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'Great actor, Sean Penn. Amazing. And not an a**hole. Like Russell Crowe'

Actor Josh Brolin (left), who starred with Crowe in *American Gangster*



'We live in more of now, where everybody to saying, "Well, he it psychologically? you just punched t Film-maker Clint Eastwood'

The pastry team made up of chefs (from left) Ng Chee Leong, 30, Pang Kok Keong, 34, Hoi Kuok I, 24, and Lim Choon Seng, 33, showcasing its (from left) sugar, chocolate and ice creations. ST PHOTO: DESMOND LIM



Set for sweet success

Singapore's pastry team aims to make the top five at a competition in Lyon

huang lijie

The Singapore national pastry team is aiming for a sweet finish at the prestigious World Pastry Cup in France on Jan 26.

Champions of the qualifying Asian Pastry Cup last year, it hopes to rank among the top five at the international contest, said team manager Pang Kok Keong, executive pastry chef of Canele Patisserie Chocolaterie.

Started in 1989, the World Pastry Cup is held once every two years at the International Hotel Catering And Food Trade Exhibition in Lyon and is one of the most important contests in the pastry world.

This is the ninth time Singapore is participating in the competition. Its best result was seventh place in 1997.

The team comprises pastry chefs Hoi Kuok I of Conrad Centennial, Ng Chee

Leong of Shangri-La and Lim Choon Sing of Goodwood Park Hotel. They were selected through a competition organised in September 2007 by the Singapore Pastry Alliance, a professional group under the Singapore Chefs Association.

Chef Pang, 34, who last competed in the World Pastry Cup in 2005, said: "The team has worked extremely hard, clocking about 900 hours of practice.

"To be in the top five and rank alongside countries such as France, Belgium, Italy and Japan, all big winners in the past, will be a huge accomplishment."

While European countries have typically dominated the competition, Asia is emerging as a strong contender. At the 2007 contest, four of the five competing Asian countries made it to the top 10, with Japan clinching the gold medal.

This year, six Asian countries, including China, South Korea and Japan, are participating.

The Singapore team showcased its months of hard work at a media preview yesterday at the Canele outlet in Robertson Walk. On display were two sugar and chocolate showpieces depicting underwater creatures and wildlife, as well as a 1.5m-tall ice sculpture of a panther.

Also available at the preview were tasting portions of three chocolate cakes, three ice-cream cakes and 12 dessert platters that the team will have to make for the contest.

The competition is a gruelling 10 hour long and chefs have to create confection from scratch. The 22 participating countries will be judged on criteria such as taste, originality of design and presentation.

A major challenge for the Singapore team, said chef Pang, will be adapting quickly to the low humidity and cool temperature of Lyon's winter, which will affect the texture of confections and the cooking temperature.

The team will head to Lyon a week before the contest to squeeze in one last rehearsal there to help adjust to the cooking conditions.

On having to be away from home during Chinese New Year, which falls on Jan 26, chef Pang said: "Let's hope our performance will give us a greater cause for celebration."

The top three teams will be awarded medals and prize money worth €12,000 (S\$24,000), €7,000 and €4,000. lijie@sph.com.sg