

Philippine Regional Cuisine: Region VII – Central Visayas

A journey through the flavors, traditions, and culinary heritage of Cebu and Bohol
— the heart of the Philippine archipelago.

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Introduction to Region VII

Central Visayas (Region VII) is located in the heart of the Philippine archipelago and serves as an important center of commerce, tourism, culture, and culinary heritage. Historically, the region consisted of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Oriental, and Siquijor. With the re-establishment of the Negros Island Region (NIR) in 2024, Central Visayas now consists primarily of **Cebu** and **Bohol**, with **Cebu City** serving as the regional center.

What Shapes the Cuisine

- Coastal and island living
- Rich marine resources
- Spanish and indigenous influences
- Agricultural abundance
- Strong Cebuano cultural traditions

Famous For

- Lechon Cebu
- Ngohiong
- Puso (hanging rice)
- Peanut Kisses
- Calamay
- Seafood delicacies
- Binignit

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Learning Outcomes

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

01

Geography & Provinces

Identify the geographical characteristics of Central Visayas and name its provinces and regional center.

02

Geography & Cuisine

Explain the relationship between the region's geography and its distinctive culinary traditions.

03

Culture & Traditions

Describe the culture and traditions of the Cebuano and Boholano people, including festivals and celebrations.

04

Agricultural & Fishery Products

Identify major agricultural and fishery products of the region and discuss traditional food preparation methods.

05

Specialty Dishes & Heritage

Recognize specialty dishes from each province and appreciate Central Visayas' contribution to Philippine culinary heritage.



Geography of Central Visayas

Central Visayas occupies the central portion of the Visayas island group, lying between Luzon and Mindanao. The region is bounded by the **Visayan Sea**, **Camotes Sea**, **Bohol Sea**, and **Cebu Strait**, and consists primarily of the island provinces of Cebu and Bohol.

Geographic Features

- Extensive coastlines
- Coral reefs and marine sanctuaries
- Fertile agricultural lands
- Rolling hills and mountains
- Rivers and coastal plains

Notable Natural Attractions

- Chocolate Hills (Bohol)
- Panglao Island
- Mactan Island
- Kawasan Falls

Climate

Tropical climate with distinct wet and dry seasons and warm temperatures year-round — ideal for agriculture and year-round fishing activities.

Region VII - Central Visayas

An island region of rich culture, vibrant cuisine, and natural abundance.

2 Provinces

Cebu & Bohol

1 Regional Center

Cebu City

Island Region

Surrounded by the Visayan, Camotes & Bohol Seas



How Geography Shapes the Cuisine

The physical environment of Central Visayas is the single greatest driver of its culinary identity. Surrounded by productive seas and blessed with fertile land, the region's food culture is a direct expression of its natural resources.



Abundant Seafood

Proximity to multiple seas ensures a constant supply of fresh fish, squid, crabs, shrimp, and shellfish — forming the backbone of everyday meals.



Livestock Farming

Swine, cattle, and poultry farming support the region's love of roasted and grilled meats, most famously Lechon Cebu.



Coconut Production

Coconut palms thrive across the islands, providing coconut milk and oil essential to both savory dishes and native desserts.



Vinegar-Based Flavors

Local vinegar traditions give rise to kinilaw and other marinated dishes, reflecting the coastal practice of preserving fresh seafood.

Provinces and Regional Center

Province: Cebu

Capital: Cebu City

Cebu is the largest and most populous province in the region. Cebu City, the provincial capital, also serves as the **regional center** of Central Visayas and is widely known as the "**Queen City of the South**." It is the country's oldest city and a major hub for trade, tourism, and culinary culture.

Province: Bohol

Capital: Tagbilaran City

Bohol is renowned for its natural wonders, including the iconic Chocolate Hills, and for its rich tradition of native delicacies. Tagbilaran City serves as the provincial capital and a growing center for tourism and local commerce.

Regional Center

Cebu City — the administrative, economic, and cultural heart of Region VII.

Culture and Traditions

The people of Central Visayas are predominantly **Cebuano-speaking** and are known for their hospitality, strong family ties, religious devotion, entrepreneurial spirit, and rich culinary traditions. Food plays a central and inseparable role in festivals and community celebrations.

Sinulog Festival

Celebrated every **January** in Cebu City in honor of the **Santo Niño**. One of the grandest festivals in the Philippines, featuring street dancing, feasting, and communal celebration.

Sandugo Festival

Held in Bohol, this festival commemorates the historic **Blood Compact** between Filipino chieftain Sikatuna and Spanish explorer Miguel López de Legazpi — a symbol of friendship and alliance.

Kinsan Festival

A celebration of **local fishing traditions**, honoring the region's deep connection to the sea and the communities that depend on it for their livelihood and cuisine.

Agricultural and Fishery Products

Agriculture and fisheries play vital roles in the economy of Central Visayas. Crop, livestock, poultry, and fisheries production are major contributors to the region's food sector and directly shape its culinary traditions.

Crops

- Rice
- Corn
- Coconut
- Mango
- Banana
- Root crops
- Vegetables

Livestock & Poultry

- Swine, Cattle, Goats
- Chicken, Duck

Fishery Products

- Tuna
- Sardines
- Squid
- Crabs
- Shrimp
- Shellfish



The region's diverse agricultural and marine output ensures that Central Visayan cuisine is both varied and deeply rooted in local, seasonal ingredients.

Traditional Methods of Food Preparation

Central Visayan cuisine is defined not only by its ingredients but by its time-honored cooking techniques, many of which have been passed down through generations.

Roasting (Lechon Style)

The most iconic cooking method in Cebu. A whole pig is slow-roasted over charcoal, seasoned with herbs and spices, producing the world-famous **Lechon Cebu**.

Grilling

Widely used for fish, squid, pork, and chicken. Grilling over open flame imparts a smoky flavor central to street food culture, as seen in **Larsian Barbecue**.

Stewing & Simmering

Used in soups and vegetable dishes, this slow-cooking method draws out deep, rich flavors from local ingredients and is common in home cooking.

Vinegar Marination

A coastal preservation technique used in **Kinilaw** and other seafood dishes. Fresh fish or shellfish is "cooked" in vinegar and spices without heat.

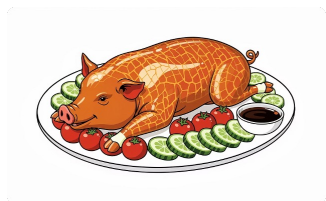
Native Dessert Preparation

Traditional sweets use **coconut milk**, **glutinous rice**, and **brown sugar** — the holy trinity of Visayan dessert-making, found in Calamay and Binignit.

CEBU PROVINCE

Cebu: Culinary Capital of the Visayas

Cebu is considered one of the country's premier culinary capitals, celebrated for its roasted meats, vibrant street food scene, and Chinese-influenced specialties. Its cuisine is bold, flavorful, and deeply tied to its identity as a trading and cultural hub.



Lechon Cebu

Whole roasted pig seasoned with herbs and spices. Considered the finest lechon in the Philippines — crispy skin, juicy meat, unforgettable flavor.



Nghohiong

A Cebuano spring roll inspired by Chinese cuisine, filled with spiced pork and vegetables, wrapped in a thin crepe and deep-fried.



Puso

Rice cooked inside woven coconut leaves, shaped into a hanging diamond. A beloved street food staple, always paired with grilled meats.

CEBU PROVINCE

More Cebu Street Food Favorites

Larsian Barbecue

A famous open-air barbecue complex in Cebu City where vendors grill an array of meats — pork, chicken, and offal — over charcoal. Larsian is a beloved institution of Cebuano street food culture, always served with puso and a variety of dipping sauces. It is a must-visit experience for locals and tourists alike.

Tuslob Buwa

A uniquely Cebuano street food experience where diners dip puso (hanging rice) into a bubbling, savory sauce made from pork brain, liver, and spices cooked in a large wok. The name literally means "dip in bubbles," referring to the boiling sauce. It is a communal, interactive dining experience that has become iconic in Cebu's food scene.

Bohol: Flavors Rooted in Land and Sea

Bohol cuisine emphasizes local agricultural products, fresh seafood, and traditional delicacies that reflect the province's natural abundance and cultural pride. Many of Bohol's most famous foods are inspired by its iconic landscapes.



Peanut Kisses

A famous Boholano confection shaped to resemble the iconic Chocolate Hills. These small, sweet, peanut-flavored cookies are a beloved pasalubong (souvenir) from Bohol.



Calamay

A sweet, sticky delicacy made from glutinous rice, coconut milk, and brown sugar, slow-cooked to a thick, glossy consistency. Often sold in coconut shells as a traditional souvenir.



Ube Kinampay Products

Desserts made from **kinampay**, a native purple yam variety prized for its rich flavor and vibrant color. Used in jams, pastries, and other sweets unique to Bohol.

BOHOL PROVINCE

Kinilaw & Binignit: Bohol's Iconic Dishes

Kinilaw

Fresh seafood — typically fish, shrimp, or shellfish — marinated in native vinegar and spices such as ginger, onion, chili, and calamansi. The acid from the vinegar "cooks" the seafood without heat, resulting in a bright, tangy, and refreshing dish. Kinilaw is one of the oldest food traditions in the Philippines and is deeply embedded in coastal Visayan culture.

Binignit

A warm, comforting sweet soup made with an assortment of root crops (taro, sweet potato, cassava), saba bananas, jackfruit, tapioca pearls, and glutinous rice balls, all simmered in rich coconut milk and sweetened with sugar. Binignit is traditionally prepared and shared during **Holy Week**, making it not just a dish but a cultural and religious tradition in Central Visayas.

Famous Culinary Ingredients of Central Visayas

A handful of key ingredients define the flavor profile and character of Central Visayan cuisine, appearing across both savory dishes and native sweets.



Coconut

Used in both desserts and savory dishes. Coconut milk is the base of Binignit, Calamay, and many stewed dishes.



Seafood

The major coastal resource of the region. Tuna, sardines, squid, crabs, shrimp, and shellfish appear in countless preparations.



Rice

The staple food of every meal. Uniquely prepared as Puso — rice cooked in woven coconut leaves — in Central Visayas.



Vinegar

An essential flavoring and preserving agent, central to Kinilaw and various marinades throughout the region.



Pork

The main ingredient in Lechon Cebu, the region's most iconic dish. Also used in Ngohiong and Tuslob Buwa.



Mango & Root Crops

Mango is a popular fruit crop enjoyed fresh and in desserts. Root crops like taro, cassava, and sweet potato are staples in native sweets like Binignit.

A Closer Look: Lechon Cebu

What Makes It Special

Lechon Cebu is widely regarded as the finest lechon in the Philippines — a claim famously endorsed by international food personalities. Unlike other regional versions, Cebu's lechon is seasoned from the inside with a blend of herbs including lemongrass, garlic, onion, and native spices, then slow-roasted over charcoal for several hours. The result is an extraordinarily crispy skin and deeply flavorful, juicy meat that requires no additional sauce.

Cultural Significance

Lechon is the centerpiece of every major celebration in Central Visayas — from fiestas and weddings to birthdays and holidays. It is a symbol of abundance, hospitality, and Cebuano pride. The preparation of lechon is itself a communal ritual, often involving the whole family or community. Cebu City is home to numerous lechon establishments, some of which have become nationally and internationally recognized brands.



Dining Etiquette and Food Practices

Traditional Dining Practices

- Rice accompanies every meal — it is the non-negotiable staple of the Visayan table.
- Food is shared **family-style**, with all dishes placed at the center for everyone to take from.
- Guests are always served first as a sign of respect and hospitality.
- Feasts (handaan) are common during fiestas, holidays, and family celebrations, with lechon as the centerpiece.

Culinary Values

Hospitality

Offering food is the primary expression of welcome in Cebuano and Boholano culture.

Family Unity

Meals are communal events that strengthen family and community bonds.

Respect for Tradition

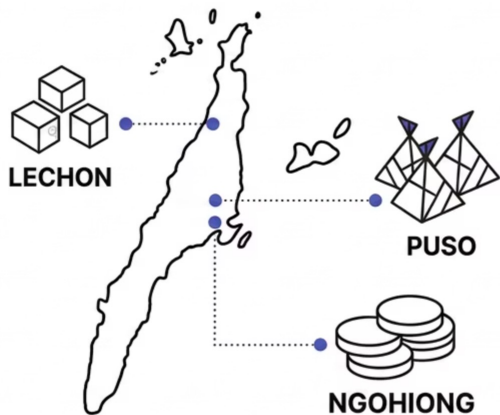
Recipes and preparation methods are passed down through generations with great care.

Comparing Cebu and Bohol Cuisines

While both provinces share the same regional identity, their culinary personalities are distinct — shaped by their different landscapes, histories, and cultural emphases.

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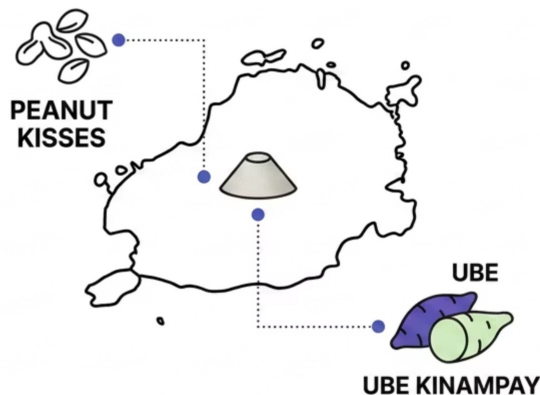
Urban Culinary Capital



- **Urban Culinary Capital**
- **Roasted Meats & Street Food**

BOHOL

Rural & Tradition-Focused



- **Rural & Tradition-Focused**
- **Native Delicacies & Seafood**

Together, Cebu and Bohol represent the full spectrum of Central Visayan culinary identity — from bold street food to delicate native sweets.

The Role of Festivals in Food Culture

In Central Visayas, food and festivity are inseparable. Major festivals are not only cultural and religious events — they are grand culinary celebrations that showcase the best of regional cuisine.

Sinulog (January, Cebu City)

The grandest festival in Cebu draws millions of devotees and tourists. Streets fill with food stalls offering lechon, puso, ngohiong, and grilled meats. Families prepare elaborate feasts at home to welcome guests, embodying the Cebuano spirit of hospitality.

Sandugo (July, Bohol)

Bohol's premier festival commemorates the historic Blood Compact. Celebrations include communal feasts featuring Bohol's native delicacies — Peanut Kisses, Calamay, and fresh seafood — shared among families and visitors as a gesture of friendship and unity.

Kinsan (Bohol)

A celebration of local fishing traditions that honors the communities whose livelihoods depend on the sea. Fresh seafood dishes, kinilaw, and grilled fish take center stage, highlighting the deep bond between the Boholano people and their marine environment.

Importance of Central Visayas Cuisine

Central Visayan cuisine holds a place of great significance — not only within the region but in the broader context of Philippine culinary identity and national heritage.



Preserves Tradition

Cebuano and Boholano food traditions are kept alive through recipes, festivals, and family practices passed down across generations.



Supports Tourism

The region is one of the country's leading food and tourism destinations. Culinary tourism — centered on lechon, street food, and native delicacies — drives significant economic activity.



Promotes Local Ingredients

Central Visayan cuisine champions the use of locally sourced ingredients — from coconut and mango to fresh seafood — supporting farmers and fisherfolk.



Reflects History & Culture

The cuisine mirrors centuries of history — indigenous traditions, Spanish colonial influence, and Chinese trade — all expressed through food.



Contributes to National Identity

Central Visayas contributes significantly to Philippine culinary identity, with Lechon Cebu recognized as one of the country's greatest culinary achievements.

Key Takeaways

1 Geography Drives Cuisine

Central Visayas' island geography, coastal access, and tropical climate directly shape its emphasis on fresh seafood, coconut-based dishes, roasted meats, and vinegar-marinated foods.

3 Food as Culture

From Sinulog to Sandugo, food is inseparable from celebration, community, and identity in Central Visayas. Dining practices reflect deep values of hospitality, family unity, and respect for tradition.

2 Two Provinces, Distinct Flavors

Cebu is the bold, urban culinary capital — home of Lechon, Ngohiong, and Puso. Bohol is the keeper of native sweets and coastal traditions — home of Peanut Kisses, Calamay, and Binignit.

4 A Living Culinary Heritage

Central Visayan cuisine preserves centuries of indigenous, Spanish, and Chinese influences while continuing to evolve. It remains one of the most celebrated and recognized regional cuisines in the Philippines.