IGCAT
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
GASTRONOMY, CULTURE, ARTS AND TOURISM

Americas Young Chef Award 2026

OPEN CALL FOR YOUNG CHEFS FROM THE AMERICAS
Organised by **IGCAT**

Hosted by **Manabí, World Region of Gastronomy awarded 2026**
on 9-12 October 2026

Deadline to submit registrations:
1 May 2026

WORLD REGION OF GASTRONOMY
MANABÍ AWARDED 2026

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The 1st Americas Young Chef Award is a competition organised and promoted by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT), and hosted by Manabí, World Region of Gastronomy awarded 2026.

The aim of the 1st Americas Young Chef Award is to strengthen links between young professional chefs across the American continent, while promoting traditional cuisine, local produce, sustainability and culinary innovation.

IGCAT and the World Regions of Gastronomy Platform aim to raise the profile of local food production and diversity. Food is often a unique selling point for regions and a way to support regional development. By enabling young chefs to learn about the value of local food diversity and regional distinctiveness, we hope to inspire future ambassadors for local food culture.

This event is not only a competition judged by renowned international chefs and experts, but it is an opportunity for young finalists from across the Americas to establish professional contacts, learn about food products from different regions and celebrate what is vibrant and unique across the American continent.

BACKGROUND

IGCAT brings to this initiative a solid and proven background through its long-standing organisation of the European Young Chef Award (this year celebrating its 10th edition), a programme that has successfully combined talent development with territorial storytelling, international visibility, and strong links between gastronomy, culture, and place.

Building on this experience, the Americas edition aims to create a prestigious platform that empowers young chefs as cultural ambassadors of their regions while fostering exchange, excellence, and food sovereignty across the continent.

"IGCAT's Young Chef Awards are a learning process that provide very valuable experiences. Success is doing what you like doing. So, you have already won!"

Joan Roca
El Celler de Can Roca

WINNERS OF PREVIOUS EUROPEAN EDITIONS

Since winning the European Young Chef Award, Marta has continued her professional trajectory grounded in haute cuisine, building on her experience working with top chefs and internships—including time at the *three-Michelin-starred* **Aponiente**—and now contributes to contemporary Catalan cuisine with a focus on sustainability, local products and heritage through collaborations and appearances in culinary events.

"I hope to share my knowledge and passion with other young chefs and contribute to the development of gastronomy as a tool for positive change."

Marta Minoves - 2024
Catalonia 2025

After her success at the European Young Chef Award 2019, Eirini has worked as **Chef de Partie at Esperos Village Blue & Spa**, a prestigious 5-star hotel in Faliraki, Rhodes, continuing to refine her craft and deepen her connection to innovation rooted in local Aegean ingredients and traditions.

"Taste should bring back memories of the past, while the dish should be a transportation to joy."

Eirini Giorgoudiou - 2019
South Aegean 2019

Following his 2023 European Young Chef Award win, Boštjan now manages his **family-run restaurant in Plešivec, Slovenia**, where he champions high-quality local ingredients and sustainable gastronomy, using his platform to celebrate Slovenia's culinary identity.

"At the European Young Chef Award, I intended to showcase my region and emphasise the significance of bees, which are vital for life on earth."

Boštjan Volk - 2023
Slovenia 2021

Andreas, winner of the European Young Chef Award 2018, has continued his culinary journey and—as verified on his professional profile—works as **assistant chef at Falsled Kro, a Relais & Châteaux property in Denmark**, where he explores classic techniques and seasonal local produce in refined contexts.
"I love to learn new techniques and to innovate on traditional recipes using local products."

Andreas Bjerring - 2018
Aarhus-Central Denmark 2017

Since his win, Espen has built a distinguished career in Norway's culinary scene: he now serves as **Assistant Head Chef at Hildurs Urterarium**, a restaurant celebrated for its northern herb garden and local produce, and also teaches at Brønnøysund Upper Secondary School. The competition gave him not only visibility but also the confidence and professional network to excel in national championships and international contests like the **Bocuse d'Or** qualifiers.

"Food and gastronomy are my way of bringing people together. What pushes me most is refining traditional dishes, trying to add my own special touch to them."

Espen Laumann - 2021
Trondheim-Trøndelag 2022

After winning the European Young Chef Award while still a **Culinary Arts student at Galway International Hotel School**, Aisling has continued her professional development with plans to gain international experience. The award was an early milestone that helped position her ambitions to expand her culinary expertise abroad and shaped her vision of opening her own restaurant in the future

"I wanted the jury to experience my story and my region through my dish."

Aisling Rock - 2017
Galway-West of Ireland 2018

At just 23 years of age, Pau is already head chef in the kitchen at **La Cocina de Cristine** in the Cristine Bedfor Boutique Hotel in Mahón, Menorca, where he combines local Menorcan products with creative expression. His win at the European Young Chef Award elevated his profile on a European stage, opening doors to professional leadership and recognition both on the island and beyond.

"I believe the European Young Chef Award is a great opportunity to raise the profile of young chefs, and to encourage the new generations to train as such."

Pau Sintes - 2022
Menorca 2022

Following his 2016 Award success and continued involvement in IGCAT's network, Stamatis has become a respected figure within the South Aegean gastronomy community, often invited to mentor and lead workshops that link Aegean culinary heritage with innovation. The competition helped lay the foundation for his ongoing role as a culinary ambassador of his region, fostering connections between tradition and contemporary culinary expression

"My innovation was made up of different steps: research, development and a connection to my region's identity."

Stamatis Misomikes - 2016
South Aegean 2019

IN BRIEF

The competition is open to Academic Institutions in the Americas dedicated to the awareness of Gastronomy as a cultural and social development tool. The competition welcomes students or graduates that have concluded culinary education within 1 year of the local selection process (for more detailed information on eligibility, please refer to rule 3 below). **Finalists must be aged between 18-26 years at the time of the local competition / selection process.**

The Americas Young Chef Award aims to foster a deeper understanding of regional food diversity. For this reason, participating young chefs must clearly represent their territory or region, reflecting its food heritage, identity, and values. This requirement is essential, as the initiative is directly connected to IGCAT's World Regions of Gastronomy Platform.

Finalists must be selected by the sponsoring Institution, preferably through a local competition and/or signed off by a selection committee.

Each aspiring chef will prepare an innovative version of a regional traditional dish. Finalists are asked to use local animal or plant varieties specific to their region and thus support the future survival of these regional products.

When conceiving and preparing their dish, finalists should also pay special attention to sustainability issues including: a) reduction of food waste; b) reduction of single-use plastics; c) balanced proportionality of vegetables to meat/fish in the recipe. **The sustainability of finalists' practices in the kitchen will form part of the jury's final evaluation**.

The jury will positively evaluate if finalists demonstrate they **support one or more young food producer from their region** (e.g. farmers, fishermen, etc.).

Finalists are recommended to take inspiration from local artists (e.g. painters, musicians, writers, etc.) and to share the process of their creative interpretation in their presentation. The story / presentation of the dish is expected to tell the jury about the origin and connection of the dish to the region it comes from.

Each finalist should be accompanied by a supporting team member/mentor whose role in the first instance is to promote the young chef through social media in their own countries and beyond.

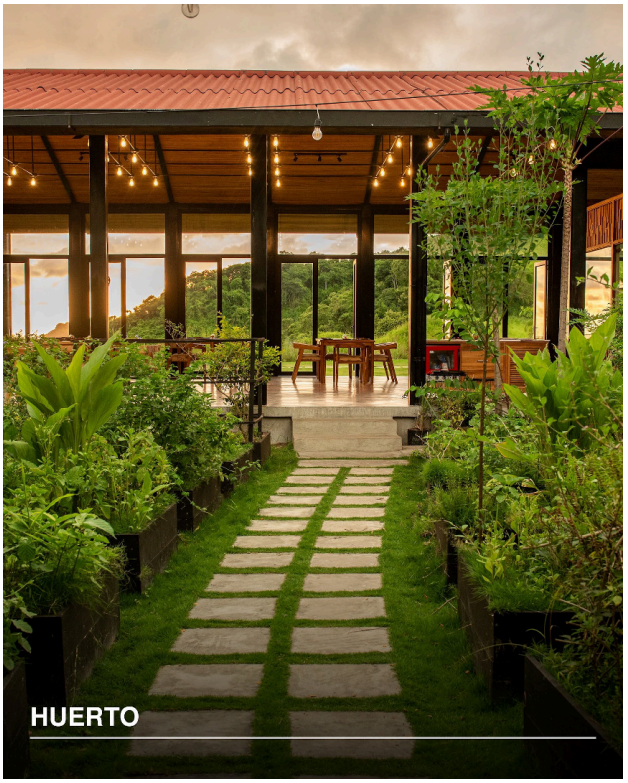
The supporting team member/mentor is **not allowed** to help in the preparation of the competition dish. Their role is strictly to mentor their candidate outside of the competition and they will not be allowed to assist the finalist in the kitchen or in the presentation of their dishes to the Jury.

The competition's official language will be Spanish. Manabí, World Region of Gastronomy 2026 and the hosting institution commit to providing simultaneous translation from English, French or Portuguese, in the case that this is needed.

The region should provide a video to be shown during the competition. The video (**3 minutes** duration) should focus on the finalist and the inspiration behind his/her dish, highlighting the region, province or county they represent, its landscape, heritage and food products. It may also include coverage of the regional young chef competition from which the finalist was selected (if applicable). Videos made specifically for the Young Chef Award are also encouraged to submit to IGCAT's Food Film Menu (watch the 2024, 2023, 2022, 2021 and 2020 winners).

Individual kitchens will be provided for up to 12 American finalists to work in.

The finalists will cook their traditional dish using the same kitchen station as they will use for the competition, ensuring that adequate time for orientation in the kitchens is provided before the competition day.



RULES

REGISTRATION & PARTICIPANTS REQUIREMENTS

1. Regions should confirm their participation and finalist's name by **1 May 2026** by submitting the fully completed **registration form.** Regions should support their finalists in the compilation of the registration form and preparation of accompanying documents and materials. IGCAT is available to clarify any doubts concerning the form prior to the registration deadline. After the deadline, incomplete forms will not be taken into consideration and related candidatures may be rejected.

2. Finalists, with the support of their regions, will need to present the following documents:

   a. **Registration form**, completed in all its sections;

   b. **Code of Ethics** signed;

   c. A copy of an **ID document** (e.g. national identity card, passport);

   d. **Proof of enrolment / recent graduation**;

   e. **Profile photo wearing chef uniform** (high-quality, horizontal photo, min. 1200x800px);

   f. **Photo of the traditional dish** (high-quality, horizontal photo, min. 1200x800px);

   g. **Photo of the innovative dish** (high-quality, horizontal photo, min. 1200x800px).

3. IGCAT reserves the right to select 10 finalists that will compete in the final. By 15 May 2026 finalists will receive confirmation of acceptance and will be sent the details to organise their participation, as well as an invoice to cover the registration fee.

4. The registration fee is **$ 2.500** and needs to be covered by the sending institution when the finalist's registration is presented. **Registration is only confirmed after full payment of the registration fee is received**.

5. Finalists need to be aged 18-26 (at the time of the local competition or selection process) and be either formal, informal or non-formal students or former students that have concluded culinary school classes **within 1 year of the local competition or selection process**. Proof of enrolment or certificate of conclusion of classes will be required in the registration form. Students with continuing enrolment in education but working in a professional environment (for example extended student internship) for more than a year will be disqualified. In case of any dispute, IGCAT reserves the right of final interpretation of the rules concerning the eligibility of finalists.

TRADITIONAL DISH

6. The competition dish should demonstrate innovation on a traditional recipe from the region represented. Therefore, on the day prior to the competition, the finalist will be asked to serve **a total of five (5) portions of the traditional dish** prepared as it would be presented in local homes or restaurants, so that the innovation / transformation of the dish will be demonstrated effectively to the jury the following day..

   a. **3 portions for the jury members to taste** (one portion for every two jury members);

   b. **1 portion for the moderators to taste;**

   c. **1 portion for display and photos**.

The preparation of a traditional dish is intended to provide an opportunity for the finalists to familiarise with the provided kitchen environment and for the jury to note if the finalist has succeeded in capturing the essence of the traditional dish in the fine dining preparation..

7. The preparation of the traditional dish cannot exceed **1 hour and 30 minutes** from start to completion.

8. Once the traditional dish is ready, finalists will have a maximum of **3 minutes to present** it to the jury.

INNOVATIVE DISH

9. On the day of the competition, finalists will also prepare **a total of five (5) portions of the innovative dish**:

    a. **3 portions for the jury members to taste** (one portion for every two jury members);

    b. **1 portion for the moderators to taste;**

    c. **1 portion for display and photos**.

10. The innovative dish can be a starter, a main course, or a dessert. Dishes that offer fine-dining size tastings will also be accepted.

11. It should be possible for the innovative dish to be viably reproduced in a restaurant situation. If the dish is not replicable, in a tie-break situation this may be counted against the finalist.

12. Finalists are required to conceive and produce the innovative dish themselves, bringing their own style and imagination to the competition as declared in the **Code of Ethics** which needs to be returned with the registration form. The innovation on the traditional recipe is ideally inspired by a local artist (e.g. painter, musician, writer, etc.) from the finalist's region.

13. The dish presented in the competition must use local seasonal products found in the markets of the region being represented. Finalists should indicate in the registration form and explain in their presentation to the jury the use of regional plant and animal varieties in their dish. In the scoring process, **the jury will give greater weight to presentations that demonstrate the finalist's knowledge in this field.**

14. If the local competition / selection process takes place in a different season than the Young Chef competition, finalists will be allowed to adapt the innovative recipe by replacing out-of-season ingredients with seasonal products, without causing a radical disruption of the dish, and as long as a clear connection with the traditional recipe is preserved.

15. Finalists are encouraged to pair their dish with a non-alcoholic traditional beverage from their region, helping to counter the loss of local drinks and highlight their role within regional food cultures. Any intended pairing, including required glasses or serving vessels, must be specified in the registration form in order to confirm availability with the host in advance.

16. On the day of the competition, in no event can the preparation of the innovative dish exceed **2 hours and 30 minutes** from start to completion.

INGREDIENTS AND KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

17. General kitchen equipment will be made available to all finalists unless specialist equipment is required. The host will provide a list of the kitchen equipment available on site and this can be reserved on a first-come first-served basis. Unless it is confirmed in writing that the equipment has been reserved, the host bears no responsibility. **Finalists are expected to provide their own specialist equipment** and no cost of the same will be borne by the host. **All finalists must bring their own knives**.

18. **Finalists should bring their own ingredients for the preparation of both the traditional and innovative dishes**. Basic cupboard ingredients (e.g. salt, oil, sugar, etc.) will be provided by the host, however finalists are strongly encouraged to use products specific to their region and to have available information about the producers (highlighting their relationship with the producer, and if they are supporting young food producers in their region).

19. In light of current sustainability concerns, in case that the innovative dish contains meat or fish, the **ability of finalists to balance the proportionality of vegetables to meat/fish** in their recipe will be scored by the jury as part of their evaluation.

20. Likewise, finalists are encouraged to incorporate local legumes into their dishes, recognising their importance for food sovereignty, biodiversity, environmental sustainability, and healthy diets, as well as their deep roots in regional culinary traditions.

21. Partially cooked food **is not** permitted. The only pre-competition preparations allowed are: curing, dehydration, fermentation, marinating, pyrolisation, rehydration or smoking. Any excessive preparation in advance of the competition will be noted and, in a tie-break situation, may be counted against the finalist. If in doubt, please seek advice from IGCAT prior to the competition.

22. Pre-cut vegetables, meats or fish will not be admitted.

23. **Finalists must comply with the food hygiene regulations** specified by the host (if any), ensure that high-risk food products are handled appropriately, and that the **cool-chain is not compromised during transportation**. If there are any concerns around this, finalists should contact IGCAT and the host to discuss possible individual requirements. The host will help in finding replacement foods (as far as possible) if finalists' ingredients arrive in a bad state. Or the cool-chain cannot be guaranteed in transportation.

PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION PROCESS

24. The region/school should prepare a **3-minute video** about the finalist and the inspiration behind their innovative dish, to be shown before the presentation of the dish. The video can also emphasise the agricultural landscape, heritage and cultural characteristics of the region and introduce the story of how the finalist was selected. The video either needs to be in Spanish and/or have subtitles in Spanish and must be submitted by **21 September 2026**.

25. On the day of the competition, the order of presentations will be staggered and therefore a start time for cooking preparation will be given to each finalist. IGCAT will decide the order of plates and the Head of Kitchen will ensure finalists start cooking at 10-minute intervals. The order will be communicated by IGCAT on the welcome day.

26. During the preparation of the innovative dish, the jury will visit the kitchen to observe the cooking process and outcome of the dish (including **kitchen order** and **hygiene**), as well as ask finalists about the recipe and ingredients.

27. During the kitchen visit, the jury will also assess the ability of finalists to reduce **food waste** and **single-use plastics** to a minimum during the preparation of their dishes. **Finalists' food and plastic waste related practices will be scored as part of their final evaluation**.

28. Once the innovative dish is served, finalists will have a maximum of **4 minutes to present** to the jury and public. The presentation will be followed by jury questions.

29. Finalists are advised that technical ability and regional connectedness will equally contribute to the overall evaluation of the innovative dish and thus, they are warmly encouraged to focus on both aspects during the presentation of their innovative dish. Besides the technical aspect, **the jury will assess the finalist's ability to:**

    a. communicate an original story about the dish and the creative process behind it;

    b. explain the cultural connection of the dish with the region;

    c. present the local plant and animal varieties used, if they are in season and whether they are organic / grass fed / wild fish;

    d. acknowledge the local food producers sourced from with special focus on one or more young producers;

    e. demonstrate their sustainability approach in the kitchen as an overall cooking philosophy and not just for the competition.

    All the points listed above will be scored by the jury in the evaluation form.

30. The presentation should be given in Spanish, English, Portuguese or French. The hosts will provide simultaneous interpretation to Spanish for the judges (where necessary).

31. **IGCAT recommends that the local selection of finalists takes place early in the year and that the mentoring process includes Spanish classes** (if needed), so that the finalist can interact in the meals and excursions and with the kitchen/waiting staff during the competition.

32. Finalists are allowed to use supportive notes. However, these should be prepared on prompt cards (possibly including the logo of their region on the back), while pieces of paper that can become creased or create unnecessary noise should be avoided. Prompt cards contribute to an overall tidier and more professional image of the finalist.

33. The jury have a set of criteria to mark each plate. When participation is confirmed, finalists will receive the criteria and scores applied. The jury are experts in their fields and the winners will be selected following a calculation of the scoring and a discussion between the jury. In a tie-break situation, the Jury Chair will make the final choice.

34. **The jury verdict is final**, and jury members are not allowed to answer the finalist's concerns individually on the day of the event. The jury will however provide written feedback to all finalists, including an individual breakdown of their own scores and accompanying jury comments, within three weeks after the competition. No further correspondence will be entered into.

35. Only 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes will be announced. All finalists however will be celebrated through the signing and awarding of IGCAT Regional Chef Ambassador title. As Joan Roca aptly notes – all finalists are winners!

IMAGE AND CONDUCT

36. The finalist should bring at least **two sets of uniform** (kitchen jacket, trousers and hat). One for the first day and a second set, which may include sponsor logos, for the competition day. The finalist will be given aprons for use in the kitchens so as to ensure a clean jacket during the presentation. Please note that finalists are expected to wear a clean uniform for the Gala Awards.

37. Finalists are expected to attend all activities and meals as organised in the programme. Finalists should be reminded that they are acting as ambassadors for their region and their **behaviour and conduct needs to be appropriate at all times**.

SAFETY

38. The safety of finalists, accompanying people, hosts, organisers and all people involved will be a priority throughout the whole event.

39. Therefore, all participants are required to respect any health-related protocols that will be in place at the time of the competition in the hosting region. In advance of the competition, the hosting region will provide finalists with a complete list of sanitary measures and recommendations that they may need to comply with.

40. In case that restrictions to international travel are in place at the time of the competition, the event will be re-scheduled for a later date.

41. All participants attending IGCAT events must ensure that he/she has **valid health insurance for travel that covers illness, accident, or health matters.** Insurance related to flights and luggage handling will be covered by the airline, and IGCAT or the hosting Region waive all responsibility or liability regarding any of the above.

INTERPRETATION OF THE RULES

42. The present rules will be sent to regions and finalists in advance of the competition. It is recommended to read them carefully. IGCAT will be available to clarify any doubt concerning the rules prior to the competition. IGCAT will not accept any objections to the present rules during or after the competition.

43. All rules and regulations are subject to interpretation by the organising body (IGCAT) whose decision shall be final.

PROGRAMME

DAY 1 | Friday 9 October 2026

ARRIVAL AND WELCOME

A welcome supper will be organised and the videos of the finalists will be screened so that the young chefs can start getting to know each other. The dinner is reserved for finalists and mentors only.

DAY 2 | Saturday 10 October 2026

WARM-UP WITH TRADITIONAL DISHES

On 10 October, finalists will receive a short introduction about the importance of the Americas Young Chef Award for encouraging cultural and food diversity, as well as an orientation and safety briefing of the kitchens. All finalists will be invited to become IGCAT Young Chef Ambassadors and join a growing World network of chefs committed to promoting local food cultures. The finalists will then commence with the preparation of the traditional version of their dish (1h30) to be presented to jury members. This day is intended as a dress rehearsal for the competition day ensuring that all finalists are comfortable with their kitchen stations and with presenting in front of an audience. On this day, there will also be the possibility for finalists to go shopping for any missing ingredients, if necessary. The lunch and dinner are reserved for finalists, mentors and VIP guests only.

DAY 3 | Sunday 11 October 2026

COMPETITION WITH INNOVATIVE DISHES

The competition will take place on 11 October. Each finalist will have 2 hours and 30 minutes to prepare their dish. IGCAT will decide the order of plates and finalists will start cooking at 15-minute intervals. When their time is up, finalists will present their dishes in front of the jury and public. The lunch and dinner are reserved for finalists, mentors and VIP guests only.

DAY 4 | Monday 12 October 2026

EXCURSION AND GALA AWARDS

Manabí will invite all finalists and their mentors to Toac to learn about regenerative farming and make chocolate. A more detailed version of the programme will be provided to participants closer to the competition.

The winners will be announced during the Award Ceremony at the Official Dinner that evening in Iché. Alongside finalists, mentors, and VIP guests, family members and friends are welcome to attend as supporters, with a small contribution requested to help cover the cost of the dinner.

REGISTRATION

The registration fee is **USD 2.500** per finalist.

Manabí, World Region of Gastronomy awarded 2026 will provide

- Accommodation in a local hotel close to the venue of the competition for up to 2 people per region (finalist and mentor)* for four nights;
- Breakfasts, lunches, dinners for up to 2 people (finalist and mentor);*
- Airport transfers;
- Participation in the international competition and aprons;
- Standard kitchen, utensils and basic ingredients;
- Local Food Tour and visits.

For more information or to reserve a place, please fill in the registration form and send it (with accompanying documents) to: projects@igcat.org

VENUE

The Americas Young Chef Award 2026 will take place at the Iche School (escuela.iche.ec), in Bahía de Caráquez (Manabí, Ecuador)

ORGANISERS

The Americas Young Chef Award is organised and coordinated by the **International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism** (IGCAT). **IGCAT** aims to **empower local communities** by raising awareness of the importance of safeguarding and promoting distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism assets. This is essential to balance against globalised food trends that are impacting on our planet, health and local economies.

IGCAT is a non-profit institute established in 2012, working with regional stakeholder consortiums in the fields of gastronomy, culture, arts and tourism. It counts on the expertise of a worldwide network of experts and works in partnership with specialised intergovernmental organisations.

IGCAT provides the World Region of Gastronomy Award and is the official secretariat for the World Regions of Gastronomy Platforms. Furthermore, the Institute has developed the World Food Gift Challenge, the European Young Chef Award, the Food Film Menu and the Top Foodie Websites.

www.igcat.org

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