

Commonwealth culture and cuisine served up at Birmingham food festival

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Food and music from across the Commonwealth will be served up at a series of free, vibrant events in Birmingham.

Ten food and cultural experiences from Commonwealth member nations are taking place across the city, giving visitors authentic, healthy tastes and experiences from around the globe and promoting understanding of the food that celebrates Commonwealth heritage.

Local chefs will be preparing some of the best-known dishes from around the Commonwealth for visitors to try. There will be interactive cooking demonstrations with tasters, herbs, spices and recipe cards given away so visitors can recreate the dishes at home. There will also be performances by musicians and artists from each country.

The events have been organised by Communities Engage and Thrive (CET), a community interest company based in Birmingham, supported by Birmingham City Council.

The first event will have a Ghanaian theme and will be held in Nechells Pod on Friday, June 3. Running from 11am to 3pm, local Ghanaian Joanna Quaye will be serving up Ampesi and Kontomire Stew, accompanied by a West African drumming and dancing group.

On Sunday, July 17, there will be a Trinidad and Tobago-themed event held at the Simmer Down Festival in Handsworth Park from 12.30pm to 6pm. A West Indian chef will be treating visitors to tasters of some unusual specialities.

This will be followed on Saturday, July 23 with a celebratory event based around Nigeria's rich food and culture. It runs from 3pm to 9pm at the annual Birchfield Jazz Festival at St Mary's Church.

Other events are being lined up and will represent countries including Jamaica, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Sri Lanka and England to highlight the Commonwealth's rich diversity.

Organiser Parveen Talwar, founder and director of CET, said she hoped the events would encourage visitors to grow their own herbs and spices from the cuttings given away and experiment with healthy dishes from across the Commonwealth.

"The countries we've chosen have dishes with easy-to-follow recipes and herbs and spices readily available almost anywhere in the country," she said.

"We've focused on some of the most deprived wards in Birmingham for our events and we're aiming for a geographic spread of countries with the largest diasporas in the city, too.

"Birmingham is home to so many different communities and we're delighted to be able to invite chefs and artists from these communities to show off their skills and share these incredible dishes with people who may not have tried them before."

Parveen said CET is also building and donating a raised bed for growing herbs and spices at each of the sites as part of its legacy plans to encourage lasting community engagement. It will also be producing a 20-country recipe book which will be available on the website www.cetcommunity.co.uk and in other free-to-access social media.

The events are linked with the council's Cook the Commonwealth project, which is asking for people to submit recipes from around the Commonwealth.

(<https://www.bvsc.org/blog/cook-the-commonwealth-recipes-needed>)

Dr Justin Varney, Birmingham City Council's director of public health, said: "This is a fantastic start to a wider programme of work to engage Commonwealth communities in Birmingham in celebrating the food of their heritage in healthy and balanced ways. It's about supporting healthier eating while also keeping the fun, delicious focus on food and being mindful of the importance of an affordability.

"The Commonwealth Food celebration events bring together food and music to support wellbeing and celebrate the diversity of our city. They link up to the Cook the Commonwealth recipe online database, which is growing every week with contributions from our diverse hospitality and food businesses as well as community groups and passionate home chefs, and is becoming a tangible legacy that will continue to support citizens and communities.

"I'm delighted that as part of the project legacy a series of the community herb gardens are being created that have been created with communities that will form a hub for ongoing celebrations of our food heritage in Birmingham."

All the events are free. To find out more, visit www.cetcommunity.co.uk