

## Street Snacks

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It was Sunday morning, and my family and I were making our usual breakfast rounds at the market. I stopped by my favourite *kue cubit* vendor to get a box of the traditional sweet bite-sized delicacies I had missed so much when I was away in the States, where I go to school during most of the year. But much to my surprise, I was faced with more than just the one traditional option. In the time that I had been gone, the vendor had developed new flavours for *kue cubit* – I could choose between matcha (green tea), red velvet, taro or oreo. I was definitely not expecting the wealth of options at a small vendor in a wet market.

Little did I know, modernization of traditional Indonesian snacks such as *kue cubit* has spread all over Jakarta, beyond markets and into cafes and restaurants. For instance, BC Cone’s ‘Pinch Me Cake’ features five assorted half-cooked *kue cubit* with different flavours, paired with a soft serve of your choice. These five flavours include original, charcoal, red velvet, green tea and taro. Customers can then choose to have extra toppings on top, including Nutella, cream cheese, fruit loops, green tea Kit Kat and Oreo. BC Cone specializes in soft serves and ice creams, but ‘Pinch Me Cake’ has become popular in their PIK store. “In the beginning, we thought that *kue cubit* would be delicious when paired with our main product, which is ice cream,” Kevin Setiawan, owner of BC Cone, said. “A lot of people are already big fans of this traditional delicacy, so we saw this as an opportunity to innovate *kue cubit* with our own concepts and resources.”

According to Setiawan, ‘Pinch Me Cake’ is a step above typical *kue cubit* you would find in markets. Not only do they have the different flavours, ‘Pinch Me Cake’ also uses higher quality ingredients, such as butter and premium vanilla flavour, in order to enhance the taste. However, Setiawan doesn’t believe ‘Pinch Me Cake’ takes away business from other smaller *kue cubit* vendors on the streets. “I believe this is a win-win case,” Setiawan said. “Consumers were bored of the classic *kue cubit* and needed something more innovative. On the other hand, when consumers try the modern *kue cubit*, they will be reminded of the classic *kue cubit*, be nostalgic and buy the classic *kue cubit* again.”

Eat Happens in Tebet also has unique variations of *kue cubit*, specifically a savoury variation – beef floss *kue cubit*. Like Setiawan, Eat Happens owner Martin Sunu believes that the modernization of these traditional delicacies is not bad for street vendors. “This modernization is an incredibly positive thing, as these delicacies were simply street snacks previously. Now more and more people know them, as you can even buy them in big malls,” Sunu said. According to Sunu, he’s even seen some of these street vendors get invited to events such as weddings and birthdays, definitely a “good synergy.”

But is this modernization just another culinary trend that will leave Jakarta as quickly as it came, or actually here to stay? Sunu believes that you won’t be saying goodbye to the modern *kue cubit* anytime soon. “We believe this fusion of modern toppings with

traditional snacks will stay in the culinary scene for a long time, and continually evolve,” Sunu said. “Innovation and creativity must continue in order to progress. When we reach a point and eventually get bored of this menu, we must be ready to create new menus again.”

In addition to *kue cubit*, I began seeing *martabak* with a variety of colours on my social media, even one that is black. With *martabak*, one can even have toppings beyond your typical cheese or nuts. We’ve all had Ovomaltine and Toblerone, but have you had marshmallows, Fruit Loops cereal or M&M’s? Eat Happens offers a red velvet *martabak* pizza, one that comes with eight different toppings, and has become quite an Instagram novelty. Like many other food vendors in Indonesia, Sunu prioritized the role that social media would play in introducing his menu. “It was important for us to create something that’s “instagrammable” – a menu that people will talk about, something that looks good on the picture. Having 8 toppings makes the *martabak* look colourful and tempting,” Sunu said.

Another popular kid on Instagram is Martabak Blackpool, a vendor in Gandaria that sells – yup, you guessed it – black *martabak*. Martabak Blackpool uses a special ingredient, imported blackforest flour, in order to create the black colour in the *martabak*. One would expect that youngsters are the only ones buying this strange-looking *martabak*, but owner of Martabak Blackpool Hendy Hartanto says otherwise. “At first, our target audience was definitely a young audience,” Hartanto said. “But as time passes, older people also like our *martabak* as it doesn’t taste too sweet, which makes older people feel good when they eat it, especially those who don’t want to be diabetic.” For those of you itching to try this black *martabak* now, try the Black Forest Cream Cheese Oreo or the Black Forest Hershey Cookies ‘n’ Cream, the two most popular toppings according to Hartanto.

We have these three food innovators to thank for bringing us deliciously different versions of our beloved street snacks. Setiawan even hopes that vendors will continue innovating traditional food, whatever way that might be. “This will help people to continue remember and enjoy traditional food, especially for the younger crowd,” he said. Well, I’ll definitely be looking forward to my next trip to the market when I come back again in December – who knows what I’ll find next?