



Philippine Regional Cuisine

Region I – Ilocos Region

A deep dive into the bold, savory, and resourceful culinary traditions of Northwestern Luzon — where fermented flavors, crispy fried dishes, and vegetable-rich stews tell the story of a resilient and practical people.

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Learning Outcomes

At the end of this module, students should be able to:

01

Identify Geography

Describe the geographical location and characteristics of Region I, including its provinces and capitals.

03

Discuss Traditions & Products

Describe Ilocano culture, traditional cooking and preservation methods, and major agricultural and marine products.

02

Explain Culinary Influences

Explain how geography, climate, and culture shape Ilocano cuisine and its distinctive flavors.

04

Recognize Specialty Dishes

Identify signature dishes from each province and appreciate Ilocano cuisine's contribution to Philippine gastronomy.

Introduction to Region I: The Ilocos Region

The Ilocos Region, also known as Region I, is located in the **northwestern part of Luzon**, along the western coast facing the West Philippine Sea. It is bordered by the Cordillera mountains to the east and the sea to the west — a geography that has profoundly shaped its people and their food.

Bold Flavors

Strong savory and salty tastes define nearly every Ilocano dish, from fermented condiments to crispy fried meats.

Vegetable-Forward

Extensive use of locally grown vegetables such as eggplant, bitter melon, string beans, and tomatoes.

Fermented & Preserved

Fermented ingredients like bagoong and patis are staples, reflecting centuries of food preservation culture.

Seafood & Native Delicacies

Coastal access brings abundant seafood, while native sweets and snacks round out the regional table.

The Ilocano people are widely known for being **frugal, practical, and highly skilled in preserving food** — values that are woven into every aspect of their culinary tradition.

Geography of Region I

Location & Borders

Situated along the western coast of Northern Luzon, the Ilocos Region faces the West Philippine Sea to the west and is flanked by the Cordillera mountain range to the east. The landscape includes coastal plains, mountainous areas, river systems, and agricultural lands.

Climate

The region experiences a **dry season from November to April** and a **wet season from May to October**, with a coastal and lowland tropical climate overall.

How Geography Shapes Cuisine

- **Seafood abundance** — Coastal access makes fish, shellfish, and bangus central to the diet.
- **Salt production** — The dry coastal climate made salt harvesting practical and important.
- **Fermentation as preservation** — Limited refrigeration and seasonal scarcity drove the development of bagoong, patis, and other fermented products.
- **Hardy crops as staples** — Vegetables and grains that thrive in the region's climate — garlic, eggplant, bitter melon, rice, and corn — became dietary cornerstones.

Region I - Ilocos Region



Provinces and Regional Center

Region I is composed of four provinces, each with its own capital city and distinct culinary identity. The regional center is **San Fernando City, La Union**.

Province	Capital	Culinary Highlight
Ilocos Norte	Laoag City	Bold flavors, crispy fried dishes, empanada, bagnet
Ilocos Sur	Vigan City	Heritage cuisine, Vigan longganisa, native delicacies
La Union	San Fernando City	Ilocano-Pangasinense fusion, seafood, tupig
Pangasinan	Lingayen	Bangus specialties, fermented fish products, pigar-pigar

Culture and Traditions of the Ilocano People

The Ilocano identity is built on a foundation of **hard work, simplicity, resourcefulness, strong family ties, and frugality**. These values are not merely social — they are directly expressed in the way Ilocanos grow, prepare, preserve, and share food.



Bayanihan

Community cooperation is practiced during harvesting, fishing, and festivals. Neighbors work together, reinforcing bonds through shared labor and shared meals.



Fiesta Celebrations

Food is absolutely central during town fiestas, religious celebrations, and family gatherings. Elaborate spreads of specialty dishes are prepared to honor guests and community.



Preservation Culture

Due to the dry climate and historical scarcity, drying, fermentation, and salting became common and essential practices — minimizing waste and extending the life of every ingredient.

Agricultural and Marine Products

Vegetables

- Eggplant
- Bitter melon
- String beans
- Tomatoes
- Garlic
- Onion

Grains & Staples

- Rice
- Corn

Fruits & Crops

- Mangoes
- Watermelon
- Tobacco-related crops

Marine Products

- Bangus (milkfish)
- Shrimp
- Crab
- Dried fish
- Shellfish

Processed Products

- Bagoong (fermented fish paste)
- Patis (fish sauce)
- Salted fish



Traditional Methods of Food Preparation

Ilocano cooking techniques reflect centuries of adaptation to the region's climate, resources, and cultural values. Each method serves both practical and culinary purposes.

1 Fermentation

Used to preserve seafood and vegetables. Key examples include **bagoong** (fermented fish paste) and **burong isda** (fermented fish with rice). Fermentation adds depth of flavor while extending shelf life.

2 Grilling

Fish and meats are grilled over charcoal, imparting a smoky, charred flavor. Grilling is especially common for fresh seafood and pork dishes like dinakdakan.

3 Frying

Deep-frying is popular and produces the region's most iconic crispy dishes, including **bagnet** (crispy pork belly) and **empanada**. The crunch is a hallmark of Ilocano cooking.

4 Drying & Salting

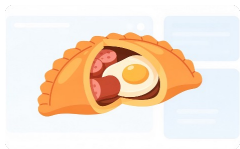
Common for fish preservation. Examples include **daing** and **tuyo** — sun-dried salted fish that can be stored for extended periods without refrigeration.

5 Boiling & Stewing

Used in vegetable dishes and soups. The classic example is **dinengdeng**, a light vegetable soup flavored with bagoong — simple, nourishing, and deeply Ilocano.

Ilocos Norte: Bold Flavors & Crispy Classics

Ilocos Norte is known for its **bold flavors** and **crispy fried dishes**. Its cuisine is arguably the most iconic of the region, with dishes that have gained national and international recognition.



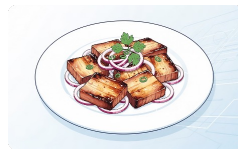
Ilocos Empanada

An orange rice-flour pastry filled with egg, longganisa, and papaya. Fried until crispy and served with vinegar dipping sauce.



Bagnet

Deep-fried crispy pork belly — the Ilocano answer to lechon kawali. Twice-cooked for maximum crunch and rich flavor.



Dinakdakan

Grilled pork parts mixed with onions and a creamy dressing, often made with pig brain. A bold and distinctive Ilocano appetizer.



Pinakbet

A vegetable stew flavored with bagoong, featuring eggplant, bitter melon, string beans, and squash. A nutritious Ilocano staple.

Ilocos Sur: Heritage Cuisine & Native Delicacies

Ilocos Sur, home to the UNESCO World Heritage City of Vigan, is celebrated for its **heritage cuisine and native delicacies** that have been passed down through generations. The province's food reflects its rich colonial and indigenous history.

Vigan Longganisa

A garlicky native sausage with a distinctly bold, savory flavor. Unlike other regional longganisa, the Vigan variety is small, fatty, and intensely seasoned with garlic and vinegar.

Vigan Empanada

A crispy fried empanada with local fillings. Similar to the Ilocos Norte version but with its own distinct preparation and flavor profile rooted in Vigan tradition.

Sinanglao

A beef innards soup flavored with bile, giving it a characteristic bitter taste. A heritage dish that reflects the Ilocano tradition of using every part of the animal.

Royal Bibingka

A soft, rich rice cake delicacy that is a prized native sweet of Ilocos Sur. Often enjoyed during fiestas and special occasions.

La Union: Where Ilocano Meets Pangasinense

Culinary Character

La Union occupies a unique culinary position — it **combines Ilocano and Pangasinense influences**, resulting in a diverse food culture that draws from both traditions. As the regional center, San Fernando City is a hub of culinary activity.

Tupig

A grilled sticky rice delicacy wrapped in banana leaves, popular across La Union and Pangasinan. The rice is mixed with coconut milk and sugar, then grilled until fragrant and slightly charred.

Specialty Dishes

- **Halo-Halo de Iloko** — A traditional Ilocano variation of the beloved Filipino shaved ice dessert, featuring local ingredients and native sweets.
- **Dinengdeng** — A light vegetable soup flavored with bagoong, showcasing the Ilocano love for simple, nourishing vegetable-based dishes.
- **Tupig** — Grilled sticky rice delicacy enjoyed as a snack or dessert.
- **Seafood Dishes** — Fresh grilled fish and shellfish sourced from the province's coastline, prepared simply to highlight natural flavors.

Pangasinan: Bangus Capital & Fermented Fish Country

Pangasinan is renowned for its **seafood, bangus (milkfish) specialties, and fermented fish products**. The province's name itself is believed to derive from the word for salt-making, underscoring the deep connection between Pangasinan and food preservation.

Pigar-Pigar

A popular stir-fried beef dish cooked with onions. A beloved street food and local specialty, often enjoyed late at night.

Bangus Dishes

Milkfish specialties are the pride of Pangasinan, including **boneless bangus** and **rellenong bangus** (stuffed milkfish). Dagupan City is particularly famous for its bangus.

Kaleskes

A hearty carabao innards stew that reflects the Ilocano tradition of nose-to-tail cooking and minimizing food waste.

Bagoong Monamon

A fermented anchovy paste that is a cornerstone condiment of Pangasinan cuisine, used to flavor vegetables, rice, and stews.

Tupig

A popular grilled rice delicacy shared with neighboring La Union, made from glutinous rice, coconut milk, and sugar wrapped in banana leaves.

Famous Culinary Ingredients of Region I

These six ingredients are the backbone of Ilocano cooking — each one reflecting the region's geography, preservation culture, and agricultural heritage.



Bagoong

Fermented fish paste — the defining condiment of Ilocano cuisine. Used to flavor pinakbet, dinengdeng, and countless other dishes.



Patis

Fish sauce derived from fermented fish. A liquid seasoning used in place of or alongside salt in many Ilocano recipes.



Garlic

A major Ilocos agricultural crop. Ilocos garlic is prized for its small size and intense flavor, used abundantly in longganisa and many savory dishes.



Bangus

Pangasinan's milkfish — the national fish of the Philippines and a culinary icon of the region, prepared in dozens of ways.



Longganisa

Native sausage, especially the garlicky Vigan variety. A breakfast staple and a symbol of Ilocano culinary identity.



Native Vinegar

A common flavoring ingredient used in marinades, dipping sauces, and preservation. Adds the characteristic sour note to many Ilocano dishes.

A Closer Look: Bagoong & Fermentation

What Is Bagoong?

Bagoong is a fermented condiment made from fish or shrimp mixed with salt and left to ferment over weeks or months. It is one of the most important flavor foundations in Ilocano — and broader Filipino — cuisine.

Types in Region I

- **Bagoong Monamon** — Fermented anchovy paste from Pangasinan, with a pungent, deeply savory flavor.
- **Burong Isda** — Fish fermented with cooked rice, producing a sour, tangy product.
- **Patis** — The liquid byproduct of fish fermentation, used as a seasoning sauce.

Why Fermentation Matters

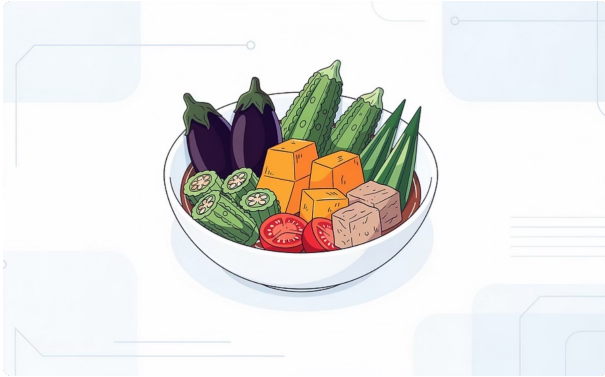
Fermentation in the Ilocos Region was born out of necessity — the dry climate, seasonal fishing cycles, and historical scarcity made food preservation critical. Over time, fermented products evolved from practical solutions into beloved flavor pillars that define the regional palate.

Culinary Role

- Flavors pinakbet and dinengdeng
- Used as a dipping condiment
- Adds umami depth to vegetable dishes
- Traded and sold as a regional product

Spotlight: Pinakbet & Dinengdeng

Two of the most iconic vegetable dishes of Region I — both rooted in the Ilocano philosophy of simplicity, resourcefulness, and respect for local ingredients.



Pinakbet

A mixed vegetable stew flavored with bagoong, featuring eggplant, bitter melon, string beans, squash, and tomatoes. Originally an Ilocano dish, pinakbet has become one of the most recognized Filipino vegetable dishes nationwide. The bagoong provides a salty, fermented depth that ties all the vegetables together.



Dinengdeng

A lighter, brothier vegetable soup also flavored with bagoong. Often cooked with grilled fish added directly into the broth. Dinengdeng is considered the more rustic, everyday version of pinakbet — a dish that perfectly embodies the Ilocano value of making the most of simple, available ingredients.

Dining Etiquette & Food Practices

Traditional Dining Practices

- **Rice is served at every meal** — it is the non-negotiable center of the Ilocano table.
- **Shared dishes** encourage family bonding — food is placed at the center and everyone eats together.
- **Elders are served first** — a sign of deep respect for age and experience.
- **Food preservation is highly valued** — leftovers are rarely wasted; they are repurposed or preserved.

Ilocano Culinary Values

- **Simplicity** — Dishes are straightforward, relying on quality ingredients rather than complex techniques.
- **Resourcefulness** — Every part of an ingredient is used; nothing goes to waste.
- **Sustainability** — Cooking practices are aligned with seasonal availability and local sourcing.
- **Hospitality** — Despite their reputation for frugality, Ilocanos are generous hosts who take pride in feeding their guests well.

Ilocano Cuisine at a Glance

A summary of the key dishes, ingredients, and techniques that define Region I's culinary identity across all four provinces.

ILOCOS NORTE



EMPANADA



BAGNET



DINAKDAKAN



PINAKBET

ILOCOS SUR



VIGAN LONGGANISA



SINANGLAO



ROYAL BIBINGKA

LA UNION



DINENGDENG



TUPIG



HALO-HALO DE ILOKO

SEAFOOD



PANGASINAN



PIGAR-PIGAR



BANGUS DISHES



KALESKES



BAGOONG MONAMON



The Importance of Ilocano Cuisine

Ilocano cuisine holds a significant place in the broader story of Philippine gastronomy. Its importance extends well beyond the borders of Region I:

→ **Reflects Filipino Resilience**

The cuisine emerged from conditions of scarcity and geographic challenge, demonstrating how creativity and practicality can produce a rich and distinctive food culture.

→ **Preserves Indigenous & Colonial Influences**

Ilocano dishes carry traces of pre-colonial indigenous practices alongside Spanish colonial influences, making them living records of Philippine history.

→ **Promotes Sustainable Cooking**

The emphasis on fermentation, drying, salting, and vegetable-forward cooking aligns with modern principles of sustainability and zero-waste cooking.

→ **Highlights Local Agriculture & Fisheries**

By centering local crops like Ilocos garlic and Pangasinan bangus, the cuisine supports regional farmers and fisherfolk while celebrating terroir.

→ **Contributes to Philippine Culinary Identity**

Dishes like pinakbet, bagnet, and Vigan longganisa are now recognized nationwide and internationally as symbols of Filipino food culture.

Key Takeaways: Module 2 Summary



Geography Shapes Food

The coastal location, dry climate, and Cordillera border directly produced a cuisine built on seafood, salt, fermentation, and hardy vegetables.



Culture Drives Cuisine

Ilocano values — frugality, resourcefulness, bayanihan — are inseparable from their food traditions, from preservation techniques to fiesta feasts.



Five Core Techniques

Fermentation, grilling, frying, drying/salting, and boiling/stewing form the technical foundation of Ilocano cooking.



Four Distinct Provinces

Each province — Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, and Pangasinan — contributes unique specialty dishes to the regional culinary mosaic.



The Ilocos Region is one of the Philippines' richest culinary regions. Studying its cuisine helps learners appreciate the heritage, resilience, and lasting contribution of the Ilocano people to Philippine gastronomy.



Conclusion

The Ilocos Region is one of the Philippines' richest culinary regions, offering dishes that reflect its geography, history, agriculture, and culture. Through fermented products, vegetable-based dishes, seafood specialties, and preserved foods, Ilocano cuisine demonstrates practicality, creativity, and deep cultural identity.

Studying the cuisine of Region I helps learners appreciate the **heritage and resilience of the Ilocano people** and their lasting contribution to Philippine gastronomy. From the crispy crunch of bagnet to the pungent depth of bagoong, every dish tells a story of a people who turned the challenges of their environment into a culinary legacy that endures to this day.



Seafood & Fermentation



Vegetable-Forward Cooking



Crispy Fried Classics



Living Cultural Heritage