



The Cabaña family in the main room of their 200-square-foot apartment in Manila, the Philippines, with a week's worth of food. Seated are Angelita Cabaña, 51, her husband, Eduardo Cabaña, 56 (holding sleeping grandson Dave, 2), and their son Charles, 20. Eduardo, Jr., 22 (called Nyok), his wife Abigail, 22, and their daughter Alexandra, 3, stand in the kitchen. Behind the flowers is the youngest son, Christian, 13 (called Ian). Cooking method: gas stove. Food preservation: none.

Freshly Squeezed

ONE WEEK'S FOOD IN JANUARY

Grains & Other Starchy Foods: \$7.09

White rice, 30.9 lb; Park n' Go white bread, sliced, 3 loaves; pan de sal (salty bread), 2.2 lb; cheese bread, 1.3 lb; potatoes, 11.6 oz; V.C. original breeding mix, 3.5 oz.

Dairy: \$2.01

Nestlé Bear Brand milk, powdered, 12.7 oz; Kraft Cheez Whiz, 8.8 oz.

Meat, Fish & Eggs: \$19.72

Pork, 7.7 lb; chicken, whole, 4.4 lb; milk fish, fresh, 4.4 lb; galunggong (fish), fresh, 2.2 lb; tilapia (fish), fresh, 2.2 lb; eggs, 12; foot-long hot dogs, 1.1 lb; Ma Ling's luncheon meat, canned, 5.8 oz; 555 Brand sardines, in hot tomato sauce, canned, 5.8 oz; tuyo (assorted dried fish, like tamban), 2.5 oz.

Fruits, Vegetables & Nuts: \$7.17

Green mandarin oranges, 8.8 lb; yellow bananas, 4.4 lb; saba plantains, 2.9 lb; limes, 8.8 oz; kalabasang tagalog (squash), 2.9 lb; eggplants, 2.4 lb; green tomatoes, 2.2 lb; daikon, 2.2 lb; squash, 1.7 lb; kangkong (water spinach), 1.3 lb; bitter melon, 1.1 lb; red onions, 1.1 lb; cabbage, 1 small head, okra, 12.4 oz; carrots, 8.8 oz; mongo beans, 8.8 oz; snap beans, 8.8 oz; sweet potato, 6.5 oz; hot green peppers, 5.3 oz; garlic, 3.7 oz.

Condiments: \$2.01

White sugar, 2.2 lb; cooking oil, 1.1 lb; Silver Swan soy sauce, 11.8 fl oz; tamarind, 8.8 oz; Lorins Patis hot fish sauce, 5.9 fl oz; ketchup, 5.6 oz; vinegar, 5.1 fl oz; salt, 4.4 oz; Mong Tomos all around sauce (made from ground liver mixed with seasonings), 2.9 fl oz; black pepper, 0.5 oz; bay leaves, 8.

Snacks & Desserts: \$1.92

Granny Goose stone ground tortilla chips, 8.5 oz; graham crackers, 3.5 oz; Sky Flakes crackers, 3.5 oz; Hello chocolate mini bars, 2.1 oz; chocolate candies, 1.1 oz; Halls cough drops, 1 oz.

Prepared Food: \$1.13

Lucky Me instant pancit canton noodles, 1.3 lb; Nissin instant ramen noodles, 1.3 lb.

Fast Food: \$1.86

Jollibee burger and French fries; fried chicken and rice; Coca-Cola, 2.

Street Food: \$1.30

Siopao (steamed pork buns), 1.1 lb; quek quek (quail eggs covered in flour and egg mixture and deep-fried), 5.3 oz.

Beverages: \$4.46

Pop Cola, 11.27-fl-oz bottles, produced by the Coca-Cola brand; SunKist orange juice drinks, 4.85-fl-oz pks; Nescafe instant coffee, 1.9 oz; tap water for drinking and cooking from indoor faucet only from 2 to 6 a.m. Very weak water pressure.

Miscellaneous: \$0.75

HOPE cigarettes, 2 pks.

Food Expenditure for One Week:

2,629.50 pesos/\$49.42

While any traveler with a modicum of curiosity finds Metro Manila fascinating, it's a testament to the resilience of hardworking Filipinos that they can live there. Rampant unemployment, pollution, crime, cronyism, corruption, nepotism, overcrowding, and traffic congestion all plague the Philippine capital. In fact, Manila's best single attribute—all that may be holding the city together—is the cohesive nature and inventiveness of the Filipino family.

IN BRIGHT SUNSHINE, WE STEP from a central Manila city street, past a rooster tied by its leg to a log, into the total darkness of a narrow alleyway leading to Angelita Cabaña's house. Her sons Nyok and Charles say she's not home, but is expected back shortly. She's away demonstrating her line of Tupperware to prospective buyers. This is just one of the many jobs she does to help keep the family fed, in school, and financially afloat. She learned massage therapy, and serves a small clientele of women who can afford the luxury of paying \$4 or \$5 an hour for the personal attention. Angelita is also the landlady for the half of the house she's given over to renters, squeezing her eight family members into three small rooms to do so. In a pinch she can also repair watches. She inherited a watch repair business when her father died, and it's the work her husband Eduardo does as well—in her father's phonebooth-size shop bolted to the sidewalk on a nearby street. On a good day, Eduardo earns about \$18.

The Cabañas' neighborhood in the Malate District houses the working poor, who provide the tourist hotels nearby with waiters, tour guides, and bartenders. Street vendors who live here move around the city selling boxes of candies or small kitchen tools. Food-cart entrepreneurs cook crispy, deep-fried sweet potatoes, skewers of barbecued chicken, and *kwek-kwek*—hard-boiled quail eggs coated in orange-colored flour. Mom-and-pop convenience shops called *sari-saris* open early and close late. Aside from the ubiquitous Coca-Cola, Nestlé, and Kraft products, they sell other items in the small sizes that Filipino families can afford.

The streetlamps in the Cabañas' neighborhood, installed by their local municipal mayor, are lauded by the Cabañas. Like many in Metro Manila—which consists of not one city but four, and thirteen municipalities—the Cabañas live around drug addicts



and loiterers, and illumination helps make their area safer. But the overflowing trash, the randomness of basic city services, and the lingering pervasiveness of crime are visible reminders that providing a safe, clean environment for a crowded, overwhelmingly poor population is an enormous challenge. Inside the Cabañas' home, although a giant step and a half will get you from one side of the living room to the other, everything is orderly and clean, if threadbare.

CHEF DE CUISINE

The cartoon on the Cabañas' TV holds Nyok's 3-year-old daughter Alexandra in thrall in much the same way that we are mesmerized by the large statue of Santo Niño—the child Jesus—in the corner. Many Filipinos in this predominantly Catholic population have similar statues, which they parade through the streets once a year. The tourism department of the Philippines calls Metro Manila's Santo Niño Festival "a grand procession of over 200 well-dressed images of the child Jesus." (The number we saw was considerably more than 200, and, yes, they were very well-dressed.)

Two-year-old Dave, Alexandra's brother, perks up when his grandmother Angelita—Lita, as she is called—walks in the door. This is the woman of his dreams—the chef de cuisine of the noodles and eggs, the keeper of the Cheez Whiz. Breakfast a la Lita sometimes includes Cheez Whiz, usually includes rice and chicken eggs, and always includes *pan de sal*—the salty bread sold on the street by the "pot pot," vendors named for the sound of their horns.

Relieved of child-care duty by the arrival of his mother, Nyok, a graduate student in business administration, escapes to study in the small room he shares with the two children and Abigail, his wife, who works as a cigarette vendor in a local market. Like many young couples who live with extended family to share expenses, Nyok's family lives with Lita. In addition, they benefit from Lita's remarkable skill at the Manila game of making every peso count at the market, a game with many angles, the most important of which is having *sukis*.

THE ART OF THE Suki

Crowded to unsafe levels, the splendidly garish, squat-bodied busses called jeepneys barrel along every road in Metro Manila, including the one near Divisoria Market that Lita and 50 other people are now attempting to cross. Taking advantage of their numbers, they swarm

the road and force the jeepneys and trucks to stop and let them pass—a mode of traffic negotiation that is routine throughout Metro Manila. Lita does the food shopping for the entire family between her massage appointments and Tupperware sales. Because her refrigerator recently died an untimely death, she has resigned herself to shopping almost daily again. The problem is that the cheapest places are also the farthest away, so she must weigh the pluses—better prices—against the minuses—the time and money it takes to get there and back. Today at Divisoria Market, 30 minutes by jeepney from her home, she hopes to buy from some of her *sukis*.

Suki is the term used for both buyers and sellers and refers to people who do repeat business with one another. Over time, the relationship—like a sort of noncorporate loyalty card—can garner deep discounts for the buyer and ensures the seller a steady customer. To Lita, the discount might mean the difference between buying a snack-size or a meal-size portion of some item. "I can get up to a 20 percent discount from my *sukis*," she says.

Lita likes to survey the crowd of fruit and vegetable vendors before settling for the freshest produce that's within the budget. She buys onions and tomatoes from her *suki*, choosing only green tomatoes because "it takes longer for the green ones to spoil."

When no *suki* has what she needs, her strategy is to pick a vendor with no other customers, hoping that she will be able to negotiate a better price. She searches vainly for affordable eggplant—"Really expensive," Lita says, shocked, at one table where the price is 30 pesos a kilo (55 cents, USD for 2.2 lbs) rather than the usual 20. Finally, she finds a seller who has no other buyers, and thus is willing to bargain. "Pick out the good ones," Lita tells her, after they agree on a price. To me she explains, "I grill the eggplant, remove the skin, and then cook it with egg." Lita squeezes her finger tightly as the seller makes change. "Did you hurt yourself?" I ask. "I got bitten by a rat last night while I was sleeping," she says, and shows me. Sure enough, there are tiny bite marks on her fingertip and the skin is broken. Will she have a doctor look at it? "Maybe," she says as she accepts her change. Nonfood expenses must be weighed carefully. In the end, she doesn't go.

Lita tries to shop early, not just to get the freshest foods, but also in the hope of being a vendor's *buena mano*—the first sale of the day, which promises the seller many more sales to follow. The *buena mano* gets the biggest discount of the day. Does she have any other

PHILIPPINES

- Population: **86,241,697**
- Filipinos living or working overseas: **7,500,000 (est.)**
- Population of Metro Manila: **14,000,000 (est.)**
- Area in square miles: **115,800 (slightly larger than Arizona)**
- Population density per square mile: **745**
- Urban population: **62%**
- Life expectancy, male/female: **72/65 years**
- Fertility rate (births per woman): **3.2**
- Literacy rate, male/female, 15 years and older: **93/93%**
- Caloric intake available daily per person: **2,379 calories**
- Annual alcohol consumption per person (alcohol content only): **3.5 quarts**
- GDP per person in PPP \$ (Purchasing Power Parity: an adjustment for what equivalent local goods would cost in the U.S.): **\$4,170**
- Total annual health expenditure per person in \$ and as a percent of GDP: **\$30/3.3**
- Overweight population, male/female: **22/25%**
- Obese population, male/female: **1/3%**
- Population age 20 and older with diabetes: **7.1%**
- Meat consumption per person per year: **68 pounds**
- Number of McDonald's restaurants/Jollibee restaurants: **236/400+**
- Big Mac price: **\$1.42**
- Cigarette consumption per person per year: **1,849**
- Population living on less than \$2 a day: **46%**

FIELD NOTE

The Philippines must have more street food per capita than China, which is saying something. We found it everywhere—even in the poorest slums—hole-in-the-wall kitchens, street vendors' carts, poor entrepreneurs grilling mystery meat on skewers over a piece of glowing charcoal in a tin can, you name it. Most of it was quite delicious but some of the Filipino dishes I tried—like *dunguan* (pig entrails over rice in a stew of pig blood and pig liver)—were viscerally challenging.

One evening, we happened upon a tent pitched outside a house where a funeral was taking place. Standing next to her mother's glass-topped casket, the bereaved daughter was cooking up eggplant and dried fish on a small fire. She was serving the results to the friends and neighbors at the funeral, many of whom were taking advantage of a quirk in Filipino law that permits wagering on games, but only at funerals. Part of the gaming proceeds went to help the daughter bury her mother.

Near the service desk of a large supermarket I found a small take-out restaurant called Kiss, King of Balls. With a name like that, and an attractive young girl doling out the balls, I couldn't resist. Since I didn't know what *kikiam* balls (ground pork and vegetables wrapped in bean curd sheets) or *gulaman* balls (sea weed gelatin) were at the time, I ordered the squid balls, which were like meatballs of squid (not bad, actually). Because I liked the name so much, I joked later about franchising the chain. I wanted a business card announcing myself as CEO of Kiss, King of Balls. I was later disappointed to learn that a Manila businessman, Melchor Flores, already operates more than 250 Kiss, King of Balls nationwide and has even opened a few in the Middle East. — Peter



FAMILY RECIPE

Sinigang na Baboy ni Ka Lita (Ka Lita's Pork in Sour Soup)

- 2 lb pork, sliced into 1" cubes
- 4 cups water (preferably from rice washing)
- 1/2 t salt
- 2 oz tomatoes, cut into wedges
- 2 oz onion, cut into wedges
- 1 cup eggplant, chopped into cubes
- 1 cup okra
- 4 oz daikon, cut diagonally
- 12 oz tamarind
- 1/2 t fish sauce (or to taste)
- 11 oz water spinach
- 1/2 oz hot green pepper

- Boil pork in water with salt, tomatoes, and onions.
- When pork is almost tender, add eggplant, okra, and daikon.
- Meanwhile, boil tamarind with 1 cup water in a separate pot.
- Using a fork, grind on tamarind to release juice. Pour freshly made tamarind extract and fish sauce into pot.
- Simmer for 5 minutes and then add water spinach and hot green pepper just before turning off heat.
- Serve hot with rice and fish sauce.

Outside the Quiapo Market, people pick through the trash (*bottom left*) discarded from the early-morning wholesale market. Inside, the covered market is a tumult of activity and offers an extraordinary variety of goods, ranging from food, clothing, consumer electronics, and patent medicines to religious images and even prayers (busy people can outsource their prayers to the Quiapo Church's "prayer ladies"). In such hypercompetitive circumstances, fish vendors (*above left*) don't sell their wares by the pound or kilo. Instead, they charge by the *tumpok* (pile). The size of the *tumpok* varies moment by moment, according to demand.

pointers? Buy in bulk. It gets you discounts—if you can afford it. She can't always follow her own advice, but tries to with items that keep well, like onions. If she buys milkfish—a common purchase used in *sinigang* and many other Filipino dishes, she'll marinate it in vinegar and garlic, so it will keep longer. How does she choose a good milkfish? "It's fresh, its eyes are not red, it doesn't smell bad, and it's not too hard or too soft." Another tip: for staples like sugar, soap, and canned goods, go to shops in the more affluent areas. Why? "They have the same prices, but with air-conditioning," Lita says. Luckily, one of her massage clients lives near such a shop. Lita stops there on her way home.

For some items, even Lita can't find a cheaper alternative: "I buy meat at the market close to our house because the price is the same everywhere." But her budget doesn't always stretch enough to afford meat. "I try to serve nutritious food that is not too expensive, like vegetables and fish," she says, "but there are times when I can only serve them dried fish, or sardines. Every now and then we have extra money, and I get to buy roast chicken from a restaurant. We get by, and though our food may not be as expensive as what the rich people eat, it is just as delicious."

JOLLIBEE GOOD

Though McDonald's, KFC, and other global food purveyors have made their way to Metro Manila, street food is a mainstay of the culture and an important part of its underground economy. Across town, in the Quiapo District, Julius and Remy Galimay (p. 131) have cooked barbecue, served with a seasoned vinegar dip, on the street near the Quinta Market for over ten years. "Profits aren't stable," says Remy of their family business, but they make enough skewers of barbecued *isaw*, *taba*, *dugo*, and *adidas* to support themselves and their four children. *Isaw*—pig and chicken small-intestine barbecue—is a national favorite, as is *taba*—pieces of pork fat skewered onto a stick and deep-fried. *Dugo* is curdled and congealed pig blood, cut into chunks, skewered, and then grilled. Cow blood is too strong tasting, say the street vendors. *Adidas*, named after the running shoe, is

barbecued chicken feet. Remy sells her skewers for anywhere from one to 40 pesos—*dugo* is the cheapest. While vendors also offer chicken heads, day-old baby birds, fish balls, and floured quail eggs (*kwek-kwek*), the street menu is generally offal.

Like Lita's youngest son, Ian, who lunches on the street each day, spending about 100 pesos a week (\$1.80 USD), her middle son, Charles, eats *kwek-kwek* street-side, but prefers to eat at McDonald's, or Jollibee—a local fast-food chain that is going global and has hundreds of outlets. It serves both typical Western fast food like burgers and fries and local Filipino cuisine. Charles is a Manila merit scholar, which means the government pays for his university education. This allows him to study without having to cram work into his schedule, as many Manilenos (Manila residents) do. "It is normal for me to eat lunch every day in McDonald's or Jollibee," says Charles. "I prefer this to street food because it is air-conditioned. And although the products that these restaurants serve in their country of origin might be far from what we are used to in the Philippines, they are slowly incorporating Filipino food into their menus." He says street food "will always remain a step ahead though, because of the affordability, accessibility, and of course the distinct flavor that is truly Pinoy [Filipino]." Even Lita treats herself to McDonald's or Jollibee once or twice a month, after giving a massage, but her favorite fast food is from Ramon Lee, a noodle house that she and her husband have frequented since before they were married. Its single location is 45 minutes from their home.

Though the Cabaña family has spread out across the city during the day, everyone returns home to eat dinner together. Lita's children generally clamor for her *sinigang*, a sour, tamarind-flavored broth with fish, shellfish, pork, or beef. Charles claims it is the best in all the Philippines, and Ian calls it his favorite meal. "We have a very humble home," says Lita, "but we are proud to say that it is filled with love and respect. We try to bring up our children in the best way possible. We share with them the values that we learned from our parents. Education is our main priority—we tell our children this is all that they can inherit from us."

Working just a few feet away from her mother's casket, a Manila woman fries up eggplant and *tuyo* (dried fish) for her family's dinner. She also serves coffee, biscuits, and peanuts to help keep the visitors awake. Many of the mourners are taking advantage of a quirk in Filipino law that permits gambling only at funerals. The loss of decorum does not upset the bereaved woman. She receives a percentage of the take from the gambling and uses the cash to help pay for the burial.