

How a little bit of pho cured Cabramatta's ill



Melanie Kembrey

Some of Cabramatta's restaurants are serving more day trippers than locals, as food tourism continues to rejuvenate the south-western Sydney suburb.

"It's been thrilling," said Michael Thai, the owner of Bau Truong restaurant. "We've been around for a long time and we went through a time with the drug issues when all of the business just disappeared because no one wanted to come to Cabramatta and now loads of people are coming on day tours here."

Decades ago it was infamous for being Sydney's heroin capital. But Fairfield mayor Frank Carbone said it was food that enticed most visitors and had allowed it to "turn a new page".

On Thursday, Fairfield council launched the Good Food Month Signature Dish campaign, which aims to attract new diners to Cabramatta, Canley Vale and Canley Heights by providing a guide to some of the best dishes being served there.

"There's no doubt food tourism has revitalised our community and the perception of our community," Cr Carbone said.

Cabramatta is not alone in its food renaissance. Communities across western Sydney have formed new identities as food hubs offering specific cuisines.

Harris Park has a cluster of nearly a dozen Indian restaurants and is known as "Little India". In Granville, there are long queues nearly every night of the week for Lebanese takeaway and Auburn has a well-established reputation for Turkish dishes and sweets.

Parramatta Council has also developed a dining precinct, branding the city's main street as "Eat Street". The popular Bourke Street Bakery, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and master chef George Calombaris will open shop there, following in the footsteps of city migrants Gelato Messina, Mad Mex and Bondi Pizza.



Attracting visitors: Culinary delights at Bau Truong Vietnamese restaurant in Cabramatta. Photo: Ni

Signature dishes

Cabramatta

Spicy beef noodle soup - Dong Ba Restaurant
Hai nam chicken with rice - Super Cool
Tapioca noodles in rich blue swimmer crab soup - Pho Tau Bay

Canley Vale

Pork and chive pan-fried dumpling - Red Sichuan
Mud crab with vermicelli in clay pot - Grand Pearl Chinese Seafood Restaurant

Canley Heights

Wagyu beef noodle soup - Cafe Diem Hen

More than 2 million international and domestic overnight visitors went to western Sydney in the year ending June 2014, said the acting Tourism Minister Katrina Hodgkinson. Eating out was the second most popular activity for domestic visitors to the west.

The Western Sydney director of the Sydney Business Chamber,

David Borger, said food was a way that the west could differentiate itself from the rest of Sydney.

"Western Sydney is a far more multicultural place than most of Australia and because we are quite spread out there are so many different main streets and pockets of cuisines," Mr Borger said. "The way western Sydney is developing

every town is basically edge in one cuisine or

More than just drawn to the area and fuelling economies, food hubs are the way people think about

Western Sydney food. Thang Ngo said city officials no longer believe "that growth stops at Ashfield."

"The public image of a long time change," Mr Ngo said. "Take Cabramatta. It has a bad reputation, it's gone and come out the other side. Sydneysiders are coming to Cabramatta. Vietnamese there. What we thought a pork roll and bun become so ubiquitous

Signature Dish is part of the Good Food Month program. See goodfoodmonth.com

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