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South Central Province Charleston

Al Fresco Dining Experience – Filipino Cuisine at “Kultura”

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Chaîne Charleston members and guests gathered for a group photo: (l-r) Paula Duncan, Michael Poynter, David Schonefeld, Caroline Westwater, Michael Coneri, Chevalier Stephen Duncan, Dame Joy Kenny, Dame Michael Poynter, Dame Louise Konrath, Chevalier Randal O'Neill, Cindy O'Neill, Vice Chancelier Argentier, Hon. Rich Konrath, Ella Fabunan, Vice Echanson Nick Palmer, Vice Conseiller Gastronomique Chris Licata



By: [Michael Poynter](#), [Bailli](#) and [Paula Duncan](#), [Dame de la Chaîne](#)

July 24, 2025, Charleston, South Carolina – As the sun set over a rather hot and humid summer evening, typical for July in Charleston, 18 members and guests of the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs Bailliage de Charleston met on the patio of the highly regarded Kultura, a restaurant specializing in Filipino style cuisine, for our first chance to sample classical Filipino dishes. As the temperature dipped on the patio and cooler evening breezes wafted over the table, we looked forward to this al fresco dining experience. Guests were presented with a wonderful array of Filipino dishes specially prepared for the Bailliage by Chef/owner Nikko Cagalanan.

Chef Nikko was a James Beard Foundation finalist in 2024 in the category for “Best Emerging Chef”. His restaurant was nominated by Esquire magazine as one of the best new restaurants in the country and Food & Wine magazine named Kultura as the best Filipino restaurant in South Carolina. Chef Nikko also garnered the prestigious title as “Chopped Champion” on the Food

Network. No doubt his infectious smile along with his culinary skills has helped raise Kultura to the top in the short time since its 2023 opening.

Guests enjoyed Chef Nikko’s creative interpretation of Filipino cuisine with a menu highlighting local fish and ingredients. All of the dishes were inspired by Chef Nikko’s Filipino grandmother, Lola Mansueta. The restaurant specializes in family style dining and has Kamayan Sunday. Although this was a Thursday night, Chef Nikko allowed us to have a Kamayan event anyway.



Members and guests of the Charleston Baillige seated for an al fresco dining experience at Kultura, a Filipino Restaurant:.

Kamayan, meaning “hands” in Tagalog, one of the eight major Filipino dialects, is a communal feast where food is served on banana leaves instead of plates and the only utensils needed are your fingers. The menu was selected from the restaurant’s varied menu and served family style,

although we opted not to use the banana leaves for plates, nor our hands for utensils. One can only step so far outside of our norm.

The evening began with a welcoming cocktail called a “Yellowcard”, made with sake, yellow bell pepper, lime, honey and grapefruit, refreshing and something different than usual, giving us a welcome to Filipino flavors. This helped to relax everyone and get into a fun atmosphere for the evening.

Once we all were seated in the open-air patio, on both sides of the 30-foot long dining table, we prepared for the family style Kamayan dinner to come. It could have been a challenge to serve all of us, but they expertly placed “share” plates in front of each six guests, allowing us to eat “family style” with ease. After all, we are family! Bottles of water and bottles of the two wines selected for the evening were located along the table for self-serve. The wines included:

- 2024, Domaine La Barbotaine Sancerre, French
 - Rounded mouthfeel, delivering green and flinty notes, with citrus and pear fruit character with balanced acidity
- 2022, Domaine Jean Royer “La Petit Roy”, French
 - A medium bodied red, crisp berries and fig on the palate with black pepper and fine well integrated tannins

The meal began with some “snacks”:

- First snack: “Kinilaw”, consisting of yellow fin tuna with coconut leche, pickled ginger, mint and lime. This was a delicious example of Filipino fresh ingredients.
- Second snack: “Arroz Caldo”, a bowl of rice porridge topped with smoked trout roe, xo sauce, chili crisp, a soft egg and garlic, an example of combining soft and sweet with just enough heat to awaken the palate. This dish was featured in the New York Times “ Best Dishes We Ate Across America” article published in December 2024.
- Third snack: “Ensaladang Talong”, a roasted eggplant salad topped with Piquanté peppers, lychee (a Tropical fruit with a sweet floral taste), pickled raisins and smoked caviar, dressed with a miso vinaigrette. This dish also combined spicy and sweet with a little tang.

Following the vibrance of the food and the delicious pairing that softened the heat, we were treated to several main courses.

- First main course – “Jollybee” consisted of Lumache (snail shaped pasta) with pork, mushroom ragout, topped with warm truffle cheese.
- Second main course – “Curry” consisted of Roasted Red Snapper Filet, rich red curry sauce with shaved carrot salad, fresh herbs and rice
- Third main course – “Pork Asado” consisted of Peculiar Pig Farm (Dorchester, South Carolina) roasted pork chop with a rich asado sauce, pineapple mostarda and blistered Kale (courtesy of Dog Patch Farms)



One of the main courses- Jollybee- (snail shaped pasta) with Pork, mushroom ragout, topped with warm truffle cheese.

The selected wines went well with these three dishes and balanced the heat to a perfect level.

Following the main course, Chef Nikko was not through with his creativity. The dessert course, “Tatlong Tamis”, translated to “dessert trio” was just that with three separate parts:

- Part 1: “Suman”- sticky rice, mango, caramel sauce
- Part 2: “Buko Pie-ish”- this was a deconstructed young coconut pie, coconut sorbet, whipped coconut cream, puffed pastry
- Part 3: “Sorbet”- Filipino style sorbet ice cream



Dessert- Tatlong Tamis- Upper left: Filipino Sorbet style with candied ginger; Right: Buko Pie-ish- deconstructed young coconut pie; Bottom: Suman- sticky rice, sliced mango and caramel sauce.

After this Filipino culinary experience, we could only agree that there was a reason that Chef Nikko deserved the accolades received since opening Kultura. In recognition of Chef Nikko and his staff for the wonderful evening we had, Bailli Michael Poynter, along with Dame Paula T. Duncan who helped organize the event, presented Chef Nikko with a Chaîne des Rôtisseurs commemorative plate, with a sincere thank you for this great evening. One of Chef Nikko's

trademarks is his infectious happy disposition. He loves what he does and exhibits it with his smile, which was even more pronounced when he received the commemorative plate.



Owner/ Chef Nikko Cagalanan, with his infectious smile, holding his just received Chaîne commemorative plate for the outstanding dinner

Kultura’s journey is just beginning: Chef Nikko started with a pop-up entitled Mansueta’s Filipino Food and then opened Kultura in 2023. Kultura is only 760 square feet in size with a tiny kitchen! The restaurant announced an upcoming move this fall to a new and much larger space that will allow them to expand their menu and beverage options.

We look forward to continuing to support this standout young chef.

Vive la Chaîne!

[062425-Charleston-Kultura Philipino Restaurant-Article](#)

Photos: Courtesy of Debbie Poynter

Featured image above: Chaîne Charleston members and guests gathered for a group photo: (l-r) Nancy Snowden, Dame Paula T. Duncan, David Schofield, Caroline Westwater, Michael Cohen, Chevalier Stephen Duncan, Dame Joy Kenny, Bailli Michael Poynter, Dame Louise Konrath, Chevalier Randal O’Neill, Cindy O’Neill, Vice Chancellor-Argentier Honoraire Rich Konrath, Ella Fabunan, Vice Echanson Nick Palmer, and Vice Conseiller Gastronomique Chris Licata.

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