

Birmingham food scene takes centre stage in China

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Birmingham's vibrant restaurant scene has been championed by a city communications agency at an international food event in China.

The success of street food entrepreneurs and the challenges faced by the casual dining sector and high-end restaurants were highlighted by journalist and food writer Richard McComb **(pictured)** in a speech to the Délice Network meeting in Guangzhou.

McComb, head of content at Liquid, and the agency's chef director David Colcombe were invited to China's third largest city for a three-day day conference looking at the influence of international cuisine on local food heritage.

The event was arranged by Délice, a network of 24 food cities stretching across Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa.

The Lyon-based organisation provides a forum for established and emerging food cities to exchange ideas on innovation and best practice in gastronomy.

Guangzhou is the home of Cantonese cooking, one of China's eight major cuisines, and is a sister city of Birmingham.

McComb and Chef Colcombe, who was Birmingham's Délice representative, were asked to contribute to debates about the role of culinary authenticity, and the effect of new cultures on traditional cooking styles.

McComb also joined a panel of international food experts and delivered a speech to Délice members and more than 100 Chinese food producers, academics and senior government officials at the Baiyun International Convention Centre.

Chinese guests applauded when McComb showed the audience a Birmingham balti bowl and explained the development of the signature curry as a unique fusion of British and Pakistani cooking methods.

The Birmingham Balti Bowl Company recently started manufacturing the thin, pressed steel cooking utensil for the first time in 25 years in the Jewellery Quarter.

McComb said: “It was an honour to act as an ambassador for Birmingham’s food scene and share its story with international colleagues in one of the world’s most famous, and rapidly growing, restaurant economies. It was staggering to learn from one speaker that an average of 170 restaurants open in Guangzhou every day.

“Eating in China really is on a different scale. For a traditional lunch featuring dim sum, poached chicken and BBQ goose, we dined at a lakeside restaurant that can cater for 3,000 customers in a single sitting.

“Birmingham is the biggest food city outside London, with a population of 1.1 million, but economic output via the restaurant and hospitality scene is dwarfed by activity in our sister city of Guangzhou, which is home to more than 18 million people.

“There is so much we can learn from each other as our food scenes continue to innovate and develop, and it would be great to see both cities grasp the nettle for future collaborations.”

Chef Colcombe, head of the food division at Liquid and a visiting professor of Culinary Arts at University College Birmingham, said: “The Délice gatherings are fabulous learning opportunities for professionals in the food industry.

“The challenge is to feedback the knowledge to the chefs and the next generation of kitchen professionals, hospitality teams and producers.

“We learned a great deal about authentic Cantonese cooking, but one of the key messages from chefs in China is that tradition, and the core flavours of dishes, must always be respected. It is great advice for both junior and senior chefs.”

<https://www.greaterbirminghamchambers.com/latest-news/news/2018/6/12/birmingham-food-scene-takes-centre-stage-in-china/>