

SIETSEMA'S CHEAP EATS

A Delightful Filipino Restaurant Has Returned to Queens — and Other Cheap Eats

Plus inexpensive falafel plates in East Harlem and carnitas tacos in India Square

by Robert Sietsema | May 2, 2019, 12:04pm EDT

Three Great Cheap is a weekly series from critic Robert Sietsema that seeks to find and popularize New York City's most interesting and inexpensive food in the five boroughs and beyond. Prices range because the term "cheap eats" is relative, but a meal can be obtained here for less than \$20. Find the back catalog [here](#). Also consult the [bigger cheap eats guide](#), with maps, walking tours, and other resources.

Late last year, **Papa's Kitchen** moved out of its home on a bucolic stretch of Woodside Avenue near where the BQE slices through Woodside, to a storefront just off of Jackson Heights' bustling 37th Avenue shopping strip. While the old premises looked something like a shack in the countryside, the new space is sparer, less decorated, but does have some supergraphics on one gray wall and a menu more compact, with elements from Manila and the region of Bicol. But it's every bit as tasty as the old place, via co-owner and culinary director **Maribeth Roa**.

For the budget conscious, there are a series of marvelous *silogs* (a portmanteau made from Tagalog words referring to garlic fried rice and eggs), priced at either \$7 or \$8, each of which includes a classic Filipino dish served alongside rice with a runny fried egg on top. The unofficial national signature of chicken adobo is one choice,

but other selections include fried milkfish, sweetish Filipino sausage, cured pork, and the vegetable assortment called *pinakbet*. Full main courses are mainly \$10 to \$14, including items like crisp fried pork belly served with vinegar and pork liver dipping sauces; and *kare-kare*, a mellow stew made with peanut sauce, here made with beef. 3707 83rd St., between Roosevelt and 37th avenues, Jackson Heights

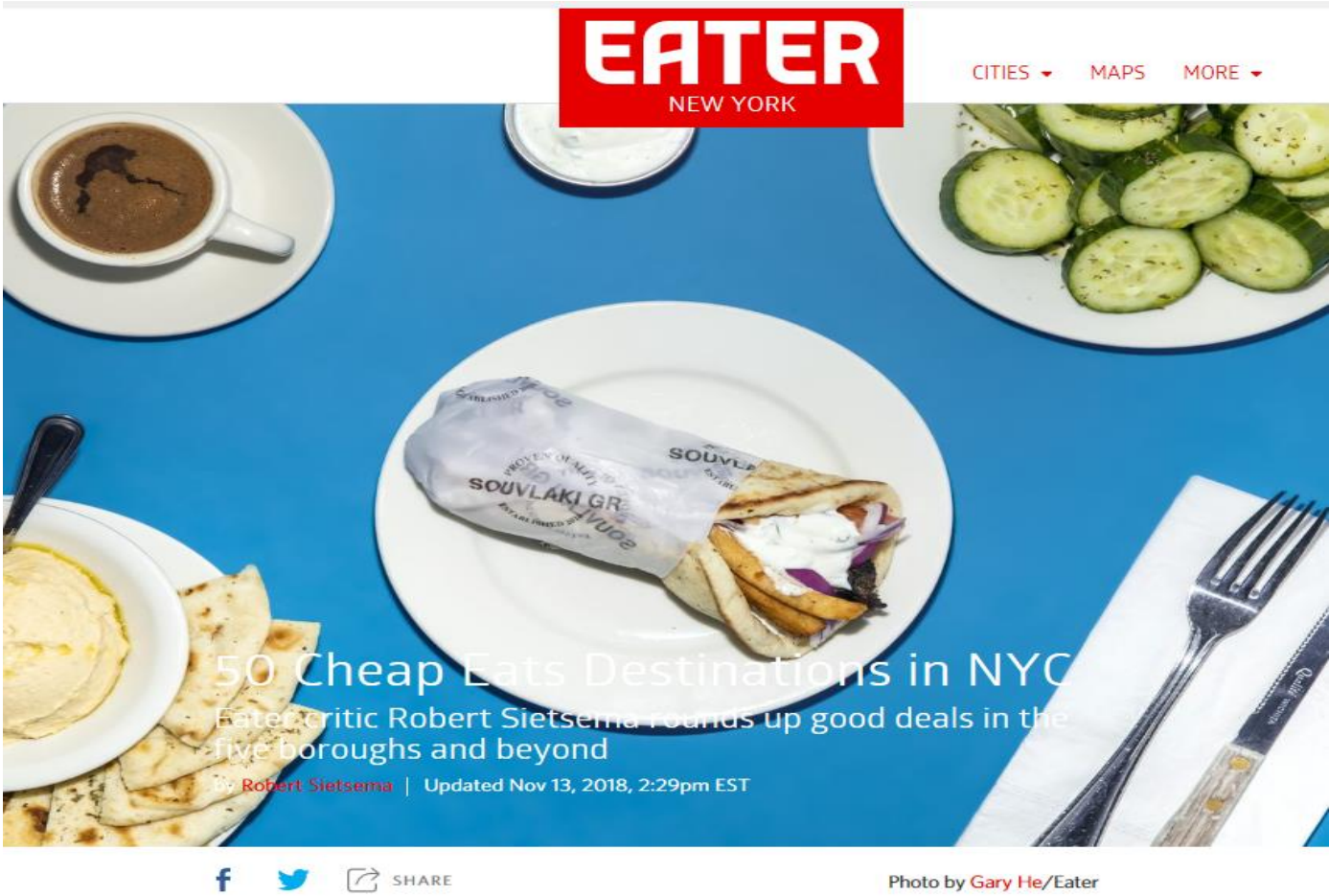
Papa's Kitchen



Papa's interior offers Tagalog lessons on the walls.



Fried pork belly



As restaurant prices in New York City continue to soar, finding great inexpensive places becomes more of a priority — and if the food is not only delicious but also outside a diner’s previous experience, all the better. Eater critic Robert Sietsema **regularly rounds up** neighborhood spots and **reviews standouts** in the five boroughs and adjacent metropolitan areas. The 50 listed here are a choice collection of those restaurants, complete with menu recommendations.

Added November 2018: 108 Food Dried Hot Pot, A&A Bake & Doubles Shop, Butcher Block, Cevabdzinica Sarajevo, Ciao Bella, Eat’s Khao Man Gai, El Rancho Burritos, La Cabaña Salvadoreña, Little Egypt, Merit Kabab, O Lavrador

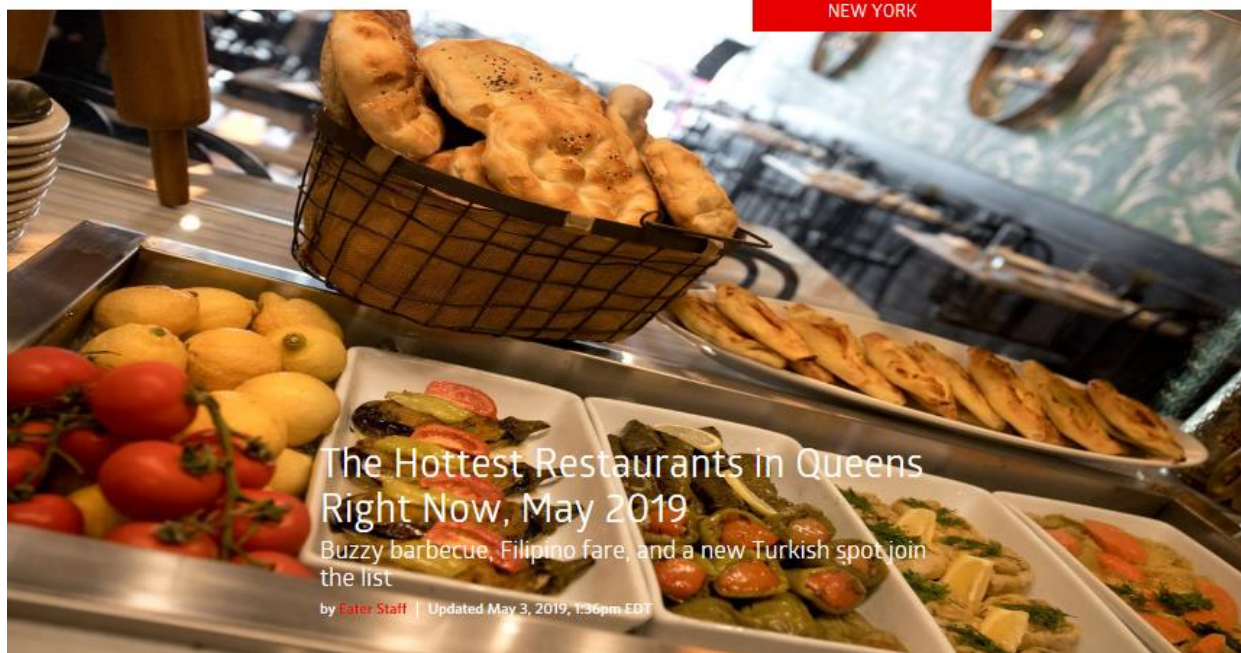
Know a place that deserves to be more appreciated? Let Robert know at robert@eater.com.

22. Papa's Kitchen

The eponymous Papa, father to the brother-and-sister co-owners, hails from Bicol, a region 250 miles southeast of Manila. **The boxy dining room offers just a handful of tables**, and the karaoke is continuous. Once a customer stops singing, another picks up the cordless mic and plows onward. Highlights include sinigang: a tart fish soup floating a pompano. Other enjoyable dishes: crispy pata (a pair of crisp pork shanks) and the national dish of chicken adobo. There are a surprising number of vegetable-focused dishes, but vegetarians beware: these often contain fermented shrimp paste. Note: A move to a larger space at 37th Ave and 83rd Street is imminent, but this location is still open in the meantime.



- [50 Cheap Eats Destinations in NYC](#)
- [60 Cheap Eats Destinations You Should Know About in NYC](#)



The Hottest Restaurants in Queens Right Now, May 2019

Buzzy barbecue, Filipino fare, and a new Turkish spot join the list

by [Eater Staff](#) | Updated May 3, 2019, 1:36pm EDT

It's time to update the **Queens Heatmap**, a guide to new and recently reviewed restaurants in the mighty borough of Queens. Here are the places that the critics, bloggers, and restaurant obsessives are buzzing about right now.

Added in May: **Papa's Kitchen**

For a list of NYC's most essential restaurants — both old and new — check out the [Eater 38](#), and for the hottest restaurants in [Manhattan](#) and [Brooklyn](#), just click on over.

9. Papa's Kitchen

3707 83rd St
Jackson Heights, NY 11372

Co-owner and culinary director Maribeth Roa has moved this Filipino favorite to a new space in Jackson Heights, bringing food from Manila and the region of Bicol. Dishes include “a series of marvelous *silogs* (a portmanteau made from Tagalog words referring to garlic fried rice and eggs),” [according](#) to Eater critic Robert Sietsema, as well as chicken adobo, fried milkfish, and crisp fried pork belly served with vinegar and pork liver dipping sauces, pictured.

Fried pork belly Robert Sietsema/Eater



TRENDS | DEC. 8, 2013

Blazing a Lumpia Trail: Filipino Cuisine Finds a Foothold in New York

By Mary Jane Weedman

Keen observers of culinary trends might have noticed the signs: the photos of sizzling sisig showing up in Instagram feeds; the 2012 declaration from *Bizarre Foods* host Andrew Zimmern that Filipino food is “the next big thing”; the Smorgasburg stands and underground-supper-club dinners serving cuisine from the Philippines.

It seems New Yorkers are finally ready for Filipino food, which has long languished in the shadow of Thai, Indian, Chinese, and other Asian standbys. Once, the restaurants that did open here—in places where the expat community lived (Woodside), worked (Manhattan’s East Side hospital corridor, a result of heavy health-care-industry recruitment), or docked (Red Hook, where the short-lived Philly Pinoy catered to crew arriving at the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal)—flew mostly under the radar of non-Pinoys (i.e., Filipinos).

Granted, mainstream America might consider the cuisine an acquired taste. “Most of the things we liked about it were stinky, saucy, and sour,” says Amy Besa, who, with her husband, Romy Dorotan, opened the pioneering, contemporary Filipino-centric Cendrillon in Soho in 1995. By the time the couple relocated to Ditmas Park, where they opened Purple Yam in 2009, they had company: King Phojanakong, whose Kuma Inn and Umi Nom display the chef’s Thai and Filipino ancestry; those restaurants were soon joined by Maharlika, whose owners present traditional foods in stylishly hip East Village surroundings. (The community might be small, but it’s tightly knit; many of these restaurateurs have jointly organized benefits and fundraisers in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan.)

It’s possible that Filipino food has struggled to define itself precisely because it’s inherently a fusion of culinary influences, both familiar and exotic: Chinese (pancit, or noodles; soy sauce), Spanish (pork; the tapas tradition), and native Pacific Islander (roots and tubers) among them. And in many cases, New York chefs have gone one step further, sneaking in Filipino staples alongside other Asian or even Western fare. If you have yet to acquaint yourself with the characteristically tart, sour, and fermented flavor palate, now’s the time. Here, the latest wave of Filipino chefs and restaurants to bring New York their versions, interpretive or traditional, of the perpetual next “next big thing.”

Papa’s Kitchen

65-40 Woodside Ave., Woodside; 347-724-9586

Woodside has for decades been home to Filipino bakeries, restaurants, and groceries like Phil-Am Food Mart and continues to welcome new ventures, like a branch of fast-food chain Jollibee or this cozy newcomer. It attracts a dedicated crowd for its karaoke sing-alongs and its traditional—and affordable—plates like palabok (rice noodles with a shrimp sauce) and kaldereta, or beef stew.



Courtesy of The NY Times

**This article originally appeared in the December 16, 2013 issue of New York Magazine.*

Papa's Kitchen Closes Woodside Location After 6 Years, Relocating to Jackson Heights

Oct. 31, 2018 By Nathaly Pesantez

Papa's Kitchen, the Filipino restaurant operating out of Woodside for the past six years, will be relocating to a new venue in Jackson Heights.

The restaurant, which opened in a tiny space at 65-40 Woodside Ave. in 2012, said it is moving to 37-07 83rd St., right in the heart of Jackson Heights, and planning on opening some time in November.

It's last day at the Woodside location was on Oct. 28.

The family-run restaurant has steadily gained a large following over the years for its modern take on traditional Filipino foods, offering dishes like lechon kawali, crispy pata, pancit, and more that constantly see rave reviews by guests and food critics alike.

Many restaurant-goers also reveled in the restaurant's small size and frequent karaoke sing-alongs.

The new location, while yet to open, will be significantly larger than the Woodside Avenue spot, with 50 seats and a small bar to boast, according to Beth Roa, who runs Papa's Kitchen with her brother, Miguel.

She promises, however, that the new location will still feel intimate, and karaoke will absolutely remain.

"The challenge is going to be more fun. I have to encourage 50 people to sing," she said with a slight laugh.

Roa said the restaurant's relocation comes after they were faced with an increase in rent that would have proven difficult to pay with the 15 seats at the constantly-packed Woodside space, where they often had to turn diners away or limit how long they could dine in.

"The place is too small to actually come up with that amount of money at the end of the month," she said.

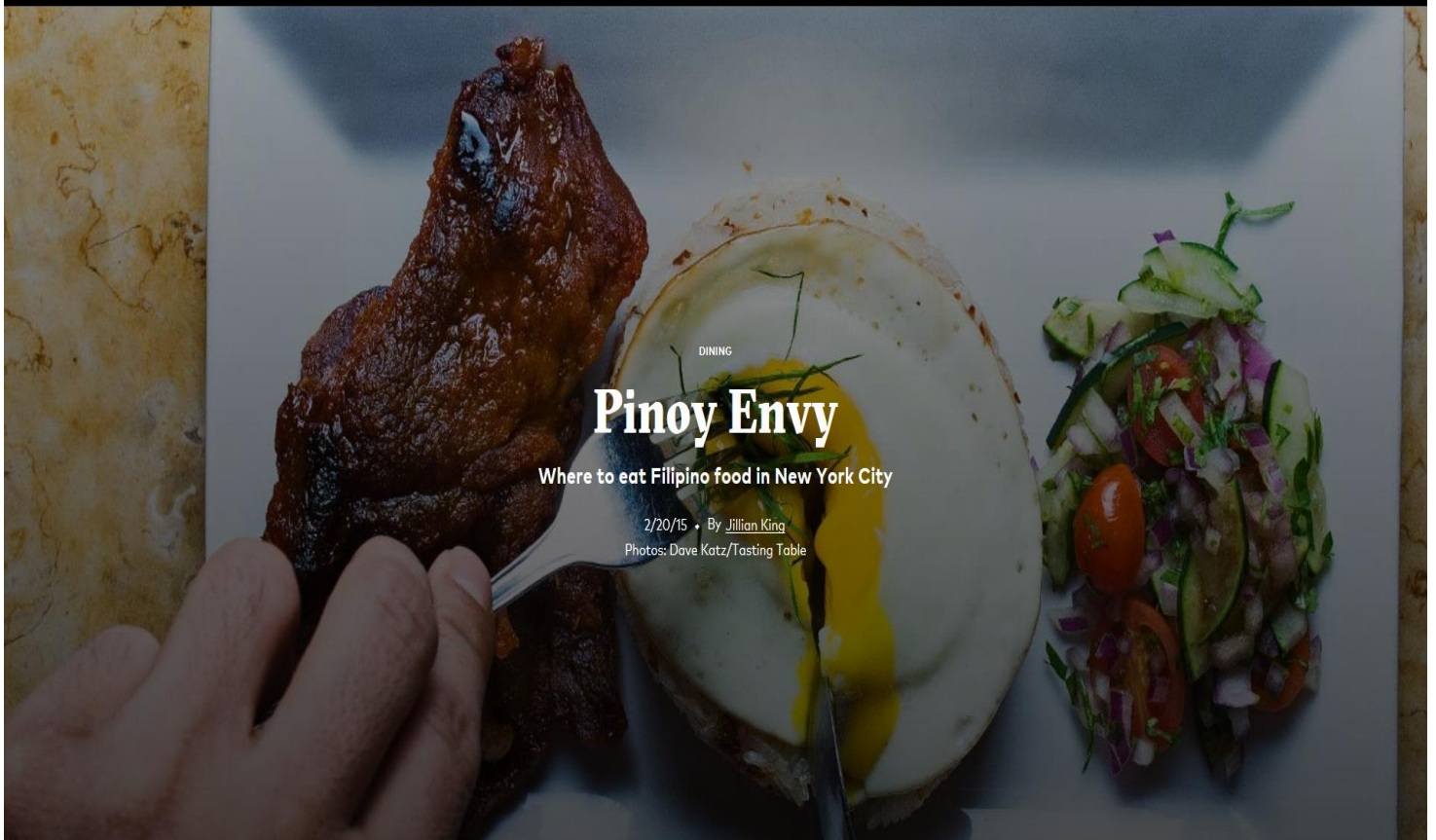
The new restaurant will also allow for an expanded menu, with possibilities like seafood nights and even chicken, beef, and pork barbecue (ihawan).

"We want to do more Filipino food so we can showcase what we have," she said.

The owners are also in the process of obtaining a full liquor license for the venue, which the Woodside location did not have.

The opening date, they say, will be announced on social media.

"I'm just excited to see everyone when we open again," Roa said.



DINING

Pinoy Envy

Where to eat Filipino food in New York City

2/20/15 • By [Jillian King](#)

Photos: Dave Katz/Tasting Table

Ask New Yorkers their favorite Thai food in the city, and they'll rattle off a list. Ditto for **dumplings**, **ramen**, sushi and even Korean barbecue.

But Filipino? Radio silence.

Papa's Kitchen, Woodside

Don't expect anything fancy. The space is tiny—15 seats max—and you'll eat off banana leaf-topped paper plates using plastic flatware. But the chicken adobo (\$11) is the best we've tasted, accented by caramelized onions we're still dreaming about. Word is that the weekend karaoke game is tight, so take a swig of San Miguel (and another bite of the spicy lumpia rolls) then belt your heart out.

Woodside's Little Manila enclave comprises a number of Filipino restaurants, shops, and groceries, but Papa's Kitchen is the only place where you can belt out your best rendition of "Purple Rain" while waiting for your meal. Karaoke is taken seriously in the Philippines, but the mood is relaxed in this teeny, family-owned spot. Filipino cuisine's roots come from culinary traditions of Southeast Asia, Spain, and the U.S., and that makes for bold and complex flavors, evident in the items here. Laing reminds a bit of Indian saag in appearance, but is in fact made with taro leaves, coconut milk, and crab. Dynamite lumpia are spring rolls filled with pork and jalapeño, and chicken adobo, likely the best-known Filipino food, is braised in vinegar, soy sauce, and garlic — its resulting sauce is a singularly delicious byproduct.

HUNGRY CITY

Sing for Your Dinner



By Ligaya Mishan

Oct. 3, 2013



“Purple Haze” crashes from the speakers as stingrays flap languidly across the flat-screen TV. The singer, leaning over the rubble of his dinner (monumental pig hooves, broken crab shells), nails every throwaway whoop. The crowd, if that’s what you can call three tables, erupts.

At [Papa’s Kitchen](#), which opened last October in Woodside, Queens, this could be Saturday night, or Wednesday night, or every night. Beth Roa, co-owner, waitress and M.C., makes the rounds from table to table, gently proffering the karaoke mic, while in the kitchen her brother Miguel cooks serious Filipino comfort food. (Ms. Roa pitches in at the stove as needed.) The scent of roasted pork steals through the tiny room, infiltrating clothes and hair.

Filipino cuisine is slowly creeping into the American mainstream. “Top Chef” recently featured a haute reimagining of balut, fertilized duck egg, with duck confit and foie gras. In New York, young Filipino-Americans have opened restaurants with wink-wink references to their heritage, like Spam fries and Tang cocktails.

Papa’s Kitchen is how they kick it old school. (“Papa” is Beth and Miguel’s father, who taught them how to cook back in Quezon City, the Philippines.) It occupies a single-story house barely the width of a station wagon. It is so small that at first it operated only as a takeout joint. When neighbors asked if they could dine in, it became a sit-down restaurant.

Mirrors on one side, a purple slogan (“Divine Tradition Papa’s Creation”) painted on the other: this is the extent of the décor. Plates are paper, flatware disposable (if provided at all), water served in plastic cups.

The menu is minimalist and mostly in Tagalog. Best to leave it up to the Roas and order the salu-salo sa bilao, a feast of stupefying proportions, presented in two winnowing baskets lined with banana leaves. (It is available on Fridays, Saturdays and by special request; minimum party of four required, \$25 a person.)

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One basket comes heaped with meat around a daunting mound of rice. If the stars align, it will include tilapia fried whole, meant to be eaten like fried chicken, by grasping it with your fingers and ravaging the dainty bones; tuna belly, bought fresh that morning, doused with a “secret” marinade and grilled; and chicken adobo, poached in an intense concentration of garlic, soy sauce and vinegar.

Inevitably there is pork, perhaps belly, marinated both before and after cooking to deepen its flavor, or crispy pata, deep-fried pig’s trotter, cut lengthwise, the better for gnawing.

The biggest surprise are golden tubes called dynamite, akin to spring rolls but skinny and tight as cigarillos, with a nearly sheer, crepe-like wrapper. They are deep-fried but confoundingly light on oil, and come open-ended so that you can see the dangerous filling: a whole jalapeño stuffed with ground pork and cheese.

The second basket is filled with mostly vegetable accompaniments, intended as counterweights in flavor — salted duck egg to be paired with longganisa (sweet-spicy Filipino sausage), mango with chicken adobo — or, when you are exhausted from eating, as bland balms to incite your appetite anew.

Do not underestimate their pleasures. The finest dish at Papa’s Kitchen may be hiding here: laing, taro leaves steeped in coconut milk, like a larger-than-life version of Thanksgiving creamed spinach, amplified by green finger chiles, crab meat and shrimp. The recipe comes from the Bicol region, where Papa grew up.

For dessert there might be banana turon (fritters) or orange slices, but the real postprandial event is karaoke. On each of my visits, the evening did not properly begin until the prep cook, Lila Soriano (whom the Roas call Manang, a term of respect), emerged from the kitchen and sang, beautifully, the pop song “Ako ay Pilipino” (“I Am Filipino”). At the end, she announced, in English: “Welcome. Tonight we are all Filipinos.”

The crowd is encouraging but full of sharks, “X Factor”-worthy belters in humble disguise. (Ms. Roa is currently running a six-week contest; first prize will be salu-salo sa bilao for a party of six.) After a recent, thrillingly raspy rendition of “Don’t Stop Believin’,” one diner turned to the singer and said in wonder, “Who are you?”

Correction: October 7, 2013

An earlier version of this article misstated the term of respect that the Roas use for the prep cook, Lila Soriano. It is Manang, not Ninang.