



# on a platter

**I**T'S always time to eat. More than just a glib slogan, this defines the appetite of Singapore: where the culinary cultures of Asia and Europe compete for space in a suffocating cluster of eateries through every step of the city streets. From the bustle in the Chinatown markets at dawn, through fine dining in international hotels to the late-night hawker stalls in shopping precinct food courts, people in Singapore are always eating.

This culinary energy and diversity is what the Singapore government is keen to broadcast to the world through its annual Singapore Food Festival, which is now being vigorously promoted in anticipation of the 2001 event, running from March 30 to April 30.

Indeed, the tourism board uses the Singapore Food Festival to pull focus on the city's rich cultural mix through the diverse and disparate food festival program. Festival staples will be blended, such as a masterclass program with famous international chefs and wine experts, dining experiences will be presented at the zoo and bird park, and the opportunity to witness and participate in Chinese wedding feasts will be on offer.

Singapore's food businesses use the festival in a different way - as a springboard to launch new ideas and ventures aimed at appealing to the locals, to heighten awareness of what exists in their town.

In this respect, it is curious the festival is not so much designed to bring global food fans to Singapore, but to highlight the importance of food in Singapore to its own people. Visitors coming for the rich festival program are considered a boon; organisers are happy to offer something of interest to tourists, perhaps encouraging them to stay a few days instead of just a stopover.

While Singaporeans talk proudly of the city's diversity of food cultures, through its Chinese, Indian, Malay, Peranakan (Chinese-Malay) and English communities, the city

As organisers begin firming the program for Adelaide's 2001 Tasting Australia food festival, **DAVID SLY** discovers a very different way of presenting a food festival in Singapore.

has a burning need to present itself as more auspicious in world culinary circles. It wants the world to recognise Singapore for more than chicken rice, laksa and chilli crab. Singapore has therefore worked to get some of the hot chefs in the world on the Singapore Food Festival program, and to align their festival with other prestigious food fairs around the world.

The foundation stone on which the reputation of the festival has been built over the last four years has been the World Gourmet Summit, created by German-born chef Peter Knipp. He was chef at Singapore's famed Raffles Hotel when he went to St Moritz as a guest presenter at a chef masterclass session, and figured the same type of event would be a success in Singapore. Forming his own consultancy company, Knipp has moulded his World Gourmet Summit into a mini-festival within the Singapore Food Festival framework. For April, 2001, Knipp has Berlin's Paul Urchs, Americans Rocco DiSpirito and George Morrone, and Sydney's Tony Bilson among a dozen international chefs. Each will present their food at dinner functions at leading Singapore hotels, then each present a course at the summit finale dinner. This year, the summit will also present a series of awards for excellence, trying to encourage the advancement of Singapore restaurants. Perhaps the most popular event of Knipp's program is the Masterchef Safari, from April 23 to 25, at which guests

will be ferried to four different venues to eat courses prepared by leading chefs at each venue.

With a maximum of 25 guests on each safari, Knipp will theme the three nights differently, ferrying patrons between venues on the back of Harley-Davidson motorbikes one night, and vintage cars another. The safari will show off several of Singapore's most dazzling dining locations, starting on the 71st floor of the Westin Stamford and Plaza hotel in the Compass Rose dining room, going to the chic Pontini Restaurant in



“The food businesses of Singapore use the festival ... to launch new ideas”

the Grand Copthorne Waterfront hotel, to the revered Asian fusion restaurant Club Chinois.

Next stop will be the cellars of the Grand Hyatt Singapore for desserts and wines, among an outstanding wine collection (the cellar is part of the hotel's ambitious Mezzan dining area, where nine differently decorated areas can be selected for specialised dining).

Beyond the Gourmet Summit, festival organisers take great pains to encourage participation in the food program by as many Singapore businesses as possible.

A food court in the new Chinatown district will present a rather bizarre celebration of wedding feasts from cultures around the world; the zoo has four dine-among-the-animals programs; the Jurong Bird Park has a formal dinner in the spacious indoor king penguin enclosure. The Sentosa cable car has evening dinners set at tables in the moving sky carriages, while Singapore's largest barbecue event for an expected 40,000 diners will be at the NTUC Lifestyle World (a workers' holiday resort owned and operated by the nation's trade union council).

The festival organisers welcome all ideas. There will be a beer festival in the central Clark Quay riverfront area, an international fried rice cooking festival (with \$18,500 prize for the winner), and a quartet of hip cocktail clubs (Wong San's, Eastside, The Siam Supper Club and Viet Cafe) will



**FOUNDATION STONE:** Chefs hard at work during the festival's World Gourmet Summit.