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# FIESTA IN AMERICA MORE THAN A FESTIVAL

## IT'S THE MARKETPLACE THAT MOVES THE FILIPINO-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

New York, NY – Now celebrating its 28th year, Fiesta in America returns to American Dream in East Rutherford, New Jersey on August 16 and 17, 2025, uniting business and culture in the largest indoor Filipino expo in the United States. This two-day showcase offers a rare and powerful opportunity for brands to connect with thousands of Filipino American attendees and 120,000 weekend mallgoers inside the second largest retail and entertainment destination in the U.S.

Since 1996, Fiesta in America has helped position Filipino culture as a catalyst for economic growth. Today, it continues to serve industries such as tourism, real estate, remittances, healthcare, beauty, fashion, and food—with sponsors reporting tangible ROI, including six figures in real estate transactions for one Philippine-based developer alone and \$45,000 in direct airline bookings, all for only two airlines, during the two expo days last year. The 2025 edition offers wall-to-wall engagement: exhibitor booths, healthcare recruitment, live demos, and interactive cultural experiences. Every sponsorship includes integrated exposure across LED stage displays, press and magazine ads, e-newsletters, social media, and in-person activation.

Adding to the draw is a high-profile lineup of performers led by multi-awarded singer-actress Vina Morales, who will headline the main concert on Sunday, August 17, and appear at the Opening Ceremony on August 16, Saturday noon. Celebrity designer Bessie Besana, known for dressing stars like Regine Velasquez and Pia Wurtzbach, will present a full runway fashion show on Saturday as well. Over 20 additional acts—from cultural dance troupes to pop performers—will electrify the stage throughout the weekend.

With the Filipino-American market showing \$13.7 billion in annual remittances and a median household income exceeding \$100,000, Fiesta in America delivers high-value consumer connections. More than just a cultural gathering, it is a strategic gateway into a brand-loyal, cross-generational audience.

And with MetLife Stadium hosting the FIFA World Cup™ just weeks before next year's expo, Fiesta in America 2026 is already being positioned as a landmark opportunity to ride the momentum of global visibility. Held in the same neighborhood as American Dream, the 2026 edition will offer sponsors a chance to capitalize on the lasting foot traffic and media presence brought by the world's most-watched sporting event.

So whether you're launching a product, expanding into a new market, or seeking face-to-face sales, now is the time to secure your place at Fiesta in America—for both 2025 and the historic 2026 edition.

For more info, visit [www.philippinefiestausa.com](http://www.philippinefiestausa.com) or [fiestaamerica.com](http://fiestaamerica.com) and click "How to Exhibit" at [info@fiestaamerica.com](mailto:info@fiestaamerica.com) to learn more about Fiesta in America





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# LOVE THE PHILIPPINES





MALACAÑAN PALACE  
MANILA

### MESSAGE

Filipinos overseas have always exhibited natural resourcefulness. Wherever they are, they have turned products into wonders, meagerness into abundance, and predictability into surprises, becoming a source of inspiration for many to be genuinely devoted and progressive in our duties for our families and communities.

It is in this spirit that I extend my heartfelt greetings to the organizers, participants, and stakeholders of **Fiesta in America**. Through your efforts, our heritage is promoted, our unique products and exceptional talents are showcased, and career and entrepreneurial opportunities are made available to our fellow Filipinos. Indeed, for nearly three decades of your existence, you have proven that innovative projects and collaboration synergized with Filipino creativity propel vast possibilities for success.

Truly, celebrating your **28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** is a feat to indulge; yet, far more than that, a chance to champion the brand of Filipino excellence, dedication, ingenuity, and compassion. I trust that with your commitment to these initiatives, you will also provide avenues for tourism promotion, trade, and partnerships among people. Rest assured that the government works with you in propagating our culture and advancing Filipino entrepreneurship overseas.

Together, let us build a *Bagong Pilipinas* worthy of being a shining beacon of empowerment and prosperity to the whole world.

I wish you a successful and heartwarming gathering.

  
FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.

MANILA  
16 August 2025

THE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES



CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
NEW YORK



The Philippine Consulate General in New York extends our warmest greetings to all the organizers, partners, and attendees to this year's People's Ball hosted by Fiesta in America.

I congratulate Fiesta in America as you celebrate 15 years of the People's Ball. We especially commend the Empowerment Awards recognizing achievements of notable Filipinos in their respective fields of endeavor. May this program continue to inspire future generations of Filipinos to be productive members of society.

Throughout the years, the Fiesta in America organization has been a steadfast partner in promoting the Philippines - its heritage, economic opportunities, and people-to-people engagements. Almost three decades of existence stand as testament to the support and value ascribed to Fiesta in America by the community. I earnestly wish for continued success for the organization.

May the People's Ball 2025 be remembered as a resounding success and enriching experience to all those who have contributed and participated.

***Mabuhay ang Fiesta in America!***

**SENEN T. MANGALILE**  
Consul General

5 August 2025, New York City



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO



Dear Friends,

As we proudly mark the 28th anniversary of Fiesta in America, I am filled with gratitude for how far we've come—and excitement for what lies ahead.

Over nearly three decades, Fiesta in America has grown into the largest indoor Filipino American expo in the Northeastern United States, offering a dynamic blend of culture, commerce, and community. This year's celebration will be our most impactful yet.

We are thrilled to welcome back Vina Morales, the multi-awarded singer and actress, who is returning to Fiesta in America for the second time. Nearly two years ago, nearly the entire Broadway cast of *Here Lies Love* performed live at Fiesta—except for Vina, who had already returned to the Philippines following her Broadway run. In 2025, she's back to grace our stage once again with a headlining performance that promises to be unforgettable.

This year also brings a historic milestone for our Empowerment Awards Gala, where we will honor a record 15 outstanding Filipino Americans. These trailblazers represent excellence across a range of fields—from medicine and finance to education, public service, and the arts. Their achievements reflect the values at the heart of Fiesta in America: resilience, innovation, and the power of community.

More than a cultural gathering, Fiesta in America continues to serve as a powerful platform for business exchange and cultural diplomacy. We're expanding our partnerships with sponsors, exhibitors, and Filipino local governments to spotlight the Philippines as a hub of opportunity for tourism, trade, and investment.

And true to our mission of service, we will once again offer free healthcare screenings and family-friendly programming, in collaboration with leading health organizations and our dedicated network of Filipino nurses and volunteers.

I invite you to be part of this remarkable celebration at Fiesta in America Expo 2025 at American Dream. Join us as we honor our heritage, uplift our community, and create new opportunities for future generations.

Mabuhay, and see you at the Expo!

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nanding Mendez".

Nanding Mendez  
President & CEO  
Fiesta in America



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRODUCTION & CULTURAL DIRECTOR



To all our beloved guests,

WELCOME to FIESTA in AMERICA 2025!

Once again, I am delighted to see you and extend my heartfelt gratitude for your presence. Your participation brings this celebration to life, and we are honored to share this special occasion with you as we celebrate our rich heritage and vibrant culture.

May your time here at American Dream—the new home of Fiesta in America—be filled with joy, meaningful connections, and lasting memories.

This year marks the 28th anniversary of Fiesta in America, a remarkable milestone that reflects our enduring unity, perseverance, and pride in our shared roots. For nearly three decades, Fiesta in America has served as a powerful bridge between communities, generations, and cultures—woven together through stories of tradition, innovation, and collaboration.

As we gather to celebrate this special 28th year, let us honor the visionaries and pioneers who paved the way, and recognize the countless friendships and partnerships that have blossomed along the way. Here's to celebrating our past, embracing our present, and looking ahead to many more years of togetherness and cultural brilliance.

Let us celebrate together and make this event truly unforgettable.  
Happy 28th Anniversary, Fiesta in America!

Mabuhay!

Sincerely,

Ogie B. Afable  
Production and  
Cultural Director

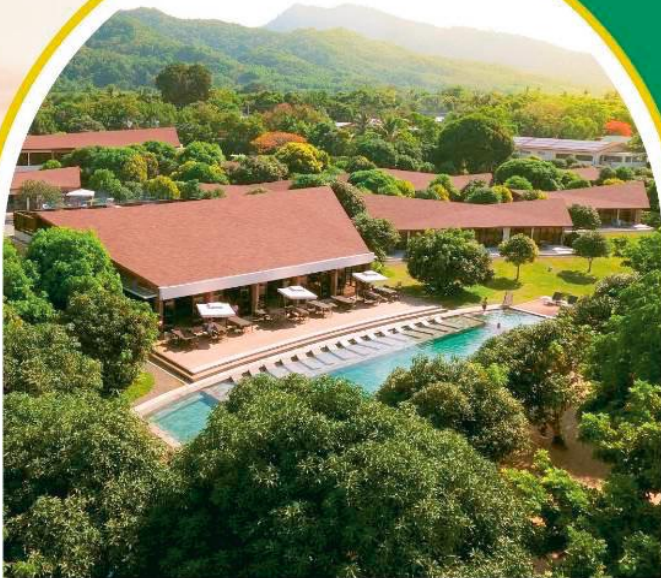




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# Batangas

Where Barako Meets the Sea and History Winks at You

If the Philippines had a caffeine-fueled, sea-loving, history-snuggling cousin, it would be Batangas City. Just a few hours south of Metro Manila (depending on traffic and your playlist), this coastal charmer punches well above its weight in personality. It's a place where mornings start with a bold cup of *kapeng barako* (strong, locally grown coffee known for its macho kick), lunch is a slurp-fest of thick *lomi* (egg noodle soup in a garlicky, savory broth), and the sunset strolls are best done along the breezy Baywalk. Known as the "Industrial Port City of CALABARZON," Batangas City may be one of the country's busiest shipping hubs, but it still knows how to live slowly, laugh loud, and love locals.

Now, with the return of **Governor Vilma Santos**—yes, *that* Vilma Santos—Batangas enters a new era that feels like a throwback to its glory days. A beloved figure in Philippine entertainment and a proven public servant, Governor Vi was recently welcomed back into office with open arms and roaring applause. Her previous terms were marked by good governance, tourism growth, and public service that blended heart with hard work. As she retakes the reins, Batangueños are abuzz with optimism.

Whether you're a first-time visitor or a homecoming *balikbayan*, there's no shortage of things to do in Batangas City. Here's a laid-back, barako-fueled guide to exploring the sights, bites, and soul of the city:

## SIP BARAKO LIKE A LOCAL

This isn't your average cup of coffee. *Kapeng barako*—translated as "stud coffee"—is bold, woody, and unapologetically strong. Brewed from the Liberica bean and often served straight-up, it's practically a rite of passage in Batangas. Take your first sip black and brace yourself—it doesn't whisper. It growls.

## SLURP YOUR WAY THROUGH LOMI HEAVEN

Thick, garlicky, and eggy, Batangas-style *lomi* is a comfort food classic. This rich egg noodle soup is often topped with chopped liver, crushed *chicharon*, hard-boiled egg, and a mountain of toasted garlic. It's so hearty you might forget to order rice—almost.

## FEEL THE BEAT OF THE SUBLIAN FESTIVAL

Every July, the streets of Batangas burst into a vibrant swirl of color, rhythm, and devotion during the **Sublian Festival**. The name comes from "subli," a traditional dance honoring the Holy Cross and the Sto. Niño. The result? A celebration that's both deeply spiritual and wonderfully festive. Expect street dancing, drum lines, and the kind of joy that makes you want to join in—even if you have two left feet.



## STEP INTO A BASILICA BUILT TO INSPIRE

In the heart of the city stands the Minor Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, one of the largest churches in the Philippines. With its grand facade, colonial-era architecture, and solemn interiors, the basilica is both a spiritual sanctuary and a history lesson in stone.

## EXPLORE VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE, A MARINE PARADISE

Batangas City's most jaw-dropping secret isn't on land—it's underwater. The **Verde Island Passage**, just a short boat ride away, is recognized globally as the "center of the center of marine biodiversity." It's a diver's dream, home to thousands of marine species—some yet to be named. Scientists and snorkelers alike are drawn to its pristine reefs and rare sea creatures, from glowing nudibranchs to technicolor coral gardens. It's the Philippines at its most awe-inspiring.

## STROLL ALONG BATANGAS BAYWALK AT SUNSET

When the day winds down, head to the Baywalk where the sea breeze is cool, the street food is sizzling, and the sunsets are reliably golden. Grab a *taho*, people-watch, or simply bask in the view of boats bobbing gently in the harbor.



## GO FISH—AT THE PUBLIC MARKET

Batangas' bustling public market is a flavor-packed experience. Wake up early and catch the *tulingan* (skipjack tuna) hauls arriving fresh from sea. Stock up on dried fish, garlic, *kapeng barako*, and local sweets like *panutsa* (peanut brittle). Bargaining is optional—but friendly banter is encouraged.

## FIESTA HOPPING WITH THE LOCALS

Ask any Batangueño: their fiesta is the best. And they might all be right. Every barangay has its own celebration, complete with *lechon*, karaoke battles, marching bands, and relatives you've never met insisting you eat more. Whether you planned it or not, chances are you'll be swept into a celebration—so show up hungry and bring your dancing shoes.

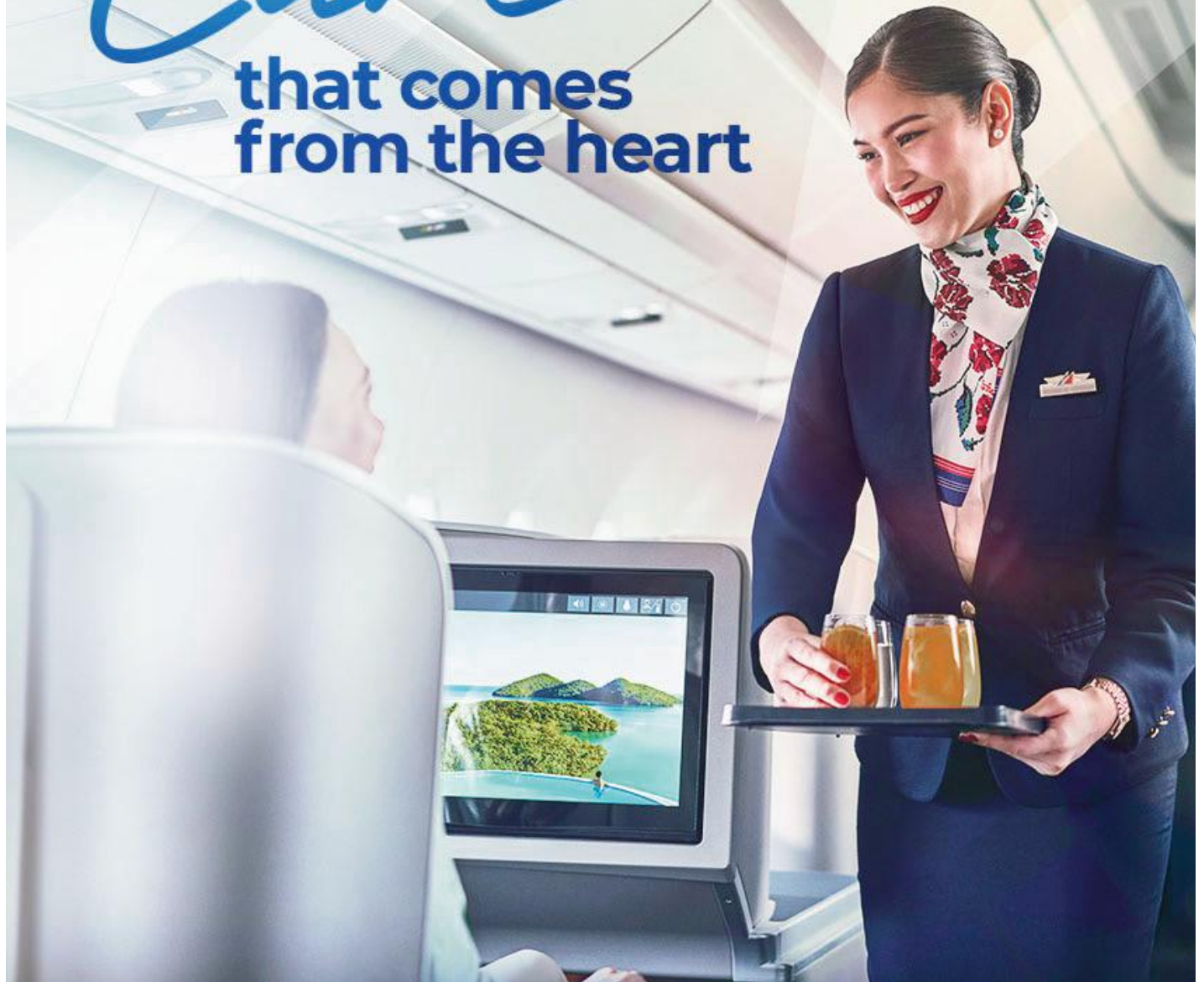
In Batangas City, the flavors are fierce, the traditions are proud, and the sea always feels just a stone's throw away. With Governor Vi back in office and the city's pulse stronger than ever, Batangas is once again proving that its real power lies not just in its port or industry—but in its people, its culture, and its endless capacity to make you feel right at home.



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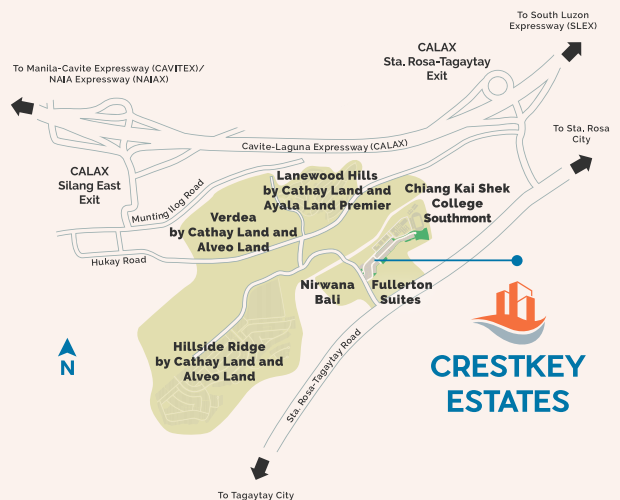


Artist's Rendition

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# BONIFACIO GLOBAL CITY

Where Manila Vlogs Itself

If Manila had a neighborhood that doubled as a movie set, lifestyle magazine, fitness ad, and Instagram filter—all in one—it would be **Bonifacio Global City**. Known to its besties as BGC, this ultra-modern district in Taguig has become the Philippines' unofficial capital of content creation. Everywhere you look, there's a clean street, a curated mural, or a coffee shop that practically begs to be filmed.

It's no surprise that vloggers, influencers, and aspiring TikTok stars flock here like **stray cats to a tapsilog (garlic rice, fried egg, and meat) stand**. Where else can you go from a rooftop bar shoot to a food crawl to an art wall time-lapse—all without leaving a 10-block radius? With its tree-lined avenues, upscale malls, international eats, and 5G-level energy, BGC is a one-stop aesthetic shop. It's clean, safe, walkable, and full of people living their best edited lives.

But even in a city designed for content, **rules still apply**—and one vlogger recently found out what happens when you ignore them.

A foreign YouTuber known for controversial pranks sparked national backlash after threatening to rob a Filipino pedestrian, mocking and harassing security guards and other egregious acts. He also took unsolicited videos of strangers, violating their privacy and safety. While the vlogger's antics went viral, they also triggered a wake-up call for creators: **being bold is no excuse for being disrespectful**.

In fact, new regulations have since made the message even clearer. Under the Philippines' **National Privacy Commission's (NPC) Circular No. 2025-01**, vloggers and content creators are now required to **blur or mask images of bystanders** caught in the videos of their body-worn cameras or alternative recording devices.

The guideline—titled "Guideline on the Processing of Personal Data Collected Using Body-Worn Cameras"—aims to protect the data privacy rights of individuals who didn't sign up to be part of your feed. Whether you're shooting a cinematic monologue or a casual Q&A, if someone's in the background, they have a right to privacy.

So in BGC, content is still king—but **privacy, safety, and consent are the royal court**. Respect those, and this city is your stage.

Planning your shoot? Here are **six BGC spots** that shine on camera and off, all while keeping your conscience (and your permit) clear:

## BONIFACIO HIGH STREET

BGC's open-air runway of urban style. Lined with shops, cafés, and leafy paths, it's ideal for lifestyle vlogs, spontaneous interviews, and midday merienda (snack) runs. It's where city life meets chill content.



## THE MIND MUSEUM

For science-themed content or family-friendly filming, this interactive museum gives you luminous exhibits, dinosaur bones, and enough geek-chic angles to power a smart vlog series.



## BGC MURALS AND STREET ART

Bold, beautiful, and free to enjoy, these walls are a favorite for street-style lookbooks, personal essays, or "walk and talk" episodes. No permit? Stick to public spaces and you're golden.

## THE DECK AT ONE BONIFACIO HIGH STREET

A rooftop scene with a view of the BGC skyline—perfect for golden hour musings, outfit montages, or quiet reflections with the city lights behind you.

## TRACK 30TH AND TERRA 28TH PARKS

Want wellness vibes? These landscaped green spaces are made for yoga, jogging, or a midday breather. Terra 28th even features larong Pinoy (traditional Filipino games) spaces—ideal for cultural storytelling.

## UPTOWN PARADE AND UPTOWN MALL

When the sun goes down, this area lights up with live music, glowing fountains, and rooftop dining. Bring your tripod and appetite—it's where glam and good food meet in one frame.

In Bonifacio Global City, the streets are your set—but the people are not your props. Bring your camera, your creativity, and your best energy—but don't forget to blur what needs blurring, ask for consent, and keep it classy. BGC isn't just where Manila looks good—it's where it demands to be respected.

## Health. Beauty. Leadership. Represent.

In the heart of Woodside, Alicia Almendral MD PLLC Primary Care and Monarch Montage Skin Science and Medical Aesthetics offers trusted, compassionate healthcare and aesthetic services tailored to your needs — and your heritage.

Led by Dr. Alicia Almendral, a proud Filipina-American physician, the clinic provides comprehensive primary care, chronic condition management, weight loss management, and natural, non-invasive aesthetic treatments. From wellness to rejuvenation, every service reflects a commitment to excellence, dignity, and cultural understanding.

But healing is just one part of the story.

Dr. Almendral proudly supports the Reina Filipina Leadership Organization Inc. and its landmark event — Reina Filipina Global 2026 — the first global pageant celebrating Filipina beauty, leadership, and advocacy across the diaspora. Taking place at the Palladium Times Square in NYC, the pageant empowers young Filipinas to lead with confidence, culture, and purpose.

When you choose Alicia Almendral MD and Monarch Montage Skin Science and Medical Aesthetics, you support a practice that uplifts community, identity, and the next generation of Filipina leaders.

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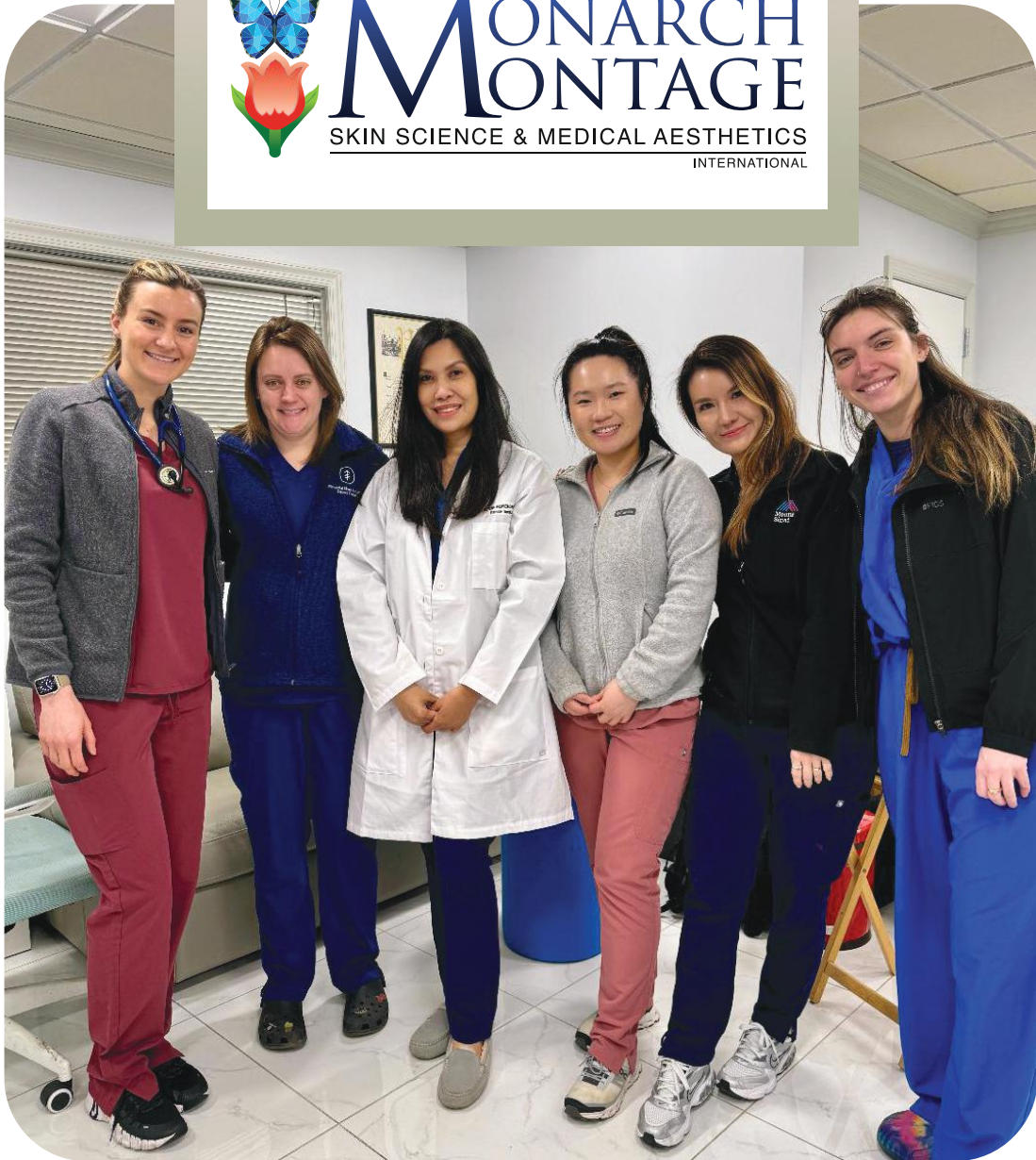


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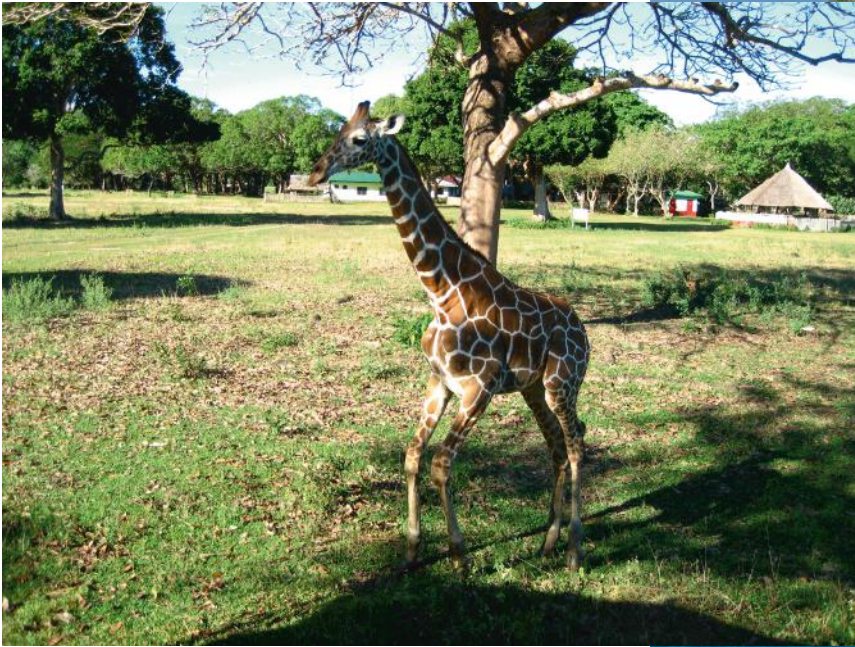
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Geriatrician, and Aesthetic specialist

## **Dr. Alice Almendral — A True Force of Beauty, Brains and Business**

Though your dedication to promoting the unique Filipino care and intelligence, you've helped bring ingenuity to the global stage. Your work not only supports homegrown clinicians, brands and medical services, it elevates the pride and potential of the Filipinos worldwide.



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# WHERE THE (PHILIPPINE) WILD ISLANDS ARE

Not all islands are made for selfies and infinity pools. Some exist for something far more powerful: protection, education, and survival—not just for people, but for the planet.

Take **Balabac**, a scattered string of remote islands in Palawan, closer to Borneo than to Manila. With its translucent shallows, shifting sandbars, and coral reefs teeming with life, Balabac is where time seems to bend with the tides. It's home to the elusive Philippine mouse-deer and nesting grounds for sea turtles. Power is patchy, cell signal is rare, and tourism is just beginning to reach its shores. But the people here understand the stakes: their survival is tied to the health of the sea. Fishermen are becoming conservation guides, and local leaders are working to ensure that any development puts the environment—and their ancestral waters—first.

Further north, **Calauit** at the tip of Palawan tells a more unusual story. African wildlife like giraffes and zebras roam its grasslands—remnants of a 1970s “Noah’s Ark” initiative that re-located species from Sudan to this tropical island. Though its origins are controversial, Calauit has evolved into a place of reflection. Conservationists now manage the island, working to restore harmony between introduced species and native ecosystems. Dugongs swim in nearby waters, and many caretakers are islanders who’ve chosen stewardship over spectacle.



To the east lies **Sibuyan**, often called the “Galápagos of Asia.” Dominated by Mount Guiting-Guiting’s jagged ridges and cloaked in some of the densest forests in the Philippines, Sibuyan hosts over 1,500 plant species—many of them endemic. What sets Sibuyan apart is its people: for decades, residents have resisted mining, logging, and large-scale tourism. Their grassroots efforts have kept the island wild. There are no airports, no luxury resorts—just spring-fed rivers, rare birds, and a community that guards its natural heritage like a sacred trust.

Then there’s **Anguib Beach**, tucked away on the northeastern tip of Luzon in Cagayan province. With powdery white sand and clear waters fringed by thick forest, it’s long been called “Boracay of the North”—but unlike its southern cousin, Anguib remains largely undeveloped. Its isolation is both its gift and its risk. Local officials and community groups are pushing for sustainable tourism, but pressure from investors is growing. Whether Anguib becomes a case study in preservation or exploitation may depend on what choices are made now—while there’s still time.



In the Visayas, **Apo Island** near Negros Oriental has become a model for marine conservation. Once overfished, the island’s waters are now a vibrant sanctuary of soft corals, sea turtles, and schooling jacks—thanks to the collective decision of its fishing community to establish no-take zones in the 1980s. Apo Island shows how nature can rebound when locals lead the way. Divers flock here not for luxury, but to witness how a fishing village helped bring a reef back to life.

And finally, there is **Danjugan**. Located off Negros Occidental, this 43-hectare island is not just wild—it’s intentionally **off-limits to mass tourism**. Once on the brink of being stripped for lumber, it was rescued by conservationists in the 1990s who envisioned something radical: an island not for leisure, but for learning. For six years, Danjugan was closed to the public. Scientists came to study its reefs and forests. Local youth were trained in conservation. When it finally opened, it came with a warning: This is not a resort. You won’t find air-conditioned rooms or cocktails here—just solar-powered huts, jungle trails, and coral gardens patrolled by baby sharks and Triton snails. More than 800 students from nearby communities have passed through its education programs, many returning as stewards of the sea. Danjugan isn’t just protected. It’s a promise—passed on, lived out, and fiercely kept.



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# ANYWHERE IS POSSIBLE

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 **KOREAN AIR**

FIESTA IN AMERICA <20> FIESTA TALKS 2025



# Where the City Works by Day and Plays All Night

If BGC is Manila's fresh-faced millennial, **Makati** is the stylish executive who's been running the show long before hashtags existed. It's polished, worldly, and still knows where to find the best *kare-kare* (peanut stew) at 2 p.m. and a Negroni at midnight. Yes, it's the country's financial capital—but behind the glass towers and power suits is a district that's pulsing with creativity, history, and very good food.

Often called the Philippines' most famous urban jungle, Makati is a city that caters to all kinds of travelers: from museum-hoppers to park-strollers, from luxury shoppers to *turo-turo* (local eatery) loyalists. Whether you're in town for a business meeting, a quick culture fix, or just to eat your way from Ayala to Poblacion, Makati offers something for every kind of wanderer.

Makati is home to some of the city's most exciting cultural spaces. **Ayala Museum** is a favorite starting point, with its pre-colonial gold, rich textile collections, and interactive digital displays on Philippine history. Just a short ride away, **The Drawing Room** showcases contemporary Filipino art, including original sketches by national artist BenCab.

Over at RCBC Plaza, the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium regularly hosts plays, dance recitals, and concerts for lovers of the performing arts. For something even older, the Guadalupe Ruins—a 400-year-old stone church—offers a peek into the city's Spanish colonial past and is a must for architecture and history buffs.



## GREEN SPACES

Don't let the skyscrapers fool you—Makati knows the value of a good breather. **Ayala Triangle Gardens** is the district's version of a pocket Central Park, and during the holidays, it transforms into a magical light-and-sound show. For something quieter, **Washington SyCip Park** offers koi ponds, sculptures by Impy Pilapil, and piped-in music under a canopy of trees.

**Jaime Velasquez Park**, also known as **Salcedo Park**, is beloved for its weekend market and art fair, *Art in the Park*. And if you're looking for movement, visit the country's first **urban skate park**—perfect for skaters looking for a no-pressure spot to practice or spectators just enjoying the vibe.

## WHERE TO SHOP (AND WINDOW-SHOP LIKE A PRO)

Shopping in Makati isn't just about spending—it's a whole experience. At the center is **Greenbelt**, a complex of high-end fashion, al fresco dining, and the occasional Sunday mass. **Glorietta** and **The Landmark** provide everything from cosmetics to pancit canton (noodle dishes), while **SM Makati** offers global favorites like Uniqlo and H&M.

For something a bit quieter, head to **Power Plant Mall** in Rockwell for upscale boutiques, family-friendly restaurants, and hidden gems like Harlan+Holden Glasshouse. And if you prefer indie finds, **Century City Mall**—dubbed the "Mall of Modern Makati"—offers stylish shops and one of the city's most eclectic food courts, **Hole in the Wall**.

## MAKATI EATS: FROM LUXE TO LUTONG BAHAY

Food is a love language in Makati. **Milkyway Café** serves up classic Pampanga cuisine and homemade ice cream, while **Blackbird**, housed in the old Manila International Airport control tower, offers elegant plates in an Art Deco setting.

For heritage dining, **XO 46 Bistro** greets you in full Tagalog and serves *sinigang na bagnet* (sour soup with crispy pork), *kalderetang baka* (beef stew), and other Filipino staples reimagined with flair. **Little Tokyo**, tucked along Chino Roces, transports you straight to Japan with its lantern-lit courtyards and *ekonomiyaki* stalls.

On a budget? Hunt down the **Jolly Jeep** food stalls—Makati's own version of food trucks. Found on CBD corners, they're the lunch spots of choice for office workers. Try the *sisig* at the Rada jeep—it has cult status for a reason.

## BARs, BREWS & BOOZE

Makati's nightlife is as diverse as its boardrooms. **Antidote** at l'M Hotel is the country's first jellyfish-themed rooftop bar, while **Long Bar** at Raffles Makati serves up a "Makati Luxury Sling" topped with 24-karat gold flakes.

If you like your drinks with a side of mystery, try the speakeasies: **Prohibition Lounge** (hidden inside Dillingers 1903) and **Penthouse 8747**, a Gatsby-esque rooftop with sweeping views and Art Deco flair.

For a more laid-back pub crawl, **Poblacion** is still king. Swing by **Polilya** for local craft beer, **YOI** for sake and Scandinavian bar chow, or wind down at **Commune**, where the coffee is strong and the cakes legendary.

Makati isn't just a place you pass through—it's a city that invites you to stay a little longer, dig a little deeper, and walk a little slower. It moves fast, but lives well. Whether you're closing a deal, hunting down the perfect *kakanin* (rice cake), or chasing jazz at 1 a.m., one thing's for sure: in Makati, the hustle is real—but so is the charm.

# CONGRATULATIONS!

**DR. SHIRLEY MALABANAN -TANSIONGCO, MD FACP**  
2025 PEOPLE'S BALL EMPOWERMENT AWARDEE  
FOR LEADERSHIP IN MEDICINE AND MENTORSHIP



**Dr. Shirley Malabanan - Tansiongco, MD FACP**

Assistant Professor State University of New York in Stony Brook (Ret)"  
Board Certified American Of Internal Medicine 'til 2025  
Attending Physician VA Northport (Ret)  
ER Director VA Northport 1998-2003 (FMR)  
Intern (2024 - Present ) and Past President USTMAANY 2020-2023  
Vice-President PMAAA

**Dr. Dennis Tobias Tansiongco, MD FACP**

Assistant Professor State University of New York in Stony Brook (Ret)"  
Board Certified American Of Internal Medicine 'til 2026  
Attending Physician VA Northport (Ret)  
East Meadow Clinic Director VA Northport EMW CBOC (Ret)  
Auditor PMAAA

**Dr. Rachel Malabanan Tansiongco - Swimmer Pediatric Dentist  
Dr. Troy Swimmer General Dentist )**

Cody, Kayden and Cameron

**Dr. Denise Malabanan Tansiongco - Sartori ( Pediatrician )  
Dr. Carl Sartori ( Pediatrician )**

Carl 4th and Xavier



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and love never ends our  
life's Journey. "

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# 2024 HIGHLIGHTS





# EMPOWERME

The Empowerment Awards 2025 celebrate the remarkable achievements of Filipinos in the US who have made significant contributions in various fields, exemplifying leadership, dedication, and community impact. This year, we are honored to include extraordinary individuals whose career and community involvement have profoundly influenced the lives of many.



**Laura Garcia**  
*Honorary Chair, The Empowerment Awards 2025*

Dr. Laura Garcia is an accomplished nurse leader, educator, and community advocate. She serves as Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Mount Saint Vincent and as an Adjunct Clinical Instructor at NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing. A recipient of the prestigious Pamanang Filipino Award in 2021, part of the Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas (PAFIOO), Dr. Garcia is recognized globally for her contributions to healthcare and the Filipino diaspora. She currently holds leadership roles as Vice President for Community Relations at Fiesta in America and President of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA), Northeast Region. She earned her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) from Fairleigh Dickinson University and also serves on Manhattan Community Board District 5, where she advocates for equity in health and education. Also, she is the Vice President of the newly formed Fight Against Tuberculosis Among Filipinos Foundation.



**Rachel Alejandro**  
*Filipino-American Performer and Producer Celebrating Culture Through Music, Theater & Film*

Rachel Alejandro is a Filipino-American platinum record recording artist, award-winning songwriter, concert performer, film actress and producer. She popularized hit songs such as "Mr. Cupido", "Kay Tagal", "K.S.P.", "Nakapagtataka", "Bulag Sa Katotohanan" and "Paalam Na". She is known as a theater actress for her roles in hugely successful Manila and Singapore productions of musicals such as "Rent", "Avenue Q", "Xanadu", "Aida", "Rock of Ages", "Into The Woods" and "Monty Python's Spamalot". She has toured performing for Filipino communities around the world, won Best Actress Awards for the musical "Avenue Q" as well as the hit romantic comedy, "Love/Sick". Rachel resides in New York City while pursuing a career as a US-based actor, singer and commercial model.



**Inez Aznar, FSCP®**  
*Championing Inclusive Financial Wellness for Families, Professionals, and Caregivers*

Inez Aznar, FSCP (Financial Services Certified Professional® Program) is a Financial Planner who helps busy parents and professionals feel confident about their financial future—so they can sleep well at night. With 14 years of experience in the financial services industry and a Master's in Finance from Golden Gate University, she brings a values-based approach to planning that empowers clients to make informed decisions aligned with their goals. Inez specializes in working with families and individuals building and preserving generational wealth, particularly those navigating the dual responsibilities of raising children and supporting aging loved ones. Through her practice at Eagle Strategies LLC, she designs personalized strategies focused on wealth building.



**Rosario de Perio Estrada**  
*Educator, Mentor, and Bridge Between U.S. and Philippine Nursing Communities*

Dr. Rosario P. Estrada is a trailblazing nurse educator, informatics expert, and distinguished healthcare leader with over four decades of service to nursing education and Filipino American advocacy. She served as Specialty Director of the Nursing Informatics MSN Program at Rutgers University and retired as Professor Emerita. Under her leadership, the program earned national distinction—ranked among the top ten Nursing Informatics programs by U.S. News & World Report in 2018—and cultivated a new generation of nursing informatics leaders. She holds a Doctorate in Nursing (Leadership in Health Systems) from Rutgers and a BSN from the University of Santo Tomas in Manila.

# NT AWARDS 2025



**JAN ANDRADA LANE**  
*A Leader in Community and Service*

Jan Andrada Lane is a respected Filipino American leader whose work spans cultural advocacy, healthcare, and public service. She is the former State Treasurer of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) New York and former Vice President of FilAm Cancer Care. Among her many contributions, she helped lead the groundbreaking Battle of Sibuyan Sea (BOSS) commemoration at the Philippine Consulate in 2015 – part of her ongoing efforts to honor World War II history, including her current role as Philippine Representative of AV Spyron Manila. Guided by the mentorship of Dra. Laura Garcia of NaFFAA, Jan became a unifying presence in civic life, organizing cultural programs and forums. She is also an active member of the Philippine Nurses Association of New York, Nurses Toastmasters, and Ang Nars, Inc. Jan received the Presidential Volunteer Service Award in 2024 and a Congressional Recognition from the State of New York.



**LORIE D. LIZARDO**  
*Psychiatrist, U.S. Army Veteran, and Trailblazer in Community Mental Health and Civic Leadership*

Dr. Lorie D. Lizardo is an accomplished physician, educator, civic leader, and matriarch whose legacy spans medicine, military service, and community empowerment. A graduate of the University of Santo Tomas, College of Medicine and Surgery (Class of 1967), she migrated to the U.S. in 1971 and completed her Psychiatry and Neurology residency at the University of Medicine and Dentistry New Jersey, Medical School, where she served as Chief Resident. She became a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology in 1982 and went on to open multiple medical practices across New Jersey. She served as Medical Director of the Behavioral Unit at St. Michael Medical Center until her retirement and held academic positions at UMDNJ and Seton Hall.



**RAY MADRONIO**  
*Redefining Corporate Housing—One Stay at a Time*

Ray Madronio is the founder and CEO of California Corporate Housing, a fast-growing company redefining the standards of temporary housing for relocating professionals. With operations spanning the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego, his business blends tech-enabled convenience with personalized, home-like comfort—often inspired by Filipino values of kapamilya (family-like care). Ray holds a business degree with honors from UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business and an MBA from Columbia University. He also completed advanced IT training at Stanford and held corporate roles at PwC, Gap, and Williams Sonoma before launching his own venture in 2014. His entrepreneurial journey began humbly in a shared San Jose living room after immigrating from the Philippines.



**VENESSA MANZANO**  
*Advocate for Filipino Cultural Learning and Community Empowerment*

In 2008, Venessa Manzano founded the Filipino School of New York and New Jersey, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting Filipino culture among the youth. Born to immigrant parents from Silang, Cavite, Venessa grew up in Massachusetts speaking Tagalog, learning folk dances, and attending a Filipino school—early experiences that sparked a lifelong commitment to cultural education. Her school offers classes in Tagalog, folk dance, martial arts, and ancient scripts like Baybayin across Bergen and Hudson counties. She helps Filipino American children feel proud of their heritage and connected to their roots. Venessa brings nonprofit leadership to her work. She also served as Executive Director of the Filipino American Human Services, Inc.



# EMPOWERME



**CORAZON "CORÁ" TAMARGO RIVERA**

*Bridging Real Estate, Ministry, and Mission*

Corazon "Cora" Tamargo Rivera is a highly respected business leader and community advocate, currently serving as Vice President of Bona Tierra Realty Corporation of New York. A pioneer in the real estate industry, Cora has built a career marked by integrity, compassion, and a steadfast commitment to service. Beyond her business accomplishments, Cora has been a long-standing pillar of support for the Filipino American community, the Catholic Church, and numerous civic causes across the New York Metro area. She is especially known for her unwavering dedication to ministries and outreach programs that support Filipino Catholic workers and immigrant families. Cora has devoted herself to supporting key faith-based ministries that reflect her deep spiritual values.



**CHRISTINE SIENICKI**

*A Dynamic Force in Dance, From Rockettes to Choreographing for Stage and Screen*

Christine Sienicki is a New York-based professional dancer, choreographer, and educator whose career spans stage, television, film, and live productions. A proud New Jersey native, she began dancing professionally at 18—debuting at the Super Bowl Halftime Show and launching a remarkable 21-season run with the world-famous Rockettes in the Radio City Christmas Spectacular. Her film credits include "Tick, Tick... Boom!," "Isn't It Romantic," "Better Nate Than Ever," and "The Kitchen." On television, Christine has performed on "Elsbeth," "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," "Fosse/Verdon," "SNL," "America's Got Talent," and "Project Runway." She's also appeared on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," "Jimmy Fallon," "Oprah," and "Ellen". Passionate about mentorship, Christine teaches masterclasses nationwide, inspiring the next generation of dancers.



**GERALD TABIOS**

*Excellence in Endurance Sports or Endurance in Sports*

Gerald Tabios is a Filipino-American ultramarathoner whose unmatched grit has powered him through over 200 marathons and ultramarathons—including nine finishes of the legendary Badwater 135-mile across Death Valley, one of the world's toughest endurance races. Born in the scenic city of Malaybalay, Bukidnon, Philippines, Gerald earned a degree in Civil Engineering from Xavier University before migrating to New York in 2001 with his wife, Donna. His remarkable journey is captured in the documentary "Running for Freedom: My Journey as an Ultra Marathon Runner" and in his 2025 memoir, "Escape from Comfort," which explores the mental and emotional strength behind physical endurance. In 2022, he was named one of The Outstanding Filipinos in America (TOFA). His story reflects the enduring Filipino spirit: *Kaya natin 'to*—"We can do this."



**SHIRLEY MALABAN-TANSIONGCO**

*Distinguished Internist, Educator, Advocate for Filipino American Medical Leadership*

Dr. Shirley Malaban-Tansiongco is a board-certified internist with medical licenses in both California and New York, and a remarkable record in clinical medicine, academic mentorship, and community leadership. She served as Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine at SUNY Stony Brook and the VA Medical Center in Northport, NY from 1996 to 2022. As a Ward Attending Physician in the Internal Medicine Residency Program, she was twice honored as "Most Outstanding Ward Attending of the Month." She serves as President of the UST Medical Alumni Association in America since 2020 and is currently the Vice President of the Philippine Medical Association of America. A Fellow of the American College of Physicians since 1995, she remains a steadfast advocate for healthcare education.

# NT AWARDS 2025



**MARIA CRESLY ARIATE TAYLOR**

*Champion of Education, Cultural Pride, and Community-Building*

Dr. Maria Cresly A. Taylor is a visionary educator, respected leader, and accomplished author with 27 years of experience shaping education across communities in the U.S. and the Philippines. She currently serves as Vice President of the United Federation of Filipino Educators (UNIFFIED) New York Chapter, President of the International Guild of Educators, Authors, and Researchers (New York Chapter), and Director of Online Education and Professional Advancement at Greenville College (USA). She also acts as a consultant to UNIFFIED chapters nationwide and abroad. Dr. Taylor has authored three books, most recently launching her latest publication in New York. Her professional work includes roles as a Special Education Teacher for the NYC Department of Education, TESOL Instructor at the YMCA of Greater New York, and college professor.



**ARIS TUAZON**

*Spotlighting Filipino culinary culture in mainstream NYC via pop-ups, demos, and social outreach*

Chef Aris “Ari” Tuazon is a Filipino-born, New York-based culinary innovator celebrated for pioneering elevated Filipino cuisine in the city’s dining scene. With over two decades of experience across NYC—including roles at hotspots like 87 Ludlow, Gugu Room, the new Halo Halo Bar in LES and the East Village’s beloved Ugly Kitchen—Chef Aris has built a reputation for blending tradition with modern flair. At Ugly Kitchen, he crafted a warm neighborhood hub, serving high-quality sisig and other Filipino comfort dishes; it became a Filipino culinary landmark until its closure in 2020 during the pandemic. Known affectionately as a “New York legend” in the Filipino-American community, He is also a sought-after guest for cooking demos and Filipino food events, such as the Kulinarya Live! NBC today show and the Degustibus series.



**WINSTON UMALI, MD, FAAP**

*Pediatrician and Community Leader with 30+ Years of Service*

Winston Caraos Umali, MD, FAAP is a board-certified pediatrician based in Jersey City, New Jersey. He earned his BS Degree in Psychology (cum laude) in 1988 and Doctor of Medicine from the University of the Philippines in 1994. With over 25 years in pediatric practice, he has mentored countless students, residents, and international Filipino medical graduates pursuing U.S. training. Dr. Umali is also an active academic, serving as Adjunct Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and Rowan University. Beyond medicine, he is a civic leader: National President of the UP Alumni Association in America, President-Elect of UPMASA, Trustee of the Handang Tumulong Foundation, and Executive Director of the Philippine Pediatric Society in America.



**MAKILALA TV**

*A Decade-Strong Platform of Culture, Advocacy, and Representation*

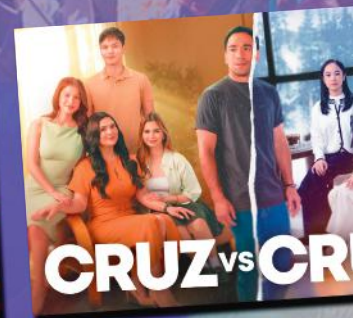
Makilala TV, the longest-running Filipino American talk show in the United States, is the first and only Filipino American television program in the New York Metro area. Since its inception, it has remained a groundbreaking platform that amplifies the stories, culture, and issues shaping the Filipino-American experience. Co-produced and co-hosted by three dynamic women—Jen Furer, Rachele Ocampo, and Cristina DC Pastor—Makilala TV blends journalism, public service, and community engagement. Together, the trio brings a powerful mix of experience in health advocacy, media, and civic leadership, creating a program that is not only informative but also deeply personal and community-centered. Makilala TV has produced 147 episodes and welcomed over 500 guests.



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# MULTI-AWARDED SINGER-ACTRESS VINA MORALES

## HEADLINES FIESTA IN AMERICA 2025

From her humble beginnings in Cebu to the spotlight of Broadway, Vina Morales brings her storied journey full circle as she takes center stage at Fiesta in America 2025. The multi-awarded actress and singer will join the opening ceremony on August 16 at 11:00 AM, and headline the main concert on August 17 at American Dream in New Jersey—one of the largest retail and entertainment destinations in the U.S.

Now in its 28th year, Fiesta in America is the largest indoor Filipino expo and cultural festival in the United States, featuring a powerful blend of trade shows, tourism showcases, culinary experiences, business networking, and star-studded performances.

The event annually attracts thousands of Filipino Americans and multicultural audiences from across the East Coast—and in 2025, it welcomes one of the Philippines' most beloved performers, who recently returned to GMA Network—where she began her television career—for her comeback teleserye *Cruz vs. Cruz*.

### A STAR BORN IN BOGO

Born Sharon Garcia Magdayao in Bogu, Cebu, Vina Morales is the eldest of four sisters, including acclaimed actress-singer Shaina Magdayao. Vina first discovered her voice in the church choir of Saint Vincent Ferrer Parish. At just nine years old, she was selected by Father Fritz Malinao to perform his original composition *Paglaum* ("Hope") in the 1986 Cebu Pop Music Festival. Her powerful delivery stunned the audience, earning her both Best Interpreter and Grand Prize—a moment that would change her life forever.

Grand Prize—a moment that would change her life forever.

Soon after, talent scouts from Viva Films saw her potential and offered her a contract. Her family made the life-altering decision to leave their businesses and home behind in Bogu to support her growing career in Manila. What followed was a meteoric rise in Philippine entertainment: a debut alongside Sharon Cuneta in *Nakagapos na Puso*, starring roles in *The Sarah Balabagan Story* and *Bonifacio: Ang Unang Pangulo*, and numerous acclaimed performances on both film and television.

### BEYOND THE STAGE: MUSIC AND GLOBAL RECOGNITION

Vina's talent is matched by her musical achievements. She released multiple studio albums, co-wrote songs with fellow artists like Piolo Pascual, and headlined concerts across the Philippines and abroad. She made history as the first Filipino to perform at the New York International Music Festival in Las Vegas in 2003 and won the Ikon ASEAN singing contest in 2007, further solidifying her status as a performer of international caliber.

Her versatility led her to unforgettable roles in Philippine dramas like *Maria Mercedes*, *Nasaan Ka Nang Kailangan Kita*, and *Araw Gabi*, where she portrayed both protagonists and villains with equal finesse. She has been honored with six Awit Awards and nominations from the FAMAS, Gawad Urian, and Metro Manila Film Festival.

### A BROADWAY BREAKTHROUGH

In 2023, Vina reached a new milestone: her Broadway debut. She was cast as Aurora Aquino in the musical "Here Lies Love" by David Byrne and Fatboy Slim, succeeding Lea Salonga for a limited engagement. Her performance marked a historic moment for Filipino representation on the world's most prestigious stage.

"To perform on Broadway was a dream come true," Vina was quoted as saying in her interview with *Playbill*. "I am grateful to Coach Lea for guiding me and to the entire "Here Lies Love" team for embracing me with open arms." Director Alex Timbers, who first noticed her over a decade ago during casting in Manila, called her return to the role "a full-circle moment."

In addition to her appearance at Fiesta in America, Vina has returned to GMA Network where she began her television career after nearly 25 years. She will star in the upcoming teleserye *Cruz vs. Cruz*, marking her highly anticipated comeback to soap operas.

Vina's headlining role at Fiesta in America 2025 is more than a performance—it is a celebration of her journey and the Filipino spirit. As the festival continues to showcase the best in Filipino entrepreneurship, music, and cultural pride, Vina Morales takes her place not only as an artist, but as a symbol of global Filipino excellence.

To sponsor, exhibit, or attend Fiesta in America, visit [fiestainamerica.com](https://fiestainamerica.com) or [philippinefiestausa.com](https://philippinefiestausa.com) or email [info@fiestainamerica.com](mailto:info@fiestainamerica.com).



# FIESTA IN AMERICA PERFORMERS



ANDY BELLO



BESSIE BESANA



BIBBOLOYSIUS



CALEB ANGELITO



CHRISTINE MORALES



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DROOVY



EN ROSE



GV DIVINE DIVAS OF ST. VINCENT



HARANA BAND



JISYL (DELOS SANTOS)



LIRAZEN ROSE



MARCUS OCHE



RAPSCDT & SEASHARP



SOUNDS OF MANILA



SUNNYSIDE UP BAND



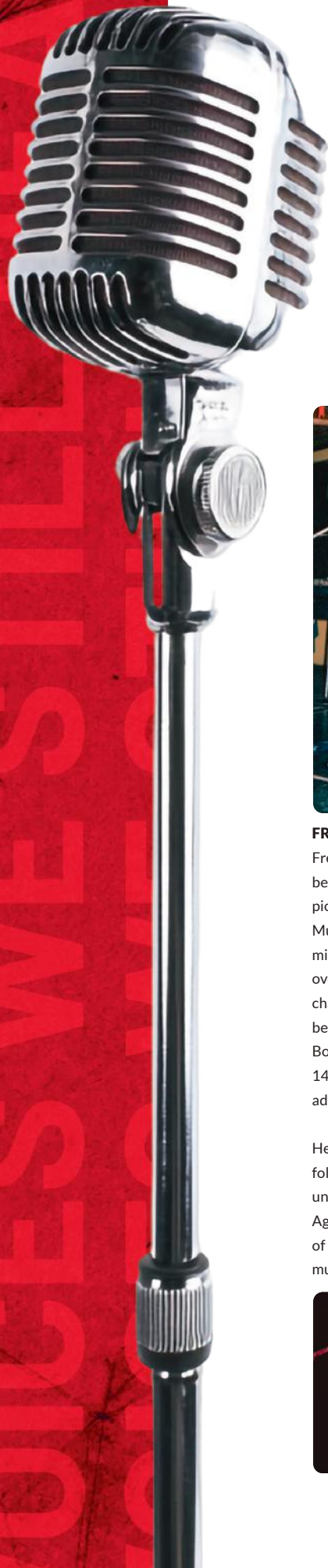
THE ANGELS



ZAIRA ELOISE SORIANO



ZOE-ERIANNA



# Voices We Still Hear: *Filipino Icons Who Passed in 2025*

In 2025, the Philippines bid farewell to some of its most beloved cultural figures—artists whose voices, performances, and creations shaped generations. From Nora Aunor’s searing portrayals on screen to Pilita Corrales’s timeless ballads, these icons left more than memories; they left a deep imprint on the nation’s soul.

Whether through song, cinema, comedy, or culinary artistry, each one helped define what it means to be Filipino. As we mourn their passing, we also celebrate their enduring legacies—voices that, though stilled, continue to echo in our stories, screens, and songs. In alphabetical order....



## **HAJJI ALEJANDRO (1954–2025)**

Hajji Alejandro, one of the original members of the OPM movement, died on April 21, 2025, at 70. Nicknamed the “Kilabot ng mga Kolehiya,” he rose to fame in the 1970s with hits like “Kay Ganda ng Ating Musika,” “Nakapagtataka,” and “Panakip Butas.” He was a founding member of the group Circus Band and later pursued a successful solo career. A consistent chart topper and concert performer, Alejandro helped define the sound of a generation. His smooth baritone voice and romantic image made him an enduring pop icon.

He is survived by his children, Ali, Barni and Rachel, the latter also a singer who performed at Fiesta in America in 2023.



## **FREDDIE AGUILAR (1953–2025)**

Freddie Aguilar, whose anthem “Anak” became a global sensation, was a pioneering voice in Original Pilipino Music. The song sold more than 33 million copies and was translated into over 50 languages. Aguilar’s socially charged music, including “Bayan Ko,” became rallying cries for democracy. Born in Isabela, he began songwriting at 14 and never stopped using his art for advocacy.

He died on May 27, 2025, at 72, following organ failure, and was buried under Islamic rites. A father of six, Aguilar left behind a legacy as one of the Philippines’ most influential musical figures.



## **NORA AUNOR (1953–2025)**

Nora Aunor, known as the “Superstar” of Philippine entertainment, rose from poverty in Iriga City to become a legend of film, television, and music. She gained fame after winning “Tawag ng Tanghalan” and starred in more than 200 films, including “Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos” and “Thy Womb.” Aunor received numerous Best Actress awards and, in 2022, was named a National Artist for Film. Her work often reflected the struggles of everyday Filipinos.

She died on April 16, 2025, at 71, and is survived by her children Lotlot, Ian, Matet, Kiko, and Kenneth. Aunor’s voice and performances shaped generations of Filipino artists and audiences. In 2004, she performed at Fiesta in America’s business and cultural expo in Secaucus, New Jersey.



### **PILITA CORRALES (1939–2025)**

Pilita Corrales, celebrated as the “Asia’s Queen of Songs,” passed away on April 12, 2025, at 85. Born in Cebu, she became the first Filipino to top the Australian pop charts and later built a prolific recording and TV career in the Philippines.

Known for her signature arched-back pose and multilingual repertoire, she was a fixture on variety shows like “An Evening with Pilita.” Corrales mentored generations of singers, including Martin Nievera and Regine Velasquez. A trailblazer for female artists in Asia, she received numerous awards and honors throughout her six-decade career.

She is survived by her children, including singer Jackie Lou Blanco, and leaves behind a rich catalog of recordings and a legacy as one of the most enduring voices in Filipino music history.



### **RICKY DAVAO (1961–2025)**

Ricky Davao, known for both acting and directing, had a career that shaped Philippine film and television. He started as a dancer before breaking into acting with standout roles in “Saranggola” and “Fuccbois,” both of which earned him acting awards. He directed episodes of “Maalaala Mo Kaya” and was widely respected for his depth and discipline. He was married to actress Jackie Lou Blanco and later partnered with Malca Darocca.

He died of cancer on May 1, 2025, at 63. Davao’s four-decade career left a powerful imprint on Filipino storytelling across genres and generations.

### **VICTOR “COCOY” LAUREL (1953–2025)**

Victor “Cocoy” Laurel, a son of former Vice President Salvador Laurel and actress Celia Diaz, was a leading man of musical theater and film. He debuted in “Lollipops and Roses” with Nora Aunor and “Miami Vice” TV star Don Johnson and went on to star in “West Side Story,” “Les Misérables” and “Miss Saigon.” Also an accomplished composer and visual artist, Laurel was a renaissance performer whose work spanned decades and continents.

He died on June 14, 2025, at 72, of cardiac arrest. Laurel is remembered as a graceful and versatile artist whose performances helped define Filipino musical theater at home and abroad.



### **DELIA RAZON (1930–2025)**

Delia Razon, born Lucy May Grytz, was a leading lady of the golden age of Philippine cinema. Discovered by LVN Pictures, she gained fame opposite Rogelio de la Rosa in 1949’s “Krus na Bituin” and became one-half of an iconic love team. She retired early but returned to acting in the 1980s, often portraying elegant matriarchs. Her grace on screen carried through decades of film and television. She was the grandmother of actress Carla Abellana.

Razon died on March 15, 2025, at 94. She remains one of the country’s most enduring symbols of classic beauty and screen sophistication.



### **GLORIA ROMERO (1933–2025)**

Gloria Romero, dubbed the “Queen of Philippine Cinema,” died on January 25, 2025, at 91. Her screen career began in the 1950s, rising to fame in Sampaguita Pictures’ golden era. Known for her poise and luminous presence, she starred in classics like “Dalagang Ilocana,” “Tanging Yaman,” and “Magnifico.” She remained active in television well into her 80s, earning respect as both a dramatic actress and comedic performer. Romero was a multi-awarded actress, widely regarded as a paragon of elegance and humility in showbiz.

Her longevity in the industry set a standard for generations. Her passing marks the end of an era in Filipino film and television.

### **RED STERNBERG (1974–2025)**

Red Sternberg became a 1990s teen icon through his role as Kiko in the GMA-7 youth series “T.G.I.S.” His charisma won him legions of fans, though he left the spotlight in the early 2000s. He relocated to the United States, pursued a career in hotel management, and raised a family with his wife Sandy.

He died of a heart attack on May 27, 2025, just three days before his 51st birthday. Though his acting career was brief, Sternberg is remembered as a symbol of ‘90s youth television and remains a nostalgic figure for a generation of Filipino viewers.





# BESSIE BESANA

FASHION DESIGNER FOR  
THE STARS, LIVE AT FIESTA  
IN AMERICA

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Bessie's career is defined by elegance, precision, and a deep understanding of couture. His designs—worn by Morissette Amon, Jodi Sta. Maria, Toni Gonzaga, and Dimples Romana—are known for their refined silhouettes, thoughtful craftsmanship, and a romantic sensibility that elevates every look. Each piece he creates reflects his belief that fashion should empower and honor the person wearing it.

Currently serving as the general manager of Miss World Philippines, Bessie continues to influence the world of beauty and style behind the scenes. But this August, audiences in the New York and New Jersey area will have the rare opportunity to experience his work live and in motion.

**Bessie Besana will stage a runway show at Fiesta in America on Saturday, August 16,** at the American Dream Mall in East Rutherford, New Jersey. The fashion show will feature pieces from one of his most popular collections—gowns that highlight feminine form through intricate lacework, structured elegance, and emotional storytelling in fabric.

Don't miss this chance to witness the work of a designer who has dressed queens, stars, and now, the global stage.

To learn more about Bessie Besana, visit [bessiebesana.com](https://bessiebesana.com) or follow him on Instagram at [@bessiebesana](https://www.instagram.com/bessiebesana).



BINI (LEFT TO RIGHT): STACEY, AIAH, COLET, GWEN, MIKHA, SHEENA, JHOANNA, AND MALOI



## How Filipino Music is Reclaiming the Spotlight

A new era in Filipino music is unfolding—and this time, it's driven not just by emotion or nostalgia, but by ambition, global polish, and cultural pride. The Philippines is witnessing a powerful resurgence of **Original Pilipino Music (OPM)**, fueled in part by the meteoric rise of **P-Pop (Pinoy Pop)** groups like ABS-CBN's **BINI**, the continued reign of **SB19**, and a diverse wave of indie artists and genre-benders reshaping the local music landscape.

Their counterpart in influence, **SB19**, remains a dominant force. Often credited with bringing P-Pop into the mainstream, the five-member group launched their own international tour this year while continuing to release emotionally resonant music that blends K-pop training with OPM soul. Meanwhile, newer acts like **G22** have emerged with their own confident brand of pop femininity and have quickly gained momentum, appearing on multiple Billboard Philippines charts and solidifying the genre's staying power.



SB19 AT BILLBOARD K POWER 100 (LEFT TO RIGHT): PABLO, JOSH, JUSTIN, STELL AND KEN

But P-Pop is just one part of the story. OPM in 2025 is a broader, more adventurous landscape. Bands like **Cup of Joe**, known for melodic tracks like "Multo" and "Tingin", are embracing indie-pop, folk, and jazz elements that feel both intimate and expansive. Their music appeals to an audience seeking sincerity and depth—a welcome contrast to the algorithm-driven sameness of global charts.

Other genres are also flourishing. A new wave of artists is pushing into **lo-fi R&B**, **dream pop**, **hip-hop**, and **electronic soul**. New artists like **Lola Amour**, **Maki** and **Dionela** are part of a cohort redefining OPM for a streaming-native generation. Their songs speak to urban life, modern romance, and digital alienation—all in Taglish or full Filipino. There has been some curiosity this year around the **return of Unique Salonga to IV of Spades**, a band whose retro-funk sound still captivates the country.

On the international front, **Filipino-American performers** are increasingly visible. **Isa Briones** (*Hadestown*) and **Jasmine Forsberg** (*Six, Old Friends*) are earning recognition on Broadway, while **Darren Criss** and **Nicole Scherzinger** continue to headline major productions and award shows. **Lea Salonga**, ever the icon, recently closed her run in *Stephen Sondheim's Old Friends*. Our group caught her performance in New York, though oddly, one scene slipped by unnoticed—at first. In a rare off-type role, Salonga played a quirky character that seemed more Helena Bonham Carter than regal diva. The understated transformation was fascinating, if unexpected, and a reminder of her quiet range.

And then there's **Olivia Rodrigo**, whose return to her roots struck a deep chord. As part of her **GUTS World Tour**, she performed at the **Philippine Arena**—not for free, but with an **affordable single-tier ticket price**; her decision to keep pricing simple and accessible endeared her even more to Filipino fans. Rodrigo also donated the proceeds to **Jhpiego Philippines**, supporting women's health initiatives. Between her charity work and her visit to **Intramuros**, where she shared her appreciation for Filipino culture, Rodrigo's visit felt less like a celebrity stopover and more like a heartfelt homecoming.

Together, these stories mark a turning point: Filipino music is no longer just reflecting the times—it's helping shape them. Whether through stadium-filling pop or streaming-era indie, artists from the Philippines are finding their voice—and the world is listening.

**Dr. Emilio P. Quines, Jr.**

Presidential Awardee. Humanitarian. Philanthropist. Filipino to the core, yet supportive of American ideals and worthy causes. His life's work speaks volumes—uplifting the underserved, healing across borders, and proving that compassion knows no boundaries. Honored with the Presidential Award for his decades of service to marginalized communities in the Philippines.

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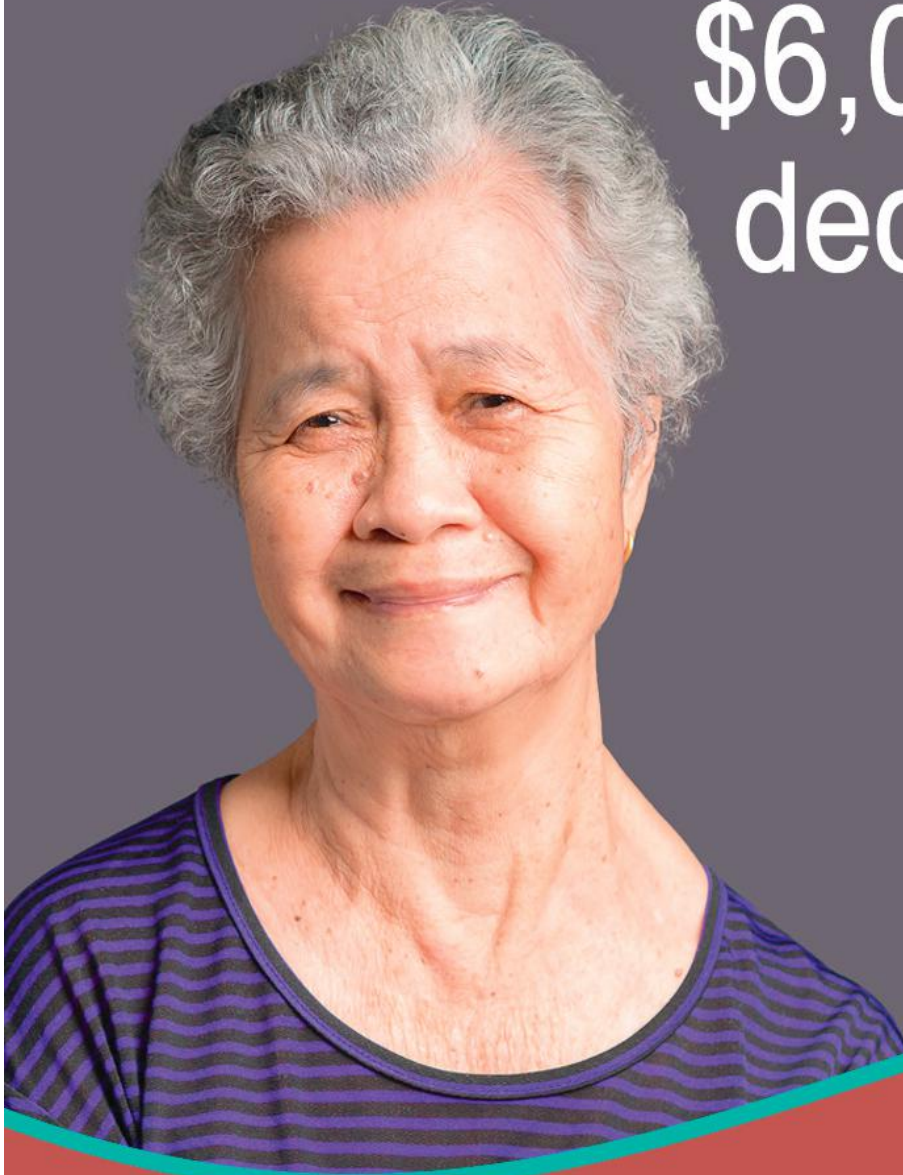
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**Angie Cruz-Quines, Phd**

Community leader and lifelong advocate for faith and service; founder and president of the Institute for Spirituality in the Workplace, Inc.; veteran of political advocacy and campaigns for public policy, representation, & political empowerment; bridge-builder among diverse communities and faiths.

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# Beyond Sweet:

## What Most Filipinos Don't Know About Their Favorite Desserts

You've had *halo-halo* in summer, *puto bumbong* at Simbang Gabi, and *leche flan* at every birthday party since you can remember. But behind these familiar treats lie surprising stories—of forgotten roots, regional rivalries, colonial twists, and clever reinventions.

So the next time you're at a Filipino restaurant (or your Lola's table), ask for these desserts—and look at them a little differently. Here's what makes them truly unique, even for Pinoys.



### Halo-Halo

A Japanese Colonial Mash-Up

You probably know it as the ultimate summer dessert. But did you know halo-halo may have evolved from Japanese *kakigōri* (shaved ice) introduced by immigrants in prewar Luzon? The earliest versions had no *leche flan* or ube ice cream—just mung beans and crushed ice. The “kitchen sink” version we love today? That's postwar Filipino creativity on overdrive.

### Leche Flan

The Colonial Dessert that Steamed Its Way into Every Handaan

Yes, it's from Spain. But few Filipinos realize how our version *diverged* from the original. Spanish flan is baked; Filipino *leche flan* is steamed—likely because ovens were rare during Spanish rule. Also, we made it *richer*: more yolks, more condensed milk, more intensity.



### Kalamay

The Sweet That Meant Survival

Most of us eat *kalamay* (Filipino sticky sweet delicacy made from glutinous rice, coconut milk, and brown sugar) during fiestas or as *pasalubong*—but its roots are in food security. In agrarian regions like Bohol or Ilocos, *kalamay* was made in bulk and stored to last during lean months. Wrapped in banana leaves or coconut shells, it was more than a treat—it was a lifeline.

### Ube Halaya

Instagram Star with Pre-Colonial Roots

Filipinos today flaunt *ube* in cakes, donuts, even lattes—but *ube halaya* has existed since long before that. The purple yam itself is indigenous to the Philippines and was used in rituals and early feasts. The irony? We now export *ube flavoring* made in the Philippines for trendy desserts abroad.



### Bibingka

The Rice Cake That Smells Like Simbang Gabi

You associate it with December mornings and salted egg. But did you know *bibingka* was traditionally made with *galapong* (soaked ground rice) and coconut toddy? Commercial versions today often use shortcuts—flour instead of rice, oven instead of clay pot. The banana leaf? Still sacred.



## Turon

Born from Waste, Now a Classic

Turon wasn't originally a dessert—it was *street food ingenuity*. Vendors sold it using overripe *saba* bananas and day-old lumpia wrappers. Today, it's found in hotel buffets and plated with caramel sauce—but its roots are in zero-waste hustle.

## Puto Bumbong

A Ritual in Purple Rice

We think of it as a Christmas specialty, but *puto bumbong* is more than seasonal cheer. It's made from *pirurutong*, a native heirloom purple rice that's almost extinct. Many modern versions now use food coloring on white rice. True *puto bumbong* is rare—and endangered.



## Buko Pandan

An Ilonggo Creation Gone National

This chilled dessert became a household name in the '90s, but it originated in the Visayas—particularly Bacolod and Iloilo. Pandan leaves were once used only to *scent rice* and *kakanin*. The twist? Combining it with gelatin and cream was a *refrigerator-era invention*.

## Kakanin

The Most Misunderstood Category

You've eaten *suman*, *palitaw*, *sapin-sapin*—but did you know *kakanin* isn't just one thing? It's a whole universe. Each town has a version with hyper-specific methods. For instance, *suman sa lihiya* in Laguna uses alkaline water to break down the rice starch—something many outside the region have never tried.



## Mango Float

The No-Bake Cake Born from Imported Goods

Yes, it's Filipino—but it's also global. The graham crackers? American imports. The condensed milk? A legacy of WWII rations. And yet, *mango float* is ours because of the *Carabao mango*, considered the sweetest mango in the world—something no foreign version can replicate.

## Next Time You Eat a Filipino Dessert...

...ask who made it; where they learned it; if they still use the traditional ingredients.

Because these desserts aren't just sweet—they're full of stories.



# THE FILIPINO FOOD SCENE TAKING OVER NYC AND NJ

New York and New Jersey are having a Filipino food moment—and there's no turning back. From sizzling sisig to ube sliders, lechon belly to banana cue, the region's Filipino culinary scene is thriving with passion, pride, and personality. This list features some of the most distinct spots, each with its own specialty and story—but it's just a starting point. For every Binondo or Mama Fina's, there are dozens more family-run gems, pop-ups, and food stalls that capture the soul of the cuisine. Some lean nostalgic, others innovate. All are worth seeking out. We couldn't possibly include them all here—but trust us, whether you're a balikbayan or first-time diner, there's a plate waiting that feels like home.



## BINONDO NYC

50 E Broadway, New York, NY 10002

<https://www.binondonyc.com/>

Located in New York's famous Chinatown, Binondo is named after Manila's historic Chinatown and channels the same energy with a polished, New York twist. Chef Elvis Robles, who once helmed kitchens at P.F. Chang's and in Bahrain, prepares each dish from scratch—resulting in fresh, standout plates. The Pancit Negra, made with squid ink, is a must-try, while smoky adobo with coconut milk, paksiw sa gata, and crispy kare-kare showcase Filipino comfort with finesse. Complimentary squash soup, peanuts, and crispy anchovies warmly welcome guests. More spacious than most neighborhood spots, with an open kitchen and friendly service, Binondo delivers a dining experience that blends Filipino and Chinese influences. Binondo is for those craving Filipino dishes you wouldn't typically make at home—elevated, soulful, and enriched with subtle Chinese undertones that make each visit truly rewarding.

## ISLAND CENTRAL

329 Central Ave, Jersey City, NJ 07307,  
United States

<https://www.binondonyc.com/>

Island Central Restaurant delivers Filipino cooking with neighborhood warmth. Reviewers consistently rave about the sizzling sisig—crispy, savory, and deeply satisfying—served on a hot plate and perfect with garlic rice. But the surprise star is the *lengua estofado*: a classic Spanish-Filipino dish of tender ox-tongue braised in rich tomato sauce, garlic, green olives, and chorizo de Bilbao, with an aromatic hint that lingers. It's melt-in-your-mouth good and packed with depth of flavor. Portions are generous, prices are fair, and the team behind the counter makes every diner feel like family. From lumpia to pancit, the menu stays rooted in Filipino home cooking, with just enough flair to make it memorable.



## MAMA FINA'S HOUSE OF FILIPINO SISIG

253 Main St, Hackensack, NJ 07601 and  
32 Avenue A, New York, NY 10009

<https://www.binondonyc.com/>

Sisig takes center stage at Mama Fina's, and no matter the variation—pork, chicken, seafood, or tofu—it crackles with intensity. Served on a scorching hot plate with garlic rice, calamansi, and chili, the pork version remains the benchmark: crispy, savory, with just enough fat to melt into the rice. Chicken sisig is equally beloved, especially among non-pork eaters. For something gentler, order the *langka*—green jackfruit stewed in coconut milk. It's one of the most underrated Filipino dishes, packed with fiber and subtle sweetness. Don't forget to come hungry.





### KALYE

251 Broome St, New York, NY 10002  
 and 111 Rivington St, New York, NY 10002  
<https://www.kalye.com/>

Kalye brings Filipino street-style flavors indoors with flair, delivering punchy, well-executed dishes that have earned praise across TikTok and food blogs alike. The **ube sliders**—filled with **pork sausage**, Swiss cheese, and onion bacon jam—are a favorite, especially during happy hour. **Pork sisig**, **beef tapa**, and **lechon with inasal rice** are crowd-pleasers, celebrated for their bold seasoning and careful preparation. Desserts like **mango float** and **ube ice cream** round out the meal with sweetness and nostalgia. While the space is small and portions lean modest, diners consistently highlight the warm service and inviting ambiance. Kalye is a solid choice for those curious about Filipino cuisine or craving a fresh take on familiar dishes.

### NAKS

201 1st Ave, New York, NY 10003  
<https://www.naks.nyc/>

Naks is Filipino soul food with swagger—bold, thoughtful, and deeply rooted. The unanimous favorite is the **Kanto Fried Chicken**, praised across reviews for its ultra-crisp skin, juicy meat, and addictive dipping sauce. Diners also rave about the **pancit batil patong**, **kare-kare**, **lechon belly**, and **adobo rice**—classics reimagined with flair but never stripped of flavor. Chef Eric's dishes retain the comforting taste of home while raising the bar in presentation. Reviewers, whether Filipino or not, note how welcome they felt thanks to the staff's warmth and attention to detail. Some celebrated birthdays and anniversaries here and left feeling like family. It's not cheap, but many say it's worth every bite. Whether you're a balikbayan or a first-timer, Naks delivers a modern Filipino dining experience that still tastes like your Tito's backyard barbecue.

### RENEE'S KITCHENETTE & GRILL

69-14 Roosevelt Ave, Woodside, NY 11377  
<https://www.reneeskitchenette.com/>

What sets Renee's apart in Little Manila, Queens isn't just its homestyle comfort—it's the BBQ longganisa that steals the show. This isn't your usual breakfast fare. Renee's takes the sweet-savory Filipino sausage, skewers it, grills it over open flame, and lets the smoke do the rest. The result: a tender, charred, caramelized bite that redefines what the dish can be. Their BBQ sampler plate, which often includes pork skewers and other grilled favorites, hits every nostalgic note while adding depth through smoky layers. Add garlic rice, a cold sago't gulaman, and a side of friendly chatter, and you've got one of Woodside's finest Filipino meals—if only they had better ventilation to keep the grilled aromas from clinging to your clothes. Still, it's a small tradeoff for food this memorable.



### TRADISYON

135 W 50th St # 11-5, New York, NY 10020  
 and 135 W 50th St # 11-5, New York, NY 10020  
<https://tradisyonnyc.com/>

Tradisyon has two locations in Manhattan, each offering the same deeply flavorful Filipino comfort food, but in very different settings. The original Hell's Kitchen branch feels more like a cozy, hybrid sit-down space—tight on seating but ideal for those craving a quiet, filling meal of sisig, kare-kare, or adobong pusit. Some diners find the ordering system unclear and note the absence of a restroom, but appreciate the warm touches in decor. In contrast, Tradisyon's stall at Urban Hawker, a busy Asian food court near Rockefeller Center, is fully geared toward takeout and quick service. It caters to office workers and tourists looking for a fast Filipino fix.



### 87 LUDLOW

87 Ludlow St, New York, NY 10002  
<https://87ludlownyc.com/>

Filipino-Spanish fusion shines at 87 Ludlow, where nearly every review praises the bold flavors, inventive small plates, and welcoming service. The common thread? A creative menu that doesn't sacrifice heart. Diners rave about the oyster sisig, widely cited as a must-try for its punchy balance of brine and sizzle. Whether celebrating a birthday or exploring something new, guests love the festive vibe and attentive staff. Portions run small, but the tapas-style format encourages sharing and discovery. It's a date night gem, a happy hour haunt, and a reminder that Filipino food continues to evolve—without forgetting where it came from.

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Since 2017, the PUSO Foundation has served hundreds of thousands of lives across eight countries: The Philippines, USA, El Salvador, Liberia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Lebanon, and the Dominican Republic. They've inspired young people globally to engage in community service.

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Funding for PUSO's endeavors is primarily sourced from strategic local fundraising events and the generous contributions of their donors. Additionally, they've established a college outreach program to encourage students to make a positive impact in their communities.

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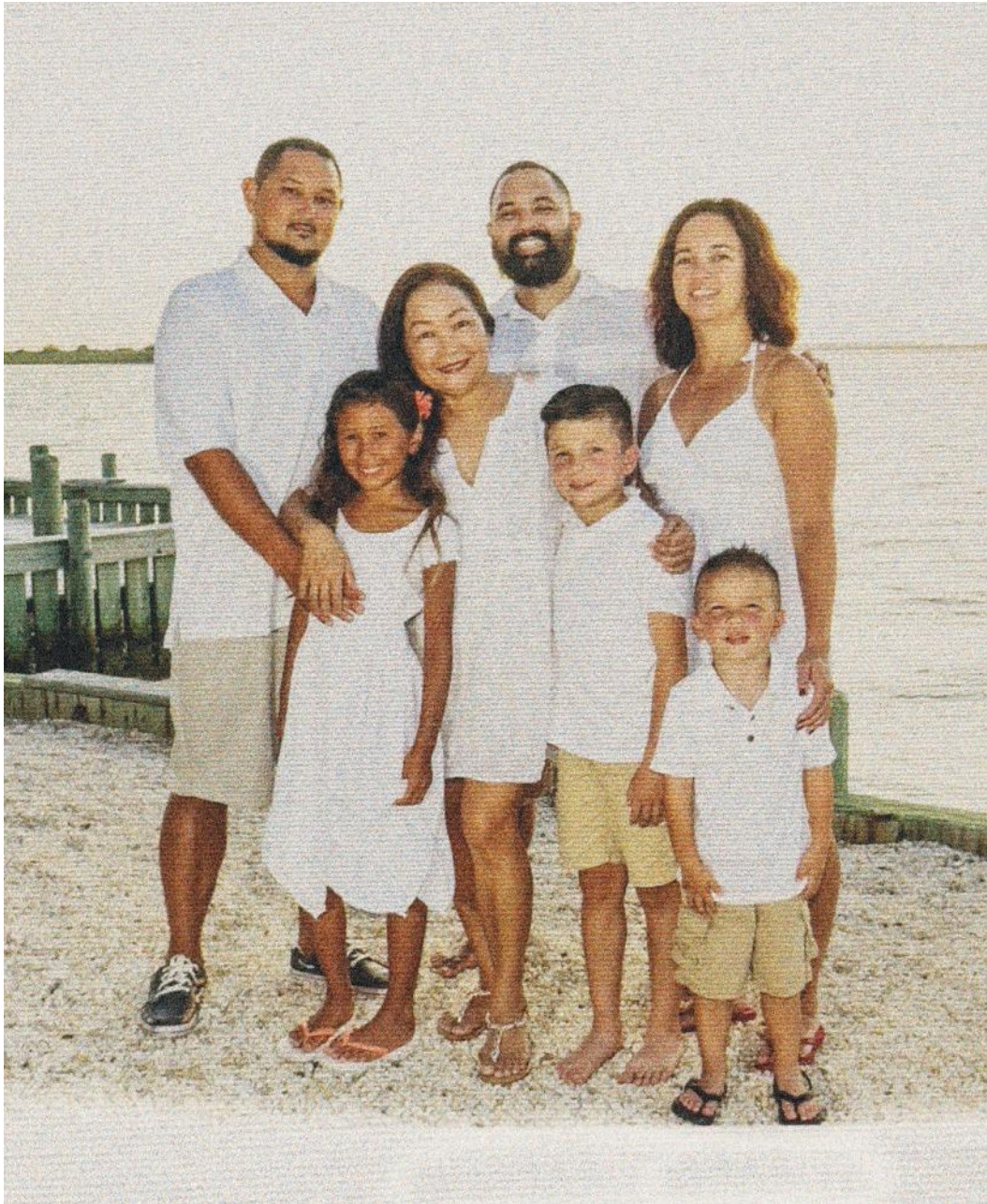


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Open Market's vision is to redefine what a marketplace can be—not just a place to buy and sell, but a vibrant hub where culture, commerce, and community converge. Rooted in the belief that business can be a force for good, its mission is to build an inclusive economic ecosystem where underrepresented entrepreneurs don't just survive—but thrive.

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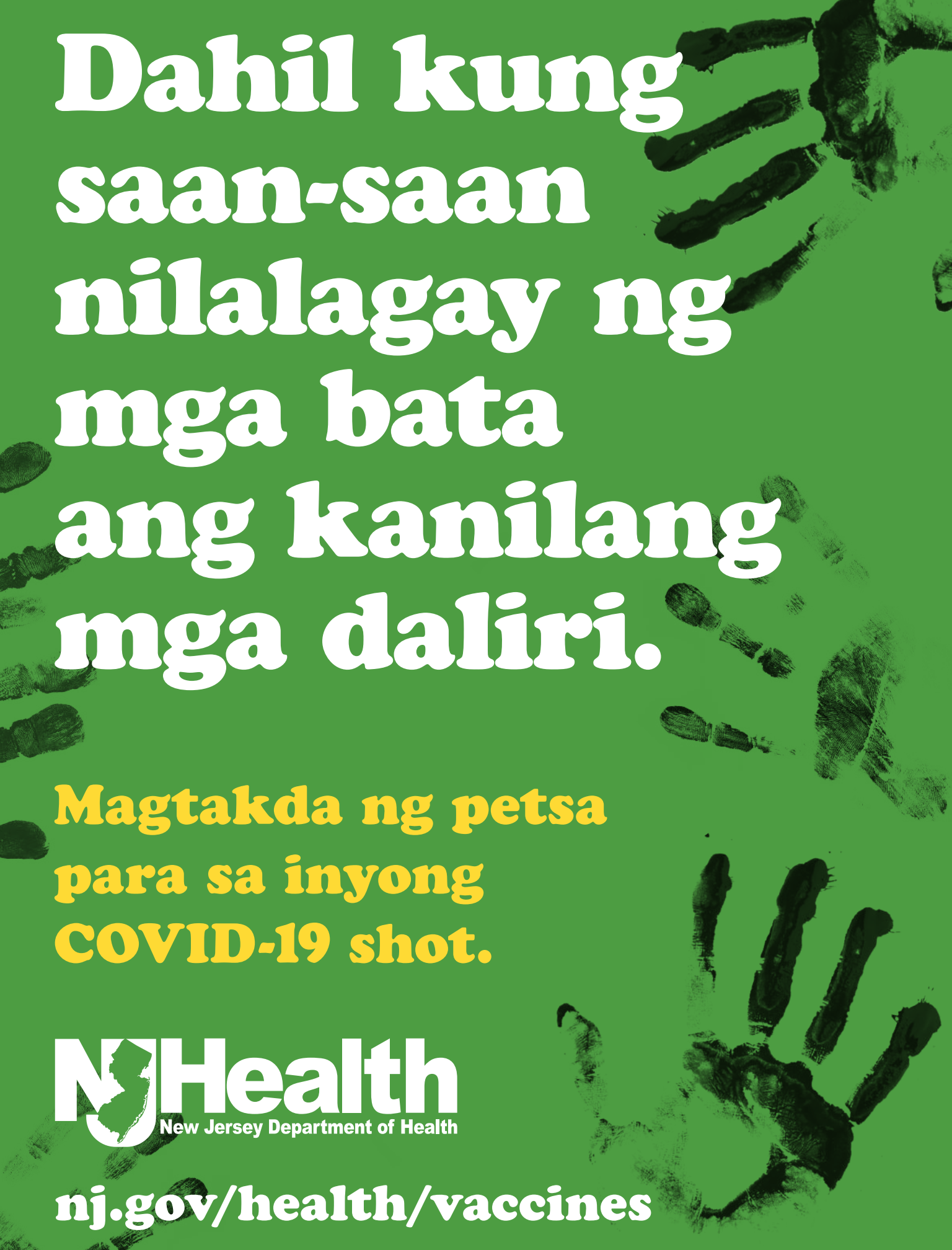
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