

# Serving up a taste of China

Delegation of Cantonese chefs visits Panama, the US and Mexico to promote Chinese culinary traditions

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**L**in Chaodai, who was blindfolded, cut a potato slice perched on a special “chopping board” — a balloon resting on two nails pointing upward. He finished slicing it successfully without bursting the balloon, but that was not the end of the show.

He then effortlessly proceeded to thread six potato slices together on a single needle.

The Cantonese cuisine master chef displayed his knife skills on several occasions over the Spring Festival period, as one of six chefs who formed a delegation that was preparing to take traditional New Year cuisine to overseas Chinese in Panama, the United States and Mexico.

The tour, organized by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, or China’s cabinet, which is now in its third consecutive year, works to revive Chinese culinary culture around the globe.

This year, the delegation departed from Guangzhou on Feb 16, the first day of Chinese New Year. During their scheduled 16-day visit, the chefs presented Cantonese cooking techniques to Chinese food practitioners in various destinations across the three countries.

All six chefs hail from Shunde in Foshan, in South China’s Guangdong province. Shunde, which joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network as a city of gastronomy in 2014, is one of the cradles of Cantonese cuisine.

According to Lin, the chefs discussed what they would teach and cook for the US-based Chinese delegates before their departure. “We wanted to use local ingredients and teach them some dishes that would not be too complicated to cook,” Lin said.

Their first stop was Panama, which established diplomatic relations with China in June 2017.

After finishing a presentation and training session in Cantonese cuisine on the afternoon of Feb 17 in Panama City, Lin and the other chefs organized a special New Year’s dinner for the evening.

With local Chinese chefs helping to prepare the food, the preparations also served as a show-and-tell session for the Shunde chefs — an opportunity to demonstrate how they make each dish while taking questions as they cooked them.

Lin described all aspects from how to cook the individual ingredients to how many grams of each condiment should be used.

More than 600 guests joined the dinner, including members of the



A chef delegation from Shunde, in South China’s Guangdong province, showcased Cantonese cooking techniques to Chinese food practitioners in Panama, the United States and Mexico during the Spring Festival. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Panamanian government. Lin’s cutting skills wowed the audience as each chef brought out their signature dishes for all to sample.

The 10-course dinner included deep-fried sesame balls, chicken in four seasonings, and homestyle stuffed mud carp — all signature Cantonese dishes showcasing authentic flavors.

Each dish chosen also had auspicious meanings — the deep-fried sesame balls resembled golden orbs, signifying good fortune, while the ginger milk curd implied blessings.

Lu Linlin, secretary-general of the delegation, said the overseas Chinese at the dinner were very impressed. “One overseas Chinese said to me that he hadn’t felt such an atmosphere at Chinese New Year since he left China over 30 years ago,” said Lu.

The dinner was held at the largest Chinese restaurant in Panama City, Fumanlou, where Lu noticed that 70 percent of the customers were local Panamanians.

“It’s great that not only Chinese people come to try Chinese food,” said Lu. “It’s also an easy way for

foreigners to learn more about Chinese culture.

“And it’s also good for the Chinese restaurants we have previously visited over the past three years, as they have become more popular after our trips,” Lu said.

Lin sees a promising future for Chinese food in Panama: “They need to use the best local ingredients and improve the plating to make better Cantonese dishes.”

On their next stop, Omaha, Nebraska, in the US, the chefs visited the Institute for the Culinary Arts at

Metropolitan Community College to meet culinary students and discuss Chinese food with them.

The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office has organized trips to more than 30 countries across five continents over the last three years, Lu said.

“Besides taking New Year’s dinners worldwide to revive Chinese food traditions, we have also invited Chinese food practitioners abroad to China for training,” Lu said. “We teach them not only how to cook Chinese food, but also how to manage their restaurants.”