

Gateway to Ilonggo Heritage

Batchoy in Iloilo's Ports

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Introduction

La Paz *batchoy* is the signature dish of Iloilo City, a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. It is a vital element of the city's cultural and gastronomic identity. However, *batchoy* is not prominently showcased in Iloilo's transit hubs such as airports and seaports. Airports and seaports are the first contact points for domestic and international guests, which makes them strategic arenas to promote local heritage cuisine. This is particularly true of Iloilo's local homegrown *batchoy* outlets that have been very much a part of Iloilo's culinary heritage. While *batchoy* is served in the airport, these are not from the iconic homegrown heritage *batchoy* establishments that helped make La Paz *batchoy* renowned across the country and internationally. This could have brought greater exposure of Iloilo's culinary heritage to visitors. It also resulted to missed economic opportunities for local businesses and reduced potential for Iloilo City to showcase its designation for tourism and local development.

This policy brief proposes the strategic integration of the La Paz *batchoy* in these gateways to promote local culture, boost tourism, and support local Iloilo businesses. It also covers some of the related key findings from the *batchoy* stakeholders' forum, which was organized as part of the Center for West Visayan Studies (CWVS) project, "*Namit Gid!*²: A Multi-Stakeholders' Collaboration for Ilonggo's *Batchoy*." The project is under the Panay Weaving and Culinary

Heritage Program and funded by the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS). The lack of *batchoy*'s strategic presence in Iloilo ports has been noted by *batchoy* stakeholders during last year's forum, and was again articulated in the recent forum held on 22 October 2025 at the Iloilo City Hall.

La Paz *Batchoy*

Batchoy, more popularly known as La Paz *batchoy* with its origins from the La Paz district in Iloilo City, is a popular part of the culinary heritage of the city. "The soup is generally prepared with tender pork meat, innards, and flavorful broth. It is garnished with crushed chicharron or crispy pork rinds, scallions, and garlic. It is a tradition to request additional *kaldo* or broth refills, reflecting a genuine appreciation for this flavorsome Ilonggo delight" (Adobo Magazine 2024). Some *batchoy* outlets also add a dash of the Ilonggo *ginamos* (shrimp paste) (Salas 2023).

La Paz *batchoy* recently received global recognition after being featured by Croatia-based online encyclopedia Taste Atlas as one of the world's best offal soups, being rated as the highest among them. Taste Atlas noted that while the origins of the dish have various stories, "there is no doubt that it was created in Iloilo, more specifically in the district of La Paz" (Marzan 2024).

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² English translation: very delicious.

Batchoy is the Ilonggo signature dish that helped Iloilo City succeed in its bid to be part of the creative cities of UNESCO for gastronomy. In fact, according to Mr. PJ Arañador, a consultant of the city in vying for the designation, the logo of Iloilo City as part of the UNESCO creative cities originated from a bowl of *batchoy*: “The city’s logo originated from the image of a bowl of hot La Paz *batchoy* to symbolize Iloilo as a ‘melting pot for local produce and home-grown cuisine coming from the sources of its supply chain’” (Arañador 2023).

Lack of La Paz *Batchoy*’s Strategic Presence in Iloilo Ports

During the *Batchoy* Stakeholders’ Forum, participants highlighted the need for Iloilo’s home-grown heritage delicacies and cuisine, particularly La Paz *batchoy*, to be prominently situated at the Iloilo International Airport. The Iloilo City Government has no authority regarding this, according to Atty. Rheinhart Pahila, lawyer representative of the Iloilo City Government. It is the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP), which is the government agency in charge of airport matters such as this. Unfortunately, CAAP failed to send someone to attend the forum.

Through the years, some *batchoy* owners already made inquiries regarding the possibility of having a space in the airport for them, but they were not able to get a positive response from CAAP. One of the issues mentioned was that they could not cook *batchoy* since cooking is not allowed in the airport, but given the opportunity, a *batchoy* owner mentioned they could find ways to still serve hot *batchoy* in the airport.

A representative from the Department of Tourism (DOT) Regional Office expressed their willingness to support recommendations regarding having La Paz *batchoy* strategically present in the airport. She also reiterated that it is CAAP who decides regarding this matter, but DOT can help propose this to the said agency.

Participants expressed that since La Paz *batchoy* is an integral part of the Ilonggo culinary heritage, it should be given a space in the airport—a strategic location, which can be an area where there are stalls with various *batchoy* outlets. This can also be implemented in seaports, but for this endeavor, it is the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) that can make decisions.

Since the Iloilo International Airport is located in Iloilo province, specifically in Cabatuan, participants discussed the possibility of having the Iloilo Provincial Government and Cabatuan LGU to also support the proposal regarding strategic presence of *batchoyans*, especially the homegrown popular La Paz *batchoy* businesses in the Iloilo International Airport.

Policy Recommendations

It is recommended that there be strategic specific areas in the Iloilo International Airport, both in the predeparture and arrival areas, for La Paz *batchoy* kiosks or food stalls. Furthermore, priority should be given to Iloilo delicacies and cuisine regarding food sold or served at the ports. DOT can also spearhead La Paz *batchoy* tourism packages, promotional materials, and Iloilo culinary trail offerings in the airport and seaport premises inasmuch as these are the gateways to Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. UNESCO underscores the importance of gastronomy as a driver of cultural identity and urban development (Park et al. 2021).

Ports, as gateways to tourist destinations, are strategic arenas to promote culinary tourism.

Culinary tourism, in essence, is about having tourists travel to experience the food and drink of a particular place, so as to be able to explore culture through gastronomy (Comstock 2022). It has emerged as an integral part of any tourist experience, providing everyone with a genuine feeling of the destination by integrating travel with culinary experiences (Tedoco and Panes 2024). Research shows that culinary tourism contributes significantly to socioeconomic development and supports small and medium enterprises (Wondirad et al. 2021). International airports such as the Singapore Changi Airport and Tokyo Narita Airport have become culinary destinations in their own right. With the advent of culinary tourism, various international airports have become a showcase of the destination’s heritage food. Singapore Changi Airport has restaurants in Terminal 3 that serve Hainanese chicken rice, satay, and chili crab. Narita Airport has traditional sushi, ramen, tonkatsu, udon, and soba (Teo 2025). Cebu’s famous *lechon* is also sold at the airport’s pasalubong area and predeparture area. At Clark International Airport, the famous Pampanga *sisig* is sold at a local Kapampangan food shop located inside the airport. Stakeholders in the *Batchoy* Stakeholders forum expressed disappointment that the Iloilo delicacies and heritage dishes like the La Paz *batchoy* are not given a strategic

place at the Iloilo International Airport. Having the homegrown heritage cuisine and delicacies at the ports provides a platform from the start—whether it’s a predeparture meal or a mid-journey stopover, these are opportunities to support the local businesses, provide a boost to tourism, and promote culinary heritage.

Needed: A Manifesto

As discussed during the *Batchoy* Stakeholder’s Forum, it is recommended that stakeholders draft a manifesto regarding the proposal for *batchoy* in airports to be submitted to DOT, which can then endorse/recommend this to CAAP. DOT can also ask for the support of the offices and groups that can help the stakeholders in the manifesto. Atty. Pahila further suggested inviting others as a collective effort for the manifesto, such as the Regional Development Council, the Iloilo Business Club, the Iloilo Provincial Government, Cabatuan LGU, and the academe to be led by UP Visayas. A similar manifesto can also be endorsed for *batchoyans* in seaports to the PPA. In this connection, Atty. Pahila expressed his willingness to take charge of drafting the said manifesto.

The Iloilo City Government can also take the lead in bringing the stakeholders in another dialogue, but ensuring first that a CAAP/PPA representative will be able to participate. The academe through UP Visayas can help act as a facilitator in this endeavor.

It is also worth noting that Ms. Leny T. Ledesma, the UNESCO Focal Person of Iloilo City to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, expressed her support for the *batchoy* stakeholders’ planned manifesto to have the heritage *batchoy* situated at the ports.

The success of this policy recommendation will depend on the collective effort of the *batchoy* stakeholders, with the support of the DOT and the governments of Iloilo City and Iloilo Province to lobby with CAAP and PPA.

Integrating La Paz *batchoy* into strategic areas of the Iloilo airports and seaports will provide support for local businesses, enhance tourism, and promote culinary heritage. Promotional materials for the *batchoy* and other Ilonggo homegrown delicacies can also be made available at the ports. The ports should also give priority to the promotion and sale of other Ilonggo local products. All these will ensure that visitors experience Iloilo’s rich culinary heritage, reinforcing Iloilo City’s identity as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

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