

Philippine Regional Cuisine: BARMM

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

A journey into one of the Philippines' most distinctive and culturally rich culinary traditions — shaped by faith, geography, and centuries of Southeast Asian heritage.

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Learning Outcomes

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

1

Identify the Geography

Describe the geographical characteristics of BARMM, including its provinces, regional center, and key physical features.

2

Understand Cultural Traditions

Explain how the culture and traditions of the Bangsamoro people shape everyday life, celebrations, and food practices.

3

Explore Agricultural Resources

Identify major agricultural and fishery products of the region and their role in local cuisine.

4

Recognize Specialty Dishes

Name and describe specialty dishes from each province, appreciating their unique flavors and preparation methods.

5

Appreciate Food as Identity

Recognize the importance of BARMM cuisine in preserving Bangsamoro cultural identity and promoting halal culinary tourism.

Introduction to BARMM

What is BARMM?

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is the **only autonomous region in the Philippines**. Established in 2019, it replaced the former ARMM and serves as the political, cultural, and spiritual center of the Bangsamoro people. Its administrative center is **Cotabato City**. The region is home to diverse Muslim ethnolinguistic groups including the Maguindanaon, Maranao, Tausug, Sama-Bajau, Yakan, Iranun, and Kalagan communities.

Hallmarks of BARMM Cuisine

- **Halal food practices** strictly observed in all cooking
- **Rich use of spices and herbs** including turmeric and chili
- **Coconut-based dishes** from creamy to charred
- **Seafood specialties** drawn from the Sulu and Celebes Seas
- **Rice-centered meals** as the foundation of every table
- **Indigenous cooking techniques** passed down through generations
- Strong **Malay, Arab, and Indonesian influences** visible in flavors and methods

Geography of BARMM

BARMM is situated in the southern Philippines and includes both mainland Mindanao provinces and island provinces in the Sulu Archipelago. The region is bordered by the **Moro Gulf**, **Sulu Sea**, and **Celebes Sea**, making it exceptionally rich in agricultural and marine resources.

Major Geographic Features

Lake Lanao

One of the largest lakes in the Philippines and the center of Maranao culture

Sulu Archipelago

Chain of islands connecting Mindanao to Borneo, rich in marine biodiversity

Basilan Island

Southernmost large island, known for its Yakan heritage

Tawi-Tawi Islands

Southernmost province of the Philippines, home to Sama-Bajau sea communities

How Geography Shapes Cuisine

→ Abundant Seafood

Coastal and island communities rely heavily on fresh fish, squid, crabs, and shellfish drawn from surrounding seas.

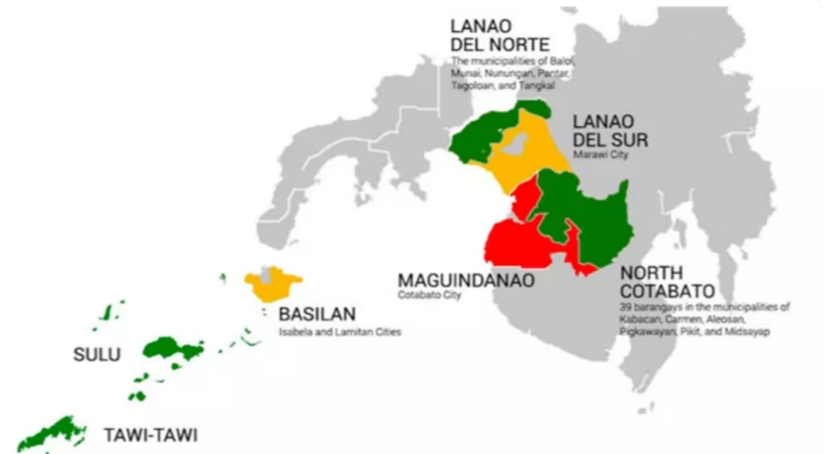
→ Coconut Production

Tropical climate and fertile valleys support extensive coconut farming, the base of many iconic dishes.

→ Spice and Rice Cultivation

Warm temperatures and abundant rainfall create ideal conditions for growing rice, turmeric, chili, and other spices.

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)



Provinces and Regional Center of BARMM

As of 2025–2026, BARMM is composed of five provinces plus the regional administrative center. Each province contributes its own unique culinary character to the broader Bangsamoro food tradition.

Province	Capital City	Culinary Identity
Basilan	Isabela City*	Yakan, Tausug, and Muslim-influenced dishes; seafood and grilled specialties
Lanao del Sur	Marawi City	Heart of Maranao cuisine; palapa, piaparan, and rich spiced dishes
Maguindanao del Norte	Datu Odin Sinsuat	Royal Maguindanaon cuisine; pastil, tiyula itum, and beef kulma
Maguindanao del Sur	Buluan	Strong Islamic culinary traditions; sinina, daral, and coconut-based stews
Tawi-Tawi	Bongao	Maritime cuisine; lato salad, kinilaw, and seaweed-based delicacies

 *Isabela City remains geographically located in Basilan but is not administratively part of BARMM. **Cotabato City** serves as the administrative center and seat of the Bangsamoro Government.

Culture and Traditions of the Bangsamoro People

BARMM is home to several major ethnolinguistic groups, each with its own language, artistic traditions, and culinary identity. Together, they form the rich mosaic of Bangsamoro culture.



Maguindanaon

Known for **royal cuisine**, kulintang music, and deep Islamic traditions. Maguindanaon cooking often reflects courtly refinement, with slow-simmered meats and aromatic spices central to their table.



Maranao

Celebrated for **artistic traditions**, ornate brassware (known as *okir*), and some of the most sophisticated cuisine in Muslim Mindanao, including the iconic palapa condiment.



Tausug

A proud **maritime culture** centered on the Sulu Sea. Their cuisine emphasizes bold, spiced seafood dishes and grilled preparations that reflect their seafaring heritage.



Sama-Bajau

Often called the **"Sea People"** of the Philippines, the Sama-Bajau traditionally lived on houseboats. Their food is defined by the ocean — fresh catch prepared simply and communally.



Yakan

Known for their striking **weaving traditions** and unique culinary practices rooted in Basilan's upland and coastal environments, blending native techniques with Islamic food customs.

Traditional Values and Major Festivals

Core Cultural Values

Hospitality

Guests are treated with great honor and always served generous, carefully prepared meals. Offering food is a fundamental expression of respect and goodwill in Bangsamoro society.

Islamic Food Practices

Halal preparation is not merely a dietary preference — it is a central act of religious observance. Every step of food preparation follows Islamic dietary laws to ensure purity and spiritual compliance.

Community Sharing

Meals are commonly shared during religious celebrations like Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, as well as family gatherings, weddings, and community feasts known as *kanduli*.

Respect for Elders

Elders are served first and given the choicest portions of the meal, reflecting the deep reverence for wisdom and seniority embedded in Bangsamoro family culture.

Major Festivals

Shariff Kabunsuan Festival

Held in Cotabato City, this festival celebrates the **arrival of Islam in Mindanao** through the missionary Shariff Muhammad Kabungsuwan. Communal feasts feature traditional Maguindanaon dishes.

Kalilang Festival

A vibrant cultural festival that **highlights diversity and unity** among the various ethnolinguistic groups of BARMM, featuring traditional music, dance, crafts, and regional foods.

Kanduli

A traditional **thanksgiving celebration** involving communal feasting. Kanduli meals are prepared and shared among the entire community as an expression of gratitude and faith.

Agricultural and Fishery Products of BARMM

Agriculture and fisheries are the economic backbone of BARMM. The region's fertile river valleys, tropical climate, and extensive coastlines produce an impressive diversity of crops and marine resources that directly shape its culinary traditions.



Staple Crops

- Rice — the foundation of every Bangsamoro meal
- Corn and Cassava — secondary staples in upland areas
- Sweet potato and Banana — everyday staples and snack ingredients



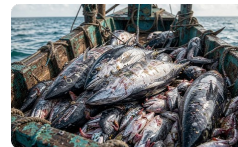
Commercial Crops

- Coconut — essential ingredient in nearly every dish
- Coffee and Cacao — emerging specialty crops
- Rubber — significant plantation crop
- Seaweed — major export product from Tawi-Tawi



Tropical Fruits

- Durian — the "King of Fruits," prized for its rich flavor
- Mango — widely grown and consumed fresh or in dishes
- Lanzones and Mangosteen — beloved seasonal fruits



Fishery Products

- Tuna and Mackerel — key commercial species
- Sardines, Squid, and Shellfish — everyday proteins
- Crabs — including the prized Curacha crab of Basilan
- Seaweed products — for food, export, and local delicacies

Traditional Methods of Food Preparation

The culinary techniques used in BARMM have been refined over centuries, reflecting both Islamic principles and indigenous ingenuity. These methods give Bangsamoro dishes their distinctive flavors, textures, and aromas.



Halal Cooking

All food is prepared according to **Islamic dietary laws**. Animals are slaughtered following proper halal procedures, pork and alcohol are strictly prohibited, and cleanliness is observed at every stage of preparation. Halal practice is both a spiritual obligation and a cultural cornerstone.



Slow Simmering

Many iconic dishes such as **Tiyula Itum**, **Kulma**, and coconut-based stews are slow-cooked for hours. This technique allows spices to bloom fully and proteins to become tender, resulting in deeply layered, complex flavors.



Grilling (Sugba)

Open-fire and charcoal grilling is a beloved method applied to fish, chicken, and beef. The smoky char enhances the natural flavors of fresh ingredients, and is central to street food culture across the region.



Coconut-Based Cooking

Coconut is used in multiple forms — **fresh coconut milk** for creamy stews, **burnt coconut** for the distinctive black color and smoky flavor of Tiyula Itum and Piyanggang, and **coconut cream** for rich, fragrant sauces.



Banana Leaf Wrapping

Banana leaves are used to wrap and steam rice dishes such as **Pastil**, locking in moisture and imparting a subtle, grassy aroma. This ancient technique doubles as sustainable, natural packaging for everyday meals and snacks.

Basilan — Flavors of the Yakan and Tausug

Basilan's cuisine is a flavorful fusion shaped by the culinary traditions of its **Yakan, Tausug, and Muslim Malay** communities. The island's coastal setting provides an abundance of fresh seafood, while its forests and farmlands supply spices and livestock. Basilan's food is bold, aromatic, and deeply rooted in Islamic culinary practice.

Satti

Grilled beef or chicken skewers served alongside a rich, **spicy sauce** made from ground chilies and spices. A beloved street food, satti is often enjoyed as an early morning meal with compressed rice cakes.

Piyanggang

Chicken marinated and cooked with **burnt coconut** and a blend of aromatic spices. The charred coconut gives the dish a uniquely dark color and a deeply smoky, complex flavor that is unmistakably Bangsamoro.

Tiyula Itum

A striking **black beef soup** made by incorporating charred, burnt coconut into a slow-simmered broth. The result is a dish of extraordinary depth — smoky, savory, and profoundly satisfying, often served at feasts and celebrations.

Curacha Dishes

Prepared from the **Curacha** (spanner crab), a large, spiny crab native to the waters around Basilan and Zamboanga. It is cooked in coconut milk with spices or served grilled, and is considered a prized delicacy of the region.

Lanao del Sur — Heart of Maranao Cuisine



Lanao del Sur, home to the magnificent **Lake Lanao** and the city of Marawi, is the cultural heartland of the Maranao people. Maranao cuisine is considered among the most sophisticated in Muslim Mindanao, renowned for its bold use of the iconic **palapa** condiment and its mastery of coconut-based cooking. Every meal at a Maranao table reflects artistry, pride, and centuries of culinary refinement.

Signature Dishes

Palapa

The foundational condiment of Maranao cuisine, made from **scallions (sakurab), chili, ginger, turmeric, and toasted coconut**. It is used as a seasoning, side dish, and flavor base for many dishes — no Maranao meal is complete without it.

Piaparan

Tender chicken cooked with rich **coconut milk and palapa**, producing a fragrant, golden stew that balances creaminess with the pungent heat of the condiment. One of the most celebrated dishes of BARMM.

Inaloban a Manok

A traditional Maranao chicken dish cooked using **ancient cooking methods**, emphasizing natural flavors and the use of locally grown herbs and aromatics.

Dodol

A rich, chewy **sticky rice dessert** made with coconut milk and palm sugar, traditionally prepared for celebrations and religious occasions. Dodol requires slow, patient stirring and is a labor of love.

Maguindanao del Norte — Royal Maguindanaon Cuisine

Maguindanao del Norte is the home of **royal Maguindanaon culinary tradition** — a cuisine that developed in the courts of the Sultanate of Maguindanao and continues to be celebrated as one of the most refined in Muslim Mindanao. The province's fertile plains, rich livestock farming, and coconut groves provide the essential ingredients for its bold, aromatic dishes.

Pastil

Perhaps the most recognizable everyday food of BARMM — **steamed rice topped with seasoned shredded chicken** (or fish), wrapped neatly in banana leaves. Pastil is the quintessential on-the-go meal, sold by vendors across the region every morning. Simple, nourishing, and iconic.

Tiyula Itum

The region's most celebrated dish — a **black beef soup** made with burnt coconut that lends the broth its signature dark hue and smoky depth. Slow-simmered for hours, this dish is a staple at weddings, feasts, and important family gatherings.

Beef Kulma

A **rich curry-like beef stew** influenced by Malay and Arab culinary traditions, made with coconut milk, spices, and slow-cooked beef. Kulma is often served during special occasions and is considered a prestige dish of the Maguindanaon.

Dudul

A traditional **sweet sticky rice delicacy** made from glutinous rice, coconut milk, and sugar. Dudul is prepared for celebrations and religious holidays, representing the sweetness of communal joy and thanksgiving.

Maguindanao del Sur — Coconut, Spice, and Sweet Traditions

Culinary Character

Maguindanao del Sur carries the banner of **strong Islamic culinary traditions** blended with the agricultural abundance of the Mindanao interior. Coconut-based cooking is central to the cuisine here, as are slow-simmered spiced meats and beloved sweet delicacies. The province shares many dishes with its northern counterpart but has developed its own distinctive preparations and flavor profiles over generations.



Specialty Dishes

1 Sinina

A fragrant chicken dish cooked in **coconut milk with aromatic spices** including turmeric, lemongrass, and chili. Sinina is a comforting, everyday dish that showcases the region's mastery of coconut-based cooking.

2 Pastil

A popular **everyday meal** consisting of rice and shredded protein wrapped in banana leaves. Widely consumed throughout the province as breakfast or a midday meal, pastil represents the simplicity and practicality of Bangsamoro food culture.

3 Beef Kulma

Served during **special occasions and celebrations**, kulma in Maguindanao del Sur is known for its deep color, rich coconut-spice sauce, and fall-apart tender beef.

4 Daral

A delicate **crepe-like dessert** made from rice flour and filled with sweetened, toasted coconut. Daral is a beloved treat served at celebrations and as an afternoon snack, representing the region's affinity for coconut-based sweets.

Tawi-Tawi — Cuisine of the Sea

Tawi-Tawi is the **southernmost province of the Philippines**, a scattered archipelago of islands stretching toward Borneo. Its cuisine is defined entirely by the sea — by the daily catches of its fishermen, the seaweed harvests of its coastal communities, and the fresh, clean flavors of ocean-to-table cooking. Tawi-Tawi is also the Philippines' leading producer of commercially cultivated seaweed.

Lato Salad

A refreshing and visually striking salad made from **lato** (sea grapes / *Caulerpa lentillifera*), a type of edible green seaweed harvested fresh from the sea. Served simply with vinegar dressing, tomatoes, and onions, it is a signature dish of Tawi-Tawi and a celebration of its marine bounty.

Grilled Seafood

Fish, squid, and shellfish are seasoned simply and grilled over charcoal, allowing the **natural freshness of the catch** to shine. Grilled seafood is the daily staple of coastal communities and a centerpiece of communal meals.

Kinilaw

Fresh, raw seafood — typically fish or shellfish — cured in **native vinegar** (*sukang tuba*) with ginger, chili, and onions. Kinilaw is the Filipino equivalent of ceviche and is particularly celebrated in Tawi-Tawi for the exceptional freshness of its seafood.

Seaweed-Based Delicacies

The province's abundant seaweed harvest gives rise to a range of **locally crafted food products** including candies, noodles, and health drinks. Seaweed is not only food — it is a major livelihood product that connects Tawi-Tawi's economy to global markets.

Famous Culinary Ingredients of BARMM

The distinctive character of Bangsamoro cuisine is built on a handful of foundational ingredients — each carrying deep cultural, agricultural, and spiritual significance. These ingredients appear again and again across the region's diverse provincial dishes.



Coconut

The single most essential ingredient in BARMM cuisine. Used as coconut milk, cream, and in its burnt form, coconut gives dishes their characteristic richness, sweetness, and smoky depth. It appears in savory stews, desserts, and condiments alike.



Rice

The undisputed staple food of the region. Every meal centers on rice — steamed plain, wrapped in banana leaves as pastil, or transformed into sticky sweets like dodol and dudul. Rice cultivation in BARMM's fertile valleys is both an agricultural livelihood and a cultural anchor.



Turmeric

Widely used as both a spice and a coloring agent, turmeric (known locally as *luyang dilaw*) gives many BARMM dishes their golden hue. It is a key ingredient in palapa, piaparan, and numerous spiced meat dishes, valued for its earthy warmth and medicinal properties.



Chili

Chilies are the heat engine of Bangsamoro cooking. From the fiery bird's eye chili to milder varieties, chili is a core component of palapa, satti sauce, and kinilaw. It brings life and vibrancy to dishes that might otherwise rely entirely on coconut's sweetness.



Seaweed

Tawi-Tawi's most important marine product, seaweed is eaten fresh in lato salad, processed into food products, and exported globally. Its cultivation is a cornerstone of the local economy and a symbol of the region's deep connection to the sea.



Halal Beef and Seafood

Beef, prepared strictly according to halal guidelines, is the primary red meat in BARMM cooking, featured in kulma, tiyula itum, and satti. Seafood — especially tuna, mackerel, squid, and crab — is equally important, especially in island provinces.

Dining Etiquette and Food Practices

Traditional Dining Practices

Dining in BARMM is a deeply communal and spiritually meaningful experience. Understanding these practices helps appreciate the full cultural context of Bangsamoro food:

- **Halal dietary laws** are strictly observed at all times — not just in ingredients but in the preparation, handling, and serving of food
- Meals are often served on **communal platters** placed at the center of the table or on a spread mat, from which everyone eats together
- **Guests receive the best portions** — the finest cuts of meat and the most prized dishes are offered to visitors as an act of honor
- Food is central to **Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha** celebrations, with entire communities preparing special dishes days in advance
- **Elders are served first**, and it is considered disrespectful to begin eating before them

Culinary Values Embedded in Every Meal

Hospitality (*Pagtanggap*)

Food is the primary medium through which Bangsamoro communities express welcome. A guest who leaves the table hungry is a source of shame for the household — generosity is paramount.

Religious Observance

Every act of eating begins with *Bismillah* (In the name of God). Food preparation and consumption are acts of worship as much as nourishment, reinforcing the inseparability of faith and daily life.

Community Solidarity

Shared meals are the glue of Bangsamoro community life. Whether at a wedding feast, a *kanduli* thanksgiving, or a simple family dinner, eating together affirms bonds of kinship and faith.



A Culinary Tour: Famous Dishes at a Glance

Across BARMM's five provinces, a constellation of iconic dishes defines the region's culinary identity. Here is a summary of the most celebrated specialties and the ingredients that make them unforgettable.



Pastil

Steamed rice and tender shredded chicken or fish wrapped snugly in banana leaves — a beloved everyday meal from Maguindanao, eaten by hand and full of smoky, earthy aroma.



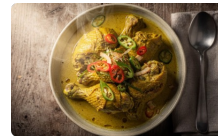
Tiyula Itum

A striking jet-black beef soup made with burnt coconut and a blend of spices. Born in the Maguindanao heartland, its deep, smoky broth is a hallmark of Bangsamoro feasts.



Palapa

The soul of Maranao cooking — a bold, fiery condiment of pounded scallions, chili, ginger, and turmeric. It flavors countless dishes and represents the spirit of Lake Lanao cuisine.



Piaparan

Chicken simmered in rich coconut milk with palapa and aromatic spices, yielding a golden, fragrant stew. A Maranao treasure that balances heat, creaminess, and depth.



Satti

Chargrilled beef or chicken skewers served with a vivid, spicy orange dipping sauce and compressed rice. A popular street food from Zamboanga and Basilan, smoky and addictive.



Lato Salad

Plump, jewel-like sea grapes from the waters of Tawi-Tawi tossed in a bright vinegar dressing with tomatoes and onions — a refreshing taste of the southernmost islands.

Each dish tells the story of its province — from the smoky depths of Tiyula Itum born in the mainland heartland to the briny freshness of Lato Salad from the southernmost islands of Tawi-Tawi. Together, they represent the full spectrum of Bangsamoro culinary genius.

The Importance of BARMM Cuisine

BARMM cuisine is far more than a collection of recipes — it is a living cultural archive that preserves identity, faith, and history across generations.

Preserves Bangsamoro Cultural Identity

The dishes, ingredients, and cooking methods of BARMM are tangible expressions of Bangsamoro history. Each recipe carries the memory of communities, courts, and coastlines, ensuring that cultural knowledge is passed from elder to youth with every shared meal.

Supports Agriculture and Fisheries

The demand for traditional BARMM ingredients — from seaweed and coconut to turmeric and fresh seafood — sustains the livelihoods of millions of farmers and fisherfolk across the region's provinces, linking cuisine directly to economic survival.

Reflects Centuries of Islamic and Southeast Asian Influence

BARMM cuisine bears the unmistakable imprint of centuries of trade, migration, and religious exchange with the Arab world, the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia, and Brunei. These influences are visible in the spice profiles, cooking methods, and food practices observed daily.

Promotes Halal and Culinary Tourism

As interest in halal travel grows globally, BARMM's authentic halal cuisine represents a unique and underexplored tourism asset. Culinary tourism initiatives can draw visitors eager to experience dishes that cannot be found anywhere else in the Philippines.

Food, Faith, and Identity: A Deep Connection

"The cuisine of BARMM demonstrates the deep connection between faith, culture, history, and food traditions — a connection that has endured for centuries and continues to nourish both body and community."

In BARMM, food is never just sustenance. It is a **living expression of Islamic faith**, a vehicle for cultural memory, and the most immediate way the Bangsamoro people communicate who they are to the world. Every pot of slowly simmered kulma, every banana-leaf-wrapped pastil, and every shared platter at a kanduli feast is an act of cultural preservation. Understanding BARMM cuisine is therefore not merely a culinary exercise — it is a window into the soul of one of the Philippines' most historically significant and culturally rich peoples. To eat Bangsamoro food is to engage with its history, honor its faith, and celebrate its enduring vitality.



5

Provinces

Each with its own distinct culinary identity

7+

Ethnolinguistic Groups

Contributing unique dishes and food traditions

100s

Years of Tradition

Of Bangsamoro culinary heritage passed through generations

Key Takeaways

As we conclude our exploration of BARMM's remarkable culinary tradition, here are the essential lessons to carry forward:



Geography Shapes Flavor

BARMM's coastlines, islands, lakes, and fertile plains directly determine what people grow, catch, and cook. Place and cuisine are inseparable.



Faith Guides the Table

Halal practice is not a restriction — it is a spiritual framework that brings meaning, discipline, and shared identity to every aspect of Bangsamoro food culture.



Food is Community

From the kanduli feast to the morning pastil vendor, food in BARMM is always a communal act — an expression of generosity, kinship, and solidarity.



Centuries of Influence

Malay, Arab, and Indonesian culinary influences have enriched BARMM cuisine over centuries of trade and migration, making it one of the most cosmopolitan regional cuisines in the Philippines.



Cuisine as Living Heritage

Every dish is a form of cultural memory. Studying and appreciating BARMM cuisine is an act of respect for the Bangsamoro people's history, resilience, and identity.

✔ This lesson is part of the Philippine Regional Cuisine series. Continue exploring the rich and diverse food traditions of every region of the Philippines!