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DINING

The real, real food!

Tired of having the usual Spanish, French or Italian fare? BT Weekend surfaces new spots where you can feed on more exotic eats from Denmark, Costa Rica, the Caribbean, and even the Alps.

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AUTHENTIC FOOD

Ms Vega says that authentic Costa Rican food is missing from Singapore's gastronomical landscape; beef burrito. - PHOTO: YEN MENG JIIN

Mamacitas

7 Maxwell Road, #01-50

Amoy Street Food Centre

Opens 8am to 3.30pm daily

AMID the aunties and uncles at Amoy Street Food Centre selling a plethora of local hawker fare, there is Cindy Castro Vega, serving up authentic Costa Rican dishes such as crispy tacos and burritos.

The 35-year-old first came to Singapore from Costa Rica six years ago on holiday to visit her sister after quitting her job in human resources and owning a small business that built apartments for rent. She met her husband here and decided to stay for good, but the life of a stay-at-home mum was not enough for her. "I love to cook, it's my passion. I was always cooking at home so I

wanted to open something very small here," she says.

In late 2012, a space between a coffee stall and a fish porridge outlet became available and she quickly took it up. However, within one month of opening Mamacitas, Ms Vega was forced to close down. "I got pregnant (her third child) and my baby was going to be premature. My doctor said that I had to close down and stay at home. I was very sad," she says.

But just several months after giving birth, Ms Vega eagerly got her stall up and running again.

Now, just six months after the re-opening of Mamacitas, Ms Vega has plans to open a second stall in Lau Pa Sat. She says, "I am looking for something slightly bigger but definitely not a restaurant yet, it's too expensive and I want to grow slowly."

Ms Vega emphasises that authentic Costa Rican food is missing from Singapore's gastronomic landscape. "There are South American and Mexican restaurants, but I always complain to my husband, 'You people don't have the real, real food!'" She laughs. "That is why I opened Mamacitas. Most places in Singapore are not authentic. I think that maybe it's because the chefs are not Latin," she explains.

One of Ms Vega's signature dishes is the burrito (\$6.90), a wrap stuffed generously with beef or chicken, fried onions, tomatoes and lettuce; then drizzled with a rich cheese sauce. Ms Vega notes that this is perhaps the most popular option with customers and with its heaping portions of fried onions, meat, and cheese sauce that make it a meal on its own.

Another signature dish, passed down from Ms Vega's mother, is Arroz Con Mariscos (\$6.80), a seafood fried rice very similar to the Spanish paella. Its contents: white rice, crab sticks, prawns, mussels, carrots and green

beans fried altogether. The result: a serving of very moist and tasty fried rice. For customers who are unable to eat seafood, a chicken version, Arroz Con Pollo, is available at the same price.

Although Ms Vega is determined to serve authentic Costa Rican food, she has made a slight modification to one dish to suit Singaporean taste buds. Casado (\$6.80), a typical Costa Rican meal, is traditionally served with a side of beans. However, Ms Vega leaves them out. "I am scared about adding them. I don't know if Singaporeans will like them. They're black beans which look a bit strange."

But for customers who are looking to have Casado just as they do in Costa Rica, do not fret: the beans are available for an extra dollar.

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