataw Na," "Growing Up" (Bagets Theme song), "Sa Yahweh" and more.

Valenciano also paid tribute to his son, Paolo, who directed the show, and called him "the best in the country."

"To say that I am proud of you is too much of an understatement, son. I love you so dearly. You are such an example to your brother and your sister. Your children, have a good mom and dad, take good care of them. I love you so much," he said.

Valenciano concluded the show with a ten-minute speech, where he explained that he is not retiring; instead, he is simply following a new calling. A trailer of his upcoming "Pure Energy" documentary was also screened after the show. ■

COMMUNITY

# All Excited for the Annual POV Gala Night



Pinoy Ontario Vendors (POV) is your go-to hub for everything Filipino and fabulous in Ontario! It is a thriving community of creative entrepreneurs, passionate about sharing Pinoy culture, flavors, and talents with the world. And guess what? It's most-awaited event of the year is here!

POV's Annual Gala is set to dazzle on December 26th at the Ascott Parc Event Centre in Vaughan. This elegant venue will host an evening filled with celebration, networking, and entertainment, bringing together the vibrant Filipino-Canadian entrepreneurial community. It's time to shine, showcase their successes, and toast to the ever-growing spirit of Filipino entrepreneurship in Ontario. Stay tuned for more updates and let's make this year's gala the best one yet!

## A Night to Celebrate Excellence and Community

### IFCNA Annual Gala 2024



On November 30, 2024, the Integrated Filipino Canadian Nurses Association (IFCNA) hosted its much-anticipated Annual Gala at the stunning St. Clement of Ohrid banquet hall. The event was a glowing celebration of the dedication, resilience, and achievements of Filipino Canadian nurses, who continue to make a profound impact in healthcare and beyond.

The evening unfolded with grace and grandeur, featuring inspiring speeches from distinguished guests, heartfelt recognitions of outstanding contributions, and mesmerizing performances

that showcased the vibrant Filipino culture. Guests enjoyed a delectable dinner, lively music, and a warm sense of camaraderie, making it a truly unforgettable night.

This year's gala not only highlighted the remarkable accomplishments of the nursing community but also strengthened the bonds among members and supporters of IFCNA. The success of the event is a testament to the spirit of unity and excellence that defines the organization.

Here's to celebrating many more milestones together!

## About IFCNA Founding Chairman

### From PSW to RN: The Founding Chairman's Inspiring Journey

By Teresa Torralba

Austin Gaqui, a true testament to determination and resilience, recently achieved a significant milestone by successfully completing his Registered Nurse (RN) licensure. His journey exemplifies the power of hard work and perseverance, as he transitioned from being a Registered Personal Support Worker (PSW) to becoming a licensed RN.

Austin's dedication to the nursing profession extends beyond personal achievement. As the Founding Chairman of the Integrated Filipino Canadian Nurses Association (IFCNA), he played a pivotal role in establishing a platform to empower and support Filipino Canadian nurses. While serving as a PSW, Austin's visionary leadership laid the foundation for IFCNA, fostering unity and creating opportunities for professional growth within the community.

Now as a Registered Nurse, Austin



continues to inspire others, proving that with passion and determination, no goal is beyond reach. His journey serves as a beacon of hope for many aspiring healthcare professionals.

Congratulations Austin from your friends at PLACA and FUN PHILIPPINES!

**More Power to IFCNA**





# Season's Greetings

From: PHILIPPINE LEGACY AND CULTURAL ALLIANCE

