

WORLD GOURMET SUMMIT

# Second helpings, anyone?

**Year after year, about 30 'super-ardent' fans join the culinary adventure for more helpings, attracted by the epicurean buzz and flair and super value for money**

By **TEE HUN CHING**

WHEN March swings around every year, Ms Florence Hooi starts rounding up her *makan kakis*.

"Ay, it's coming, it's coming," she says excitedly.

"It" is the World Gourmet Summit, the annual week-long culinary adventure which begins on April 7 this year.

Says Ms Hooi, who is in her early 50s and owns a firm which imports high-end cosmetic brands: "The event is always held in April and bookings open in March. So my friends and I get excited around this time every year."

She booked a place on the Masterchef Safari out of curiosity when the summit made its debut in 1997.

This is a sell-out gastronomic journey where diners are taken to different restaurants with each serving a course by a world-class Masterchef.

Since then, she has signed up every year either for the Masterchef Safari or the Grand Finale Dinner, where guests can sample both fine wines from guest vintners and signature dishes from all the masterchefs invited to the summit.

Enticed by the "good food, good wine, good value and good company", she has even made it a habit to book a table of 10 at the Grand Finale Dinner every year for herself and her girlfriends.

"It's a ladies' night out," says the mother of two, with a laugh.

"Men tend to go for grand dinners only when it concerns business. But we like to dress up and enjoy ourselves."

But Dr James Lee, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon in his mid-40s, thinks otherwise.

Like Ms Hooi, he has been

reserving two tables at the Grand Finale Dinner every year since 1999.

"It's like a social event, where my friends and I turn up with our spouses. Each year, different world-class chefs are invited, so we get to try something different every time.

"I remember there was a year when we even asked for second helpings of *foie gras* because it was really fabulous."

Both Dr Lee and Ms Hooi are among about 30 "super-ardent followers" whom the summit has attracted since its launch five years ago, says Mr Francis Poulouse, general manager for food consultancy Peter Knipp Holdings, which co-organises the event with the Singapore Tourism Board.

This loyal group has attended the summit's programmes for at least three years and skips them only if they are not in town, he says.

"They send us thank-you letters, or call us to thank us for the experience or for looking after them after the event.

"Some even ask us for help to secure the masterchefs' recipes or make bookings at the chefs' restaurants overseas. To us, they are no longer just customers, but friends."

About 13,000 people attended all the programmes of the World Gourmet Summit last year, including Epicurean Delights, where masterchefs whip up lunch and dinner specials at participating host restaurants.

Since its launch five years ago, the number of programmes has doubled from five to 10.

"We try to incorporate new events or change the formats of existing ones every year," says Mr Poulouse.

"For instance, we are planning more Masterchef Safaris



**Good food, wine and company** at the Grand Finale Dinner ... oh, that's life.

and special evening dinners. We are also spreading out the masterclasses. We are constantly looking at how we can expand the event and offer a better experience."

The innovative appeal of this annual epicurean affair is a big draw, he adds.

"People want a novel experience, they want to experience the world's buzz. If you bring that buzz to their doorstep, where they have their friends to enjoy the experience with, all the better."

Value-for-money is another reason people keep coming back for seconds, says Ms Josie Lau, assistant director of events marketing at STB.

"Instead of flying around the world, you pay \$400 for the Grand Finale Dinner to sample the skills of 13 international Masterchefs plus free flow of wine all in one night.

"I think connoisseurs know

a good deal when they see one."

Agreeing, Ms Sharon Ong, 27, an administrative manager who has been a World Gourmet Summit regular since 1998, says: "You can try the specialities from so many top chefs. It's definitely cheaper than travelling around the world to sample them. Besides, you get to meet a lot of other people at these events, too."

Her only grouse is that there is too much to digest within too short a time.

"Maybe they can space out the events. If not, you would just be eating and eating non-stop."

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◆ For reservations and enquiries, call the World Gourmet Summit hotline on 6270-1254 during office hours or visit [www.worldgourmetsummit.com](http://www.worldgourmetsummit.com). Tickets to all events are now on sale.