



Philippine Regional Cuisine: Negros Island Region (NIR)

A journey through the flavors, traditions, and culinary heritage of the Philippines' newest administrative region — where sugarcane fields meet the sea.

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Learning Outcomes

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

01

Identify Geography

Describe the geographical characteristics, provinces, and regional centers of the Negros Island Region.

03

Identify Agricultural Products

Name the major agricultural and fishery products of the region and explain their role in local cooking.

02

Explain Cultural Influences

Discuss how geography, culture, and traditions shape the cuisine and lifestyle of the people of Negros and Siquijor.

04

Recognize Specialty Dishes

Identify traditional food preparation methods and specialty dishes from each province, appreciating their culinary heritage and economic importance.

Introduction to the Negros Island Region

The Negros Island Region (NIR) is the Philippines' newest administrative region, officially re-established through **Republic Act No. 12000 in 2024**. It is composed of the provinces of **Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, and Siquijor**, situated in the central Philippines.

What Makes NIR Unique

- Rich agricultural resources
- Diverse cultural heritage
- Unique culinary traditions
- Sugarcane plantation heritage
- Coastal and island food traditions
- Visayan, indigenous, and Spanish influences

Famous NIR Foods

- Chicken Inasal
- Kansi
- Budbud Kabog
- Sikwate
- Kinilaw
- Piaya & Napoleones

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Geography of the Negros Island Region

NIR is located in **Central Philippines**, consisting primarily of Negros Island and Siquijor Island. The region is surrounded by four bodies of water and features diverse terrain from volcanic highlands to coastal plains.

Surrounding Waters

- **North:** Visayan Sea
- **East:** Tañon Strait
- **West:** Sulu Sea
- **South:** Bohol Sea

Key Geographical Features

- Mount Kanlaon (volcanic highland)
- Tañon Strait
- Apo Island
- Fertile coastal plains and marine ecosystems

Climate & Soil

The region experiences a **tropical climate** with distinct wet and dry seasons, moderate rainfall, and favorable agricultural conditions. The fertile volcanic soil significantly supports:

- Sugarcane production
- Rice cultivation
- Fruit and vegetable farming



Negros Island Region (NIR)

Located in Central Philippines, NIR comprises three provinces across two islands — a region of volcanic highlands, fertile plains, and rich coastal waters.



Negros Occidental

Capital: Bacolod City



Negros Oriental

Capital: Dumaguete City



Siquijor

Capital: Siquijor (town)

NIR Location Map



Province Map



How Geography Shapes NIR Cuisine



Sugarcane Agriculture

Negros is the country's "Sugar Bowl." Rich volcanic soil and a favorable climate make it the dominant sugarcane-producing region, directly inspiring sugar-based delicacies like Piaya and Napoleones.



Extensive Fishing Grounds

Surrounded by four seas, NIR has abundant marine resources. Fresh seafood — tuna, squid, crabs, and shellfish — is central to everyday cooking and celebrated dishes like Kinilaw.



Coconut & Tropical Fruits

Coconut is used extensively in cooking and desserts. Tropical fruits including mango, banana, pineapple, lanzones, and mangosteen thrive in the region's warm, humid conditions.



Livestock & Farm-Fresh Produce

Livestock raising and vegetable farming support a farm-to-table cooking culture. Grilled meats, fresh vegetables, and native ingredients define the region's culinary identity.

Provinces and Regional Centers

The Negros Island Region is composed of three provinces, each with its own capital and distinct culinary character. NIR has two administrative centers: **Bacolod City** and **Dumaguete City**.

Province	Capital	Culinary Identity
Negros Occidental	Bacolod City (Highly Urbanized City; Administrative Center)	Sugar-based delicacies, grilled specialties
Negros Oriental	Dumaguete City (Regional Service Center)	Seafood, native chocolate, traditional snacks
Siquijor	Siquijor	Island seafood, coconut-based dishes

Bacolod City

Administrative center of NIR. Known as the "City of Smiles" and home to Chicken Inasal, Piaya, and the MassKara Festival.

Dumaguete City

Regional service center. A university city celebrated for Sans Rival, Silvanas, Budbud Kabog, and Sikwate.

Siquijor

A mystical island province known for pristine waters, fresh grilled seafood, and coconut-based island cooking.

Culture and Traditions

The culture of NIR reflects a rich blend of **Hiligaynon** (Negros Occidental), **Cebuano** (Negros Oriental and Siquijor), Spanish colonial, and indigenous Visayan heritage. These influences are deeply embedded in the region's food traditions.

Hospitality

Visitors are warmly welcomed with local delicacies and community feasts. Sharing food is a fundamental expression of goodwill and generosity in NIR culture.

Fiesta Celebrations

Food plays a central role during religious festivals, town fiestas, family celebrations, and harvest festivals. Major festivals include the **MassKara Festival** (Bacolod), **Buglasan Festival** (Negros Oriental), and the **Healing Festival** (Siquijor).

Sugar Plantation Heritage

The sugar industry shaped the lifestyle, cuisine, and economy of Negros for more than a century. The hacienda culture gave rise to unique culinary traditions centered on muscovado sugar and sugar-based delicacies.

Agricultural and Fishery Products

Major Agricultural Products

Sugarcane

The "Sugar Bowl" of the Philippines

Rice

Grown in fertile lowland areas

Coconut

Used in cooking and desserts

Corn

Staple crop and livestock feed

Tropical Fruits & Vegetables

Mango, banana, pineapple, lanzones, mangosteen, eggplant, squash, tomatoes, and leafy greens are all widely cultivated across the region.

Fishery Products

Surrounded by four bodies of water, NIR's fishing industry yields a diverse bounty:

- Tuna
- Mackerel
- Squid
- Crabs
- Shrimp
- Shellfish

- ✓ The region's marine ecosystems, including the protected waters around Apo Island, support both subsistence fishing and commercial seafood production, making fresh seafood a cornerstone of NIR cuisine.

Traditional Methods of Food Preparation

NIR's culinary techniques reflect centuries of tradition, shaped by available ingredients, cultural heritage, and the region's agricultural bounty.

1

Grilling (Inasal Style)

Chicken, pork, and seafood are marinated and grilled over charcoal. The signature technique behind Chicken Inasal uses vinegar, calamansi, garlic, and annatto oil.

2

Slow Simmering

Used for rich soups and stews like Kansi, where beef shanks and batwan fruit are simmered for hours to develop deep, sour flavors.

3

Kinilaw Preparation

Fresh seafood is "cooked" without heat — cured using vinegar, citrus juice, and spices. A technique that preserves the natural freshness of the catch.

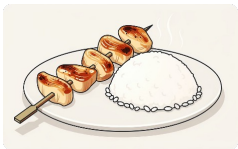
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Baking & Preservation

Pastry-making produces Piaya, Napoleones, and local cakes. Drying, salting, and smoking preserve fish and seafood for year-round use.

Specialty Dishes: Negros Occidental

Negros Occidental is known for its **sugar-based delicacies** and **grilled specialties**, a culinary identity deeply rooted in its hacienda culture and the dominance of the sugarcane industry.



Chicken Inasal

Grilled chicken marinated in vinegar, calamansi, garlic, and annatto oil. The signature dish of Bacolod City and one of the most beloved grilled dishes in the Philippines.



Kanso

A sour beef soup made with beef shanks, batwan fruit, and vegetables. Often called Bacolod's version of bulalo, with a distinctive sourness from the native batwan fruit.



Piaya

A thin flatbread filled with muscovado sugar — one of the most iconic pasalubong (take-home gifts) from Bacolod, reflecting the region's deep sugar heritage.



Napoleones

Layered puff pastry filled with custard cream and glazed with sugar icing. A beloved Bacolod delicacy that showcases the region's mastery of sugar-based pastry-making.

Specialty Dishes: Negros Oriental

Negros Oriental, centered in Dumaguete City, is celebrated for its **seafood, native chocolate traditions, and distinctive desserts** that have gained national recognition.



Budbud Kabog

A millet-based sticky rice delicacy wrapped in banana leaves. Budbud Kabog is traditionally paired with Sikwate and is a beloved breakfast or snack in Negros Oriental.



Sikwate

Traditional hot chocolate made from tablea — pure, ground cacao tablets. Rich, thick, and slightly bitter, Sikwate is a cornerstone of Negros Oriental's food culture.



Kinilaw

Fresh seafood marinated in vinegar and spices. A raw preparation technique that highlights the quality and freshness of the region's abundant marine catch.



Sans Rival & Silvanas

Sans Rival is a layered buttercream and cashew dessert popularized in Dumaguete. Silvanas are frozen buttercream cookie sandwiches — both are iconic Dumaguete pasalubong.

Specialty Dishes: Siquijor

Siquijor's island cuisine emphasizes **fresh seafood and coconut-based dishes**, reflecting its pristine marine environment and close relationship with the sea.

Kinilaw na Isda

Fresh fish cured in vinegar — Siquijor's take on the classic kinilaw, using the day's freshest catch from surrounding waters.

Adobong Pugita

Octopus cooked in the classic Filipino adobo style with vinegar, soy sauce, garlic, and bay leaves. A distinctive island specialty.

Ginataang Seafood

Seafood cooked in rich coconut milk with spices. Reflects the island's abundant coconut production and coastal fishing traditions.

Torta de Siquijor

A traditional local cake unique to the island, representing Siquijor's own baking heritage and distinct culinary identity.

Fresh Grilled Seafood

Fish, squid, and shellfish prepared using traditional grilling methods — the simplest and most celebrated expression of Siquijor's island cooking.

Famous Culinary Ingredients of NIR

The distinct flavors of NIR cuisine are built on a foundation of unique local ingredients — many of which are difficult to find outside the region.

Ingredient	Description & Use	Featured In
Sugarcane	Major regional crop; the backbone of Negros' economy and culinary identity	Piaya, Napoleones, desserts
Muscovado Sugar	Traditional unrefined brown sugar with a rich, molasses-like flavor	Piaya, local sweets
Seafood	Abundant marine resource from four surrounding seas	Kinilaw, Ginataang Seafood
Coconut	Used in cooking, desserts, and coconut milk-based dishes	Ginataang dishes, desserts
Batwan	Native souring fruit unique to the Visayas region	Kansi
Tablea	Pure ground cacao tablets; traditional chocolate ingredient	Sikwate
Millet (Kabog)	Ancient grain used in traditional sticky rice preparations	Budbud Kabog

A Closer Look: Chicken Inasal



The Signature Dish of Bacolod

Chicken Inasal is arguably the most famous dish to emerge from the Negros Island Region. It has transcended regional boundaries to become one of the most recognized Filipino grilled dishes nationwide.

Marinade Components

- **Vinegar** — for tenderizing and flavor
- **Calamansi** — local citrus for brightness
- **Garlic** — aromatic base
- **Annatto oil** — gives the signature orange-red color

The chicken is skewered and grilled over charcoal, basted continuously with the marinade and annatto-infused oil. It is traditionally served with garlic rice and a dipping sauce of vinegar and soy sauce.

❏ Inasal means "grilled" in Hiligaynon, the language of Negros Occidental.

A Closer Look: Kansi & Kinilaw

Kansi — The Sour Beef Soup

Kansi is Bacolod's answer to bulalo — a rich, slow-simmered beef shank soup distinguished by the use of **batwan fruit**, a native souring agent that gives it a uniquely tart, fruity depth unavailable in other regions.

- Beef shanks (bone-in)
- Batwan fruit (souring agent)
- Vegetables and spices

Simmered for hours until the collagen-rich broth becomes thick and deeply flavorful. A modern variation, the **Cansi Burger**, adapts this classic into a contemporary format.

Kinilaw — The Filipino Ceviche

Kinilaw is a traditional preparation found across NIR — in Negros Oriental and Siquijor especially — where the freshest seafood is "cooked" without heat through acid curing.

- Fresh fish, shrimp, or squid
- Vinegar or citrus juice (calamansi)
- Ginger, onion, chili, and spices

The acid denatures the proteins in the seafood, achieving a texture similar to cooked fish while preserving its fresh, clean flavor. Kinilaw reflects the region's deep respect for the quality of its marine resources.

A Closer Look: Budbud Kabog & Sikwate

Budbud Kabog

One of Negros Oriental's most distinctive delicacies, Budbud Kabog is made from **millet (kabog)** — an ancient grain — cooked into a sticky, sweet rice cake and wrapped in banana leaves. Unlike most Filipino kakanin (rice cakes) made from glutinous rice, the use of millet gives Budbud Kabog a unique texture and nutty flavor. It is a beloved breakfast item and pasalubong from Dumaguete.

Sikwate

Sikwate is a traditional hot chocolate drink made from **tablea** — pure, stone-ground cacao tablets produced locally. Thick, rich, and slightly bitter, it is the traditional beverage of Negros Oriental and is almost always paired with Budbud Kabog. Sikwate represents the region's long history of cacao cultivation and its indigenous chocolate-making traditions, predating the commercialized chocolate drinks common today.

Dining Etiquette and Food Practices

Traditional Dining Practices

→ Rice at Every Meal

Rice is the staple foundation of every meal in NIR, served alongside viands, soups, and grilled dishes without exception.

→ Family-Style Eating

Meals are shared communally, with all dishes placed at the center of the table for everyone to partake. This practice reinforces community bonds.

→ Welcoming Guests with Food

Guests are always offered food as a sign of respect and hospitality. Refusing food can be considered impolite in local culture.

→ Food at Celebrations

Food is central during all celebrations — from birthdays and weddings to fiestas and harvest festivals. Elaborate spreads signal abundance and gratitude.

Core Culinary Values

Hospitality

Food is the primary language of welcome and generosity.

Community Sharing

Eating together strengthens family and community ties.

Respect for Local Ingredients

Pride in using native, seasonal, and locally sourced produce.

Preservation of Family Recipes

Recipes are passed down through generations as cultural treasures.

The Importance of NIR Cuisine

The cuisine of the Negros Island Region is far more than a collection of recipes — it is a living expression of the region's identity, history, and values.



Preserves Visayan Traditions

NIR cuisine keeps alive centuries-old Visayan culinary techniques, ingredients, and food customs that might otherwise be lost to modernization.



Supports Tourism & Identity

Iconic dishes like Chicken Inasal and Napoleones draw visitors to the region, strengthening cultural pride and boosting the local tourism economy.



Promotes Local Agriculture

Demand for native ingredients — batwan, tablea, kabog, muscovado — directly supports local farmers, fisherfolk, and small-scale food producers.



Highlights Colonial & Indigenous Roots

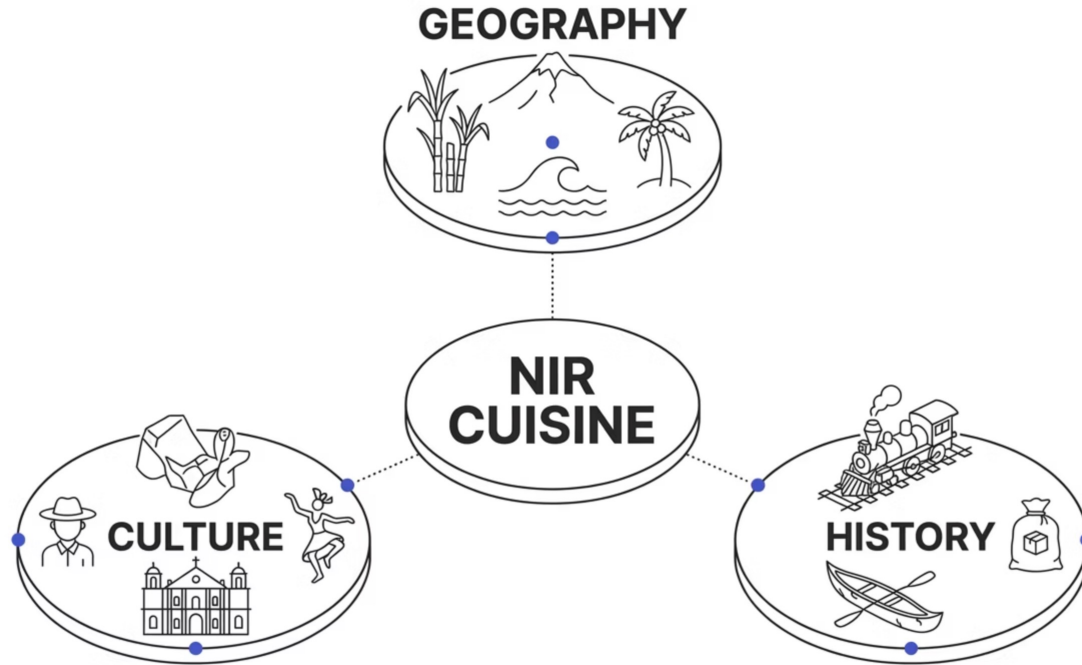
NIR dishes reflect both indigenous Visayan heritage and Spanish colonial influence, making the cuisine a tangible record of the region's complex history.



Contributes to Philippine Gastronomy

NIR's culinary contributions — from Inasal to Sans Rival — have enriched the national food landscape and elevated Philippine cuisine on the world stage.

Geography, Culture, and Cuisine: The NIR Story



NIR cuisine is the product of a unique convergence: fertile volcanic land, abundant seas, a century of sugar culture, and the warmth of Visayan hospitality. Every dish tells the story of where it came from.

Key Takeaways

1 NIR is the Philippines' Newest Region

Re-established by Republic Act No. 12000 in 2024, comprising Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, and Siquijor.

2 Geography Defines the Cuisine

Volcanic soil, four surrounding seas, and a tropical climate produce the sugarcane, seafood, coconut, and tropical fruits at the heart of NIR cooking.

3 Each Province Has a Distinct Culinary Identity

Negros Occidental: grilled meats and sugar delicacies. Negros Oriental: seafood, tablea chocolate, and iconic desserts. Siquijor: island seafood and coconut-based dishes.

4 Traditional Techniques Remain Central

Inasal-style grilling, slow simmering, kinilaw curing, pastry-baking, and preservation methods are living culinary traditions passed down through generations.

5 NIR Cuisine Matters Beyond the Plate

It preserves Visayan heritage, supports local agriculture and fisheries, drives tourism, and contributes meaningfully to Philippine gastronomy and national identity.