Food is a form
of diplomacy–
one that conveys
the essence of
Thai identity to people
around the world,
ultimately becoming
a cultural symbol
of international
significance



OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARY
THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

THE CHARM OF THAI CUISINE

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THE CHARM OF

THAI CUISINE



Thai cuisine across four regions,
reflecting diverse historical,
social, and cultural influences

Foreword
Permanent Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office

People nowadays are seeking sustainable well-being and eco-friendly living. Food is therefore no longer merely a basic necessity of life, but an indicator of abundance, a driving force for the creative economy, and a foundation of global food security strategies.

Situated in the tropics with diverse ecosystems—including forests, waterways, and coastal areas—Thailand is blessed with exceptional natural abundance and one of the world's richest levels of biodiversity. This is reflected in the remarkable variety of culinary ingredients and Thai culinary wisdom that has been accumulated and passed down through generations. With the art of cooking, distinctive flavours, and the use of herbs for health and well-being, these qualities have elevated Thai cuisine into a strategic soft power, linking community, the grassroots economy, and tourism.

This book, The Charm of Thai Cuisine, goes beyond presenting the distinctive appearance and flavours of Thai food. It also decodes the embedded culinary traditions from every region of the country, demonstrating that Thai cuisine is more than simply internationally renowned food, but a science of nutritional balance that integrates traditional medicinal properties. Thai cuisine is thus a 'food as medicine', which can help promote health and prevent disease sustainably.

The Office of the Permanent Secretary, Prime Minister's Office, sincerely hopes that this book will not only inspire national pride and raise awareness of the nutritional value of Thai food, but also serve as a medium for transforming local wisdom into future food innovations. It is our hope that Thai cuisine will be elevated from a cultural heritage to a force advancing global well-being, while contributing to sustainable food security for the international community.

(Yupha Taweewattanakitborvon)
Permanent Secretary
Office of the Prime Minister





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Preface

‘From Thai Kitchens to the World’ is a key strategic policy aimed at positioning Thai cuisine, agricultural products, and Thai restaurants as a global food hub, in terms of export capacity, food safety standards, and cultural value. This achievement has not come about by chance, but is rooted in Thailand’s natural abundance, as reflected in the traditional verse, *nai nam mi pla, nai na mi khao*—‘There are fish in the water, and rice in the fields’. Blessed with favourable geographical conditions—fertile soils, abundant water resources, and a suitable climate—Thailand is endowed with plentiful agricultural and fishery products and has become a valuable source of raw materials. This enables Thailand to proudly emerge as one of the world’s leading food-source nations.

Moreover, Thai cuisine has become increasingly popular on the international stage, serving as a powerful form of soft power. This form of cultural heritage has received continued international recognition, including the inscription of *tom yum kung* on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, *kaeng massaman* being ranked No. 1 on CNN Travel’s list of the world’s best foods and as the king of curries, with Bangkok being ranked the world’s second-best food city by Time Out Magazine. These achievements reaffirm the artistry, meticulous preparation, and harmonious balance of Thailand’s six principal flavours—sour, sweet, salty, spicy, rich, and astringent. Beyond a well-balanced taste, the diverse array of fresh ingredients and herbs used in Thai cuisine also contributes to nourishment and overall well-being.

The profound charm of Thai cuisine is also reflected in the distinctive culinary identity of each region. **The North** is characterised by mellow, delicate flavours, with aromatic wild herbs that highlight the combination of savouriness and gentle spiciness, shaped by the meticulous techniques of simmering and pounded curry/chilli pastes. Notable dishes include *kaeng hang lay, namphrik ong, namphrik num, sai ua,* and *khanom chin nam ngiao.* **The Northeast** is known for bold, intense flavours and ingenious food-preservation traditions, reflecting a close relationship with nature through foods such as *pla ra, som tam, larb,* and *koi,* which draw natural flavours from local ingredients, especially fresh vegetables and herbs. **The Central Region** is renowned for refined royal-court cuisine and harmonious flavours, combining culinary techniques with the artistry of carving, garnishing, and seasoning, as seen in dishes such as *kaeng khiao wan, kaeng massaman, tom yum kung,* and *namphrik long ruea.* **The South** is distinguished by fiery flavours and an intense herbal character, with turmeric and aromatic spices to balance the smell of ingredients from the region's abundant seas. Signature dishes include *kaeng tai pla, kaeng som* (also called *kaeng lueang*), and *kua kling.*

Rice is the centre of every Thai meal, from *Hom Mali* rice and sticky rice to indigenous rice varieties. Rice serves as a vital thread connecting Thai ways of life and culinary culture. Moreover, Thai food is also deeply intertwined with beliefs, ways of life, traditions, and rituals. In Lanna culture, for example, *kaeng khanun* is traditionally eaten on *Wan Pak Pi* during the Songkran festival, as the dish carries auspicious meaning, symbolising the hope of receiving support and protection and of enjoying prosperity throughout the year. *Khanom tom,* an auspicious Thai sweet, is traditionally prepared for ceremonial offerings, teacher-honouring rituals, and other important celebrations, as it symbolises abundance, purity, and smoothness in life, expressing wishes for success, progress, prosperity, and a peaceful and auspicious life.

The book The Charm of Thai Cuisine is therefore more than a record of culinary history or recipes. It presents Thai cuisine through a multidimensional lens, including history, society, and culture, while inspiring awareness of the true value of Thai food. It also seeks to encourage further exploration of the knowledge and wisdom of food as a means of promoting health and well-being.



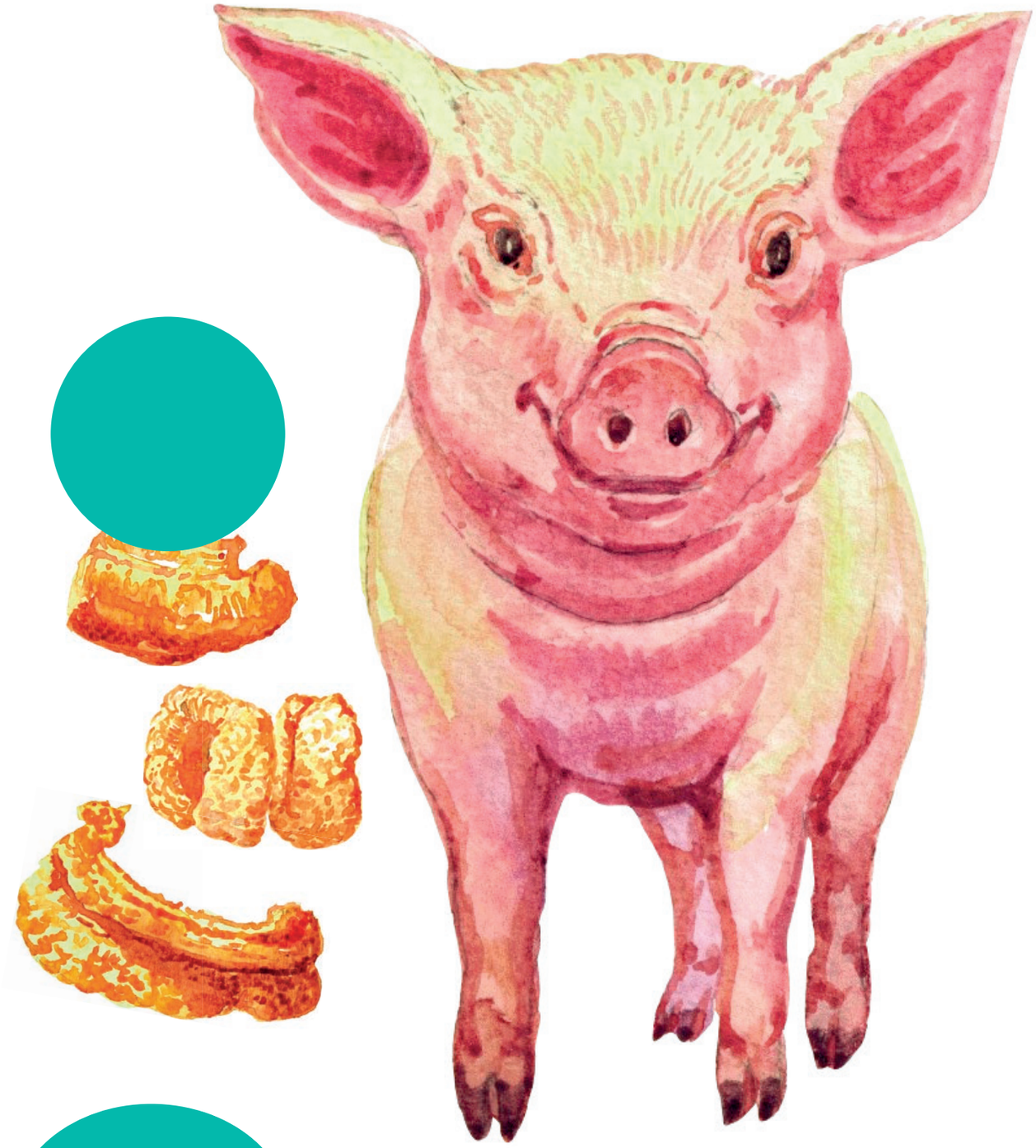
Decoding Lanna: A Culinary Heritage from the Mountains to the Table

Amid the valleys surrounded by the mountain ranges of Upper Northern Thailand, northern Thai (Lanna) cuisine is far more than sustenance. It is a record of history, reflecting a simple way of life deeply intertwined with nature and an agricultural way of life that has fostered the accumulation of wisdom, resulting in a distinctive culinary culture. Every story of every dish opens a window onto the authentic character of Lanna culture, shaped by the harmonious interweaving of diverse ethnic groups, including the Tai Yuan, Tai Lue, Tai Yong, Tai Yai (Shan), and Lawa, as well as culinary influences from neighbouring countries, including Myanmar, Laos, and Yunnan Chinese communities. This cultural integration has given rise to beloved dishes such as *kaeng hang lay,* a culinary heritage rooted in Myanmar cuisine, and *khao soi,* a rich and creamy noodle dish associated with the Yunnanese, which has since evolved into the contemporary culinary tradition today.



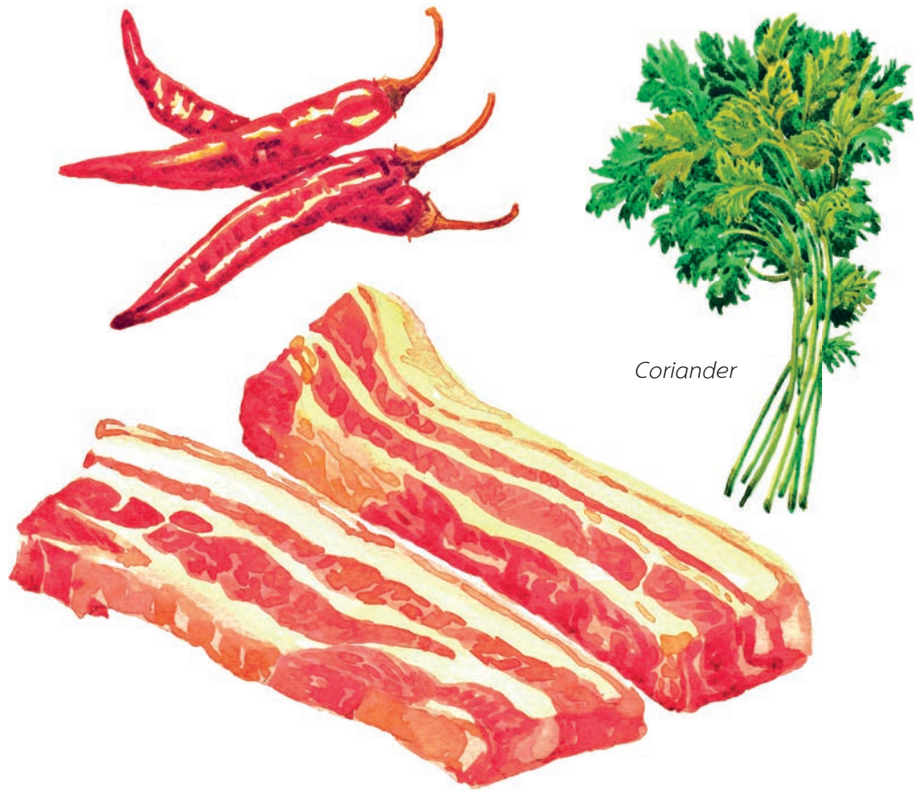
The heart of Lanna cuisine is a deep respect for natural ingredients. Rather than relying on refined sugar for sweetness, Lanna cooking draws out the natural sweetness of seasonal vegetables, balancing it with spicy, salty, and sour flavours. A distinctive feature is the use of *thua nao,* fermented soybean disks, as a seasoning in place of shrimp paste with a unique savoury aroma. Combined with a dietary tradition centred on sticky rice, this has given rise to a culinary culture of eating rice alongside chilli relishes, fresh and blanched vegetables, and a wide variety of curries and soups—dishes well suited to a way of life shaped by agriculture. Lanna cuisine can also be regarded as naturally health-conscious, with many dishes being low in fat and rich in nutritional value, from *kaeng khae,* a medley of local vegetables, and balanced flavour *jor phakkat,* to *kaeng phak pang* and seasonal specialities such as *kaeng het thop* and *kaeng ba nun.*

Beyond the abundance of local ingredients, the ingenuity of food preservation and creativity represents another dimension of Lanna food culture. *Kaeng kradang,* for example, makes use of the naturally cool temperatures of the north to allow the curry broth to set. *Kaeng ho* brings together ingredients through stir-frying, creating a flavourful dish despite having little broth. Every element of Lanna cuisine is therefore regarded as more than nourishment. It embodies generations of knowledge and cultural wisdom, carrying the warmth of its people and the abundance of nature across centuries.



25 Northern Thai Dishes



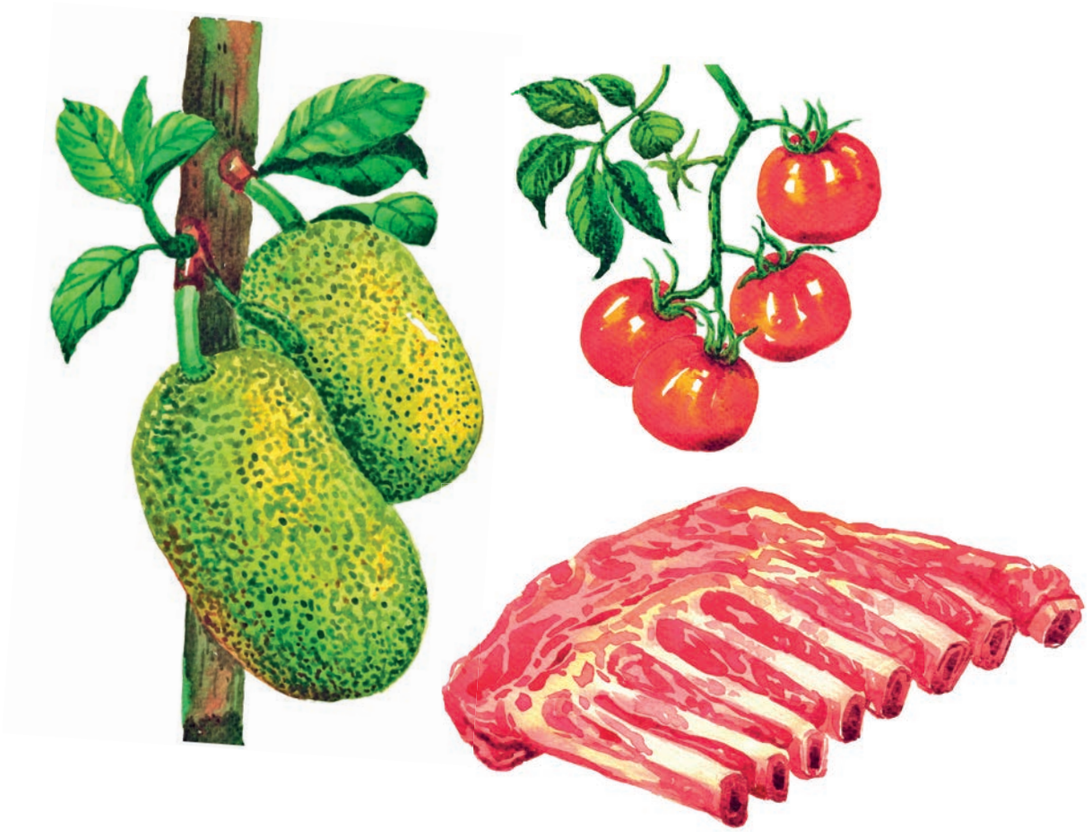


Coriander

***Kaeng Kradang* (Northern Thai Aspic)**, also known as *kaeng mu nao* (cold pork soup), is a dish traditionally prepared when the cool December winds sweep across the Lanna region. The word *kradang* means hard in the local dialect, which describes the defining characteristic of this dish—where the broth naturally sets into a firm, gelatinous block without the need for refrigeration. The transformation comes from the high concentration of collagen in simmered pork trotters and tendons, a wisdom of food preservation, particularly during merit-making celebrations, allowing the dish to be kept and enjoyed for several days.

The curry has a reddish-orange hue with a spicy kick, followed by savoury notes, while balanced with herbs and spices such as galangal, lemongrass, shallots, and garlic. Nutritionally, *kaeng kradaang* is a high-energy dish that helps keep the body warm during cold weather. Natural collagen helps support healthy joints, bones, and skin, while herbs and spices provide additional benefits by aiding digestion and supporting the immune system.





***Kaeng Khanun* (Jackfruit Soup),** known in the northern Thai dialect as *kaeng ba nun,* is a traditional dish long associated with the way of life and beliefs of the Lanna. It is traditionally enjoyed on *Wan Pak Pi* (16 April), marking the beginning of the New Year in the northern Songkran festival, as well as at wedding ceremonies. This is rooted in the auspicious belief that the word *khanun* (jackfruit) symbolises support (*nun*) and prosperity, while blessing newlyweds with a strong bond.

Kaeng khanun is a clear soup in which tender yet chewy young jackfruit is simmered with pork rib or pork belly until the flavours are fully absorbed. The dish is enhanced with a fragrant herb and spice paste made from dried chillies, shallots, garlic, galangal, lemongrass, shrimp paste, and fermented fish, topped with a gentle sourness from *Si Da* tomatoes and the unique aroma of cha-om (climbing wattle) leaves and *chaphlu* (wild betel) leaves.

Nutritionally, young jackfruit is rich in dietary fibre, calcium, and antioxidants, which support digestion, help protect and heal the stomach, and promote lactation in postpartum women. Combined with the benefits of the herbs and spices in the curry paste, *kaeng khanun* is therefore not only an auspicious dish but also wholesome and flavourful.

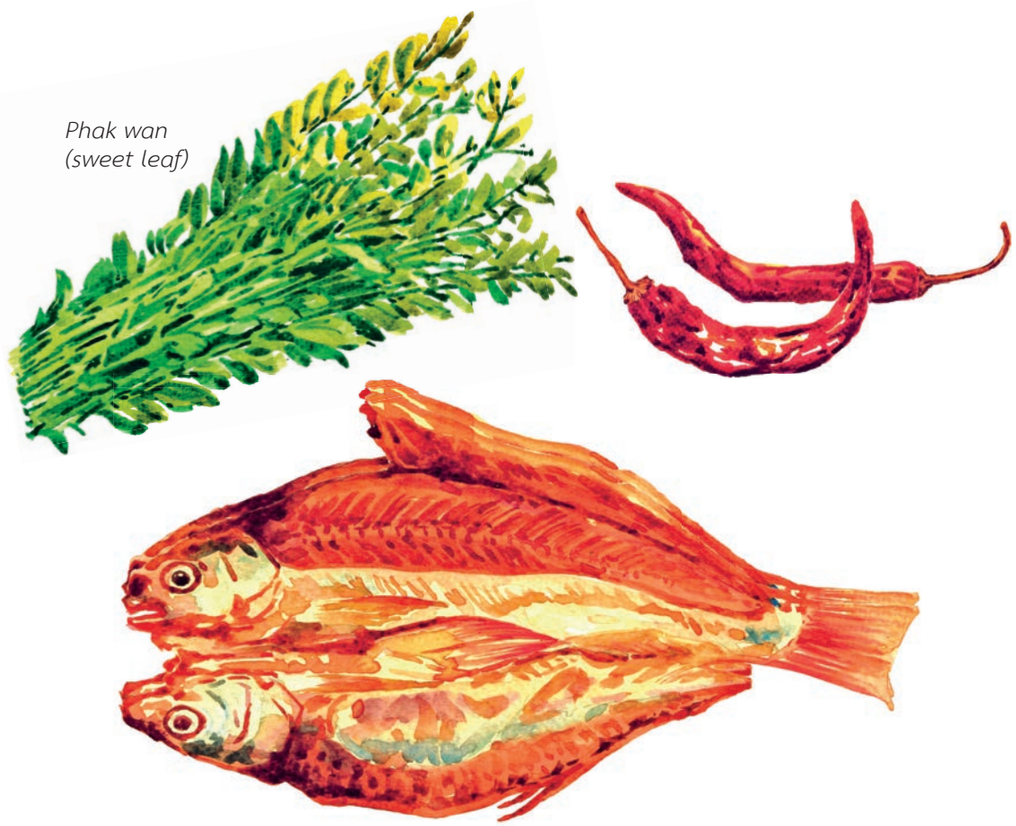


***Kaeng Khae* (Mixed Vegetable Soup)**, a charming traditional dish of Northern Thailand, does not contain a single *dok khae* (vegetable hummingbird). Instead, its name comes from *phak khae,* a local term for wild betel leaf, which gives the soup its distinctive aroma.

Kaeng khae is a clear soup without coconut milk, with a reduced broth that brings together five to ten varieties of local vegetables growing around the home. These include *phak khae,* climbing wattle, holy basils, young coconut crowns, and even red silk-cotton flower, simmered with meat such as free-range chicken, pork, or dried fish until it develops a spicy and gentle sweetness from the vegetables. The delight of the dish is the tingling and numbing on the tip of the tongue from *phak khrat* (para cress) and shrubby basil.

The best time to enjoy *kaeng khae* is in the rainy season to early winter, when the vegetables naturally growing around the home are producing new shoots and are juiciest, sweetest, and crispest. *Kaeng khae* is exceptional at balancing the elements, as it is packed with beta-carotene, gas-relieving herbs, and antioxidants that help ward off colds during the changing seasons. It is truly a testament to the culinary wisdom of eating in harmony with life.





***Kaeng Phak Wan Pla Haeng* (Sweet Leaf with Dried Fish Soup),** one of the dishes that best reflects the northern Thai wisdom of eating along with the seasons. This soup is the perfect combination of the freshness from the forest and traditional food preservation wisdom. The shoots of wild *phak wan* (sweet leaf), which flourish during the transition from the dry season into the rains, are combined with aromatic dried or grilled snakehead fish, an excellent source of protein during the times when fresh fish may be scarce.

The charm of this soup lies in its reduced, orange broth that is naturally sweet with little or no added sugar. The light sweetness of the wild *phak wan* is brought to life by a robust curry paste made by pounding dried chillies, shallots, garlic, shrimp paste, and cooked fermented fish. Once thoroughly simmered, softened glass noodles are added to bring out a delicate texture to the irresistible soup.

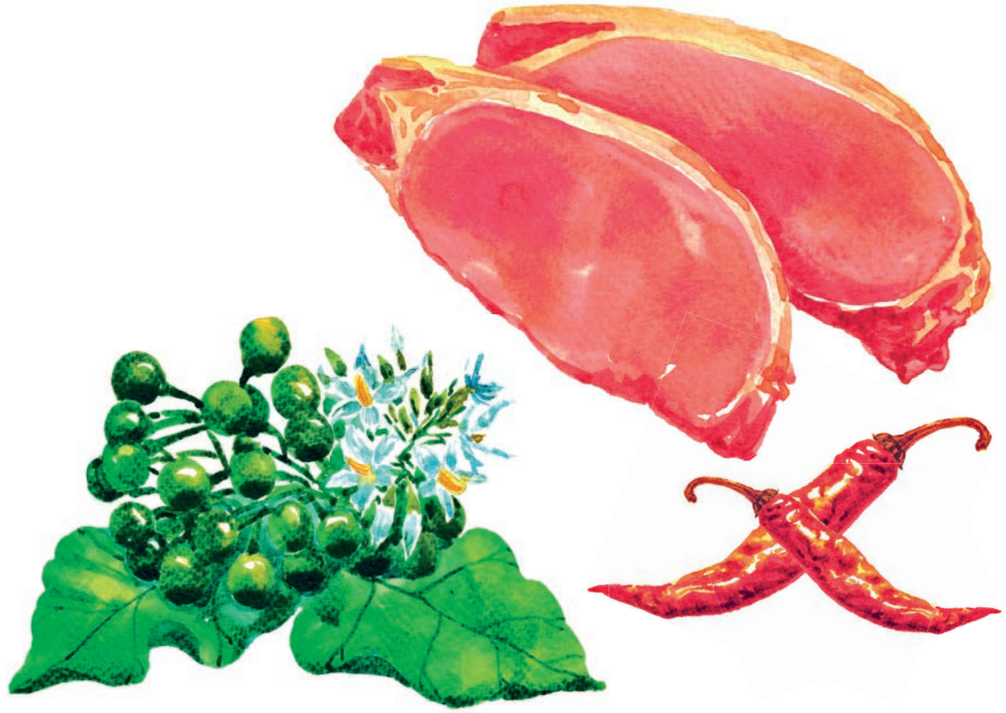
Beyond its unique flavour, *kaeng phak wan pla haeng* is a truly wholesome dish. It is high in protein and low in fat, while being rich in vitamins A and C and antioxidants that help support the immune system and nourish the body—a goodness nature has to offer.



Kaeng Hang Lay **(Northern Pork Curry)** is the dish that best embodies the journey of flavours when it comes to the heart of a northern *khan tok* traditional feast. This traditional dish brings together Lanna, Myanmar and Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna) influences in a single pot. The name *hang lay* is believed to derive from the Burmese word *hin le,* which literally means meat curry. As it reached the northern part of today's Thailand, it was reimagined into a dish with a distinctive character of its own.

Kaeng hang lay is rich, with a multidimensional flavour of gently savoury, balanced tangy, and delicately sweet. Fragrant spices and herbs—ginger, shallots, and garlic—add aromatic depth, while peanuts provide the richness and crunch. The curry is slowly simmered with tender pork belly until it is succulent and melts in the mouth. Another remarkable feature of this dish is that it is rich without the need for coconut milk. It is therefore a dish that truly becomes better when reheated, since the spices and herbs gradually permeate the pork, intensifying its flavour as time passes. In keeping with the traditional wisdom of food as medicine, the warming spices are believed to help ease flatulence and warm the body. More than simply a dish, *kaeng hang lay* is also a symbol of sharing, a part of *Poi Luang* celebrations and other important festivals in Northern Thailand.





***Kaeng Ho* (Northern Mixed Dish)** is a traditional northern Thai dish that reflects the mastery of food management. The word *ho* in the local dialect means to bring together, originating from major merit-making occasions at temples, such as Songkran and Buddhist Lent, when the locals would bring different dishes to offer to monks. After the monks had eaten, they would advise villagers to combine the remaining —especially the rich and robust *kaeng hang lay* —and cook them anew to prevent food waste.

The preparation of *kaeng ho* begins by combining the leftover curries or soups and stir-frying them with glass noodles, pickled bamboo shoots, and a variety of local vegetables and herbs. The mixture is dry-fried until the flavours are absorbed, bringing out the fragrance of the curry paste and kaffir lime leaves. The result is a new dish with an intense and distinctive flavour, perfectly paired with warm sticky rice and fresh vegetables.

In terms of nutrition, *kaeng ho* is an excellent source of energy, rich in protein from the meat and fibre from bamboo shoots and local vegetables, which can support digestion and healthy bowel function. It also provides the benefits of herbs such as lemongrass, with its carminative properties, as well as chillies, which help stimulate metabolism. This dish thus brings together nutritional value and cultural story.



Makhwaen

***Kai Thot Makhwaen* (Fried Chicken with *Makhwaen*),** a renowned dish of Northern Thailand, particularly in Bo Kluea District, Nan Province. *Kai thot makhwaen* originated from local culinary wisdom of using *makhwaen,* a fragrant forest spice with a distinctive character and a tingling sensation reminiscent of Sichuan pepper, to eliminate the gamey odour of meat and enhance its flavour.

Chicken, typically mid-joint wings, is marinated with salt and finely ground roasted *makhwaen* before being fried over a moderate heat until the skin turns golden brown. The result is crisp-yet-tender fried chicken with a pleasantly savoury flavour, a gentle hot, tingling sensation on the tongue, and the rich aroma of the forest spice. It is commonly enjoyed with hot sticky rice and *namphrik jaew* (spicy chilli sauce), a perfectly balanced combination.

In terms of its health benefits, *kai thot makhwaen* draws on the traditional medicinal properties of *makhwaen,* which is believed to aid digestion, relieve intestinal gas and bloating, support heart health and healthy blood circulation, and help alleviate anxiety and dizziness. It is also rich in vitamin E, which helps protect the body's cells.









Dok ngiao
(red silk-cotton flower)





***Khanom Chin Nam Ngiao* (Fermented Rice Noodles with Northern Thai Red Silk-Cotton Flower Broth)** is another beloved traditional dish of Northern Thailand, originating from the Tai people of Shan State, Myanmar. It was called *khao sen nam mhakkuea som* before spreading into the Lanna region, where it was adapted to suit local tastes by adding a stir-fried minced pork chilli paste. The name *nam ngiao* is derived from *dok ngiao* (red silk-cotton flower), an essential ingredient in the broth.

Nam ngiao has a deep-red broth, uniquely fragrant with roasted *thua nao,* a crucial ingredient. Pork ribs, minced pork, pork or chicken blood, *Si Da* tomatoes, and dried red silk-cotton flowers are simmered together with chilli paste containing grilled *thua nao* until rich and infused. The broth is thus distinctly robust, with a balance of saltiness, spiciness, and slight sourness from the tomatoes. It is traditionally served with *khanom chin* (fermented rice noodles), accompanied by pickled mustard greens, raw bean sprouts, shredded cabbage, fried dried chillies, fried garlic, lime, and either *khaep mu* or *nang pong* (crispy buffalo crackling).

In terms of nutritional value, red silk-cotton flowers are a good source of dietary fibre that supports digestive health, while pork blood is rich in iron for healthy blood formation. These are complemented by vitamins and antioxidants from the tomatoes and fresh accompanying vegetables, making *khanom chin nam ngiao* a well-rounded dish in terms of history, flavour, and nutrition.



Pork

***Khao Kan Chin* (Steamed Pork Blood Rice),** or *khao ngiao,* is a traditional dish influenced by the Tai people. Historically, the Lanna people referred to the Tai as Ngiao. The word *kan* refers to kneading, pressing, and squeezing the rice, while *chin* means meat; hence the name vividly describes the preparation method.

Cooked rice is mixed with fresh pork blood, minced pork, and seasonings, then wrapped in banana leaves and steamed until cooked. The finished rice takes on a deep brown colour and a soft texture, with a rich, savoury flavour complemented by the distinctive fragrance of heated banana leaves. It is commonly served with fried garlic, sliced shallots, fried dried chillies, and fresh vegetables. *Khao kan chin* is traditionally wrapped as a portable meal for working in the fields and orchards, as it is easy to prepare and carry, while retaining its flavour throughout the day.

Nutritionally, *khao kan chin* is rich in iron from pork blood, which contributes to healthy blood formation and helps prevent iron deficiency. It also provides protein from minced pork, along with herbs such as garlic and shallots, which are traditionally valued for relieving flatulence and supporting the immune system. However, as the dish contains pork blood, it can be relatively high in cholesterol and sodium, so it is best enjoyed with caution as part of a balanced diet.





Khao Soi **(Northern Thai Curry Noodles)** is a beloved dish and icon of Chiang Mai, yet widely spread throughout Northern Thailand, including Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Lamphun, and Lampang provinces. The dish exemplifies ancient fusion-food wisdom, the result of cultural exchanges among Yunnanese (known locally as Haw Chinese), Burmese, and Lanna peoples along historic trade routes. It was hence traditionally known as *kuaitiao Haw* (Haw noodles) or *khao soi Haw.*

Its defining feature is the combination of two types of noodles in a single bowl. The first is the perfectly cooked soft, flat egg noodles served in a rich coconut curry broth infused with curry powder and aromatic herbs, and the second is the topped crispy fried noodles that add texture to the dish. It is commonly made with chicken or beef, with pork used in some localities. *Khao soi* is traditionally served with accompaniments that cut through the richness of the curry, including pickled mustard greens, sliced shallots, fresh lime, and fried chilli oil.

Khao soi benefits from a range of Thai and Chinese herbs and spices, including shallots, turmeric, and dried chillies, which are traditionally valued for supporting digestion, relieving flatulence, and soothing cold symptoms.



***Khaotom Hua Ngok* (Sticky Rice Dumpling with Banana and Peanut),** also known as *khaotom thua din,* is an ancient traditional Lanna sweet that is particularly popular in Nan and Phayao provinces. The distinctive name *hua ngok,* meaning white-haired head, comes from the white strands of grated coconut mixed with salt sprinkled over the dessert, resembling grey hair. The dessert is thus closely associated with merit-making traditions, particularly *Tan Kuai Salak (Salak Phat)* Festival, an important Buddhist merit-making ceremony in Northern Thailand. However, it is also commonly prepared as a household snack due to its ease of preparation and the availability of local ingredients.

To prepare, sticky rice is mixed with salt and either peanuts (known locally as *thua din*) or black beans. The mixture is then wrapped in banana leaves with ripe *kluai Namwa* (Thai banana) to form triangular parcels or tied in pairs before being boiled until tender. The banana-leaf wrapping is removed before serving, and the dumplings are sprinkled with or tossed in grated coconut.

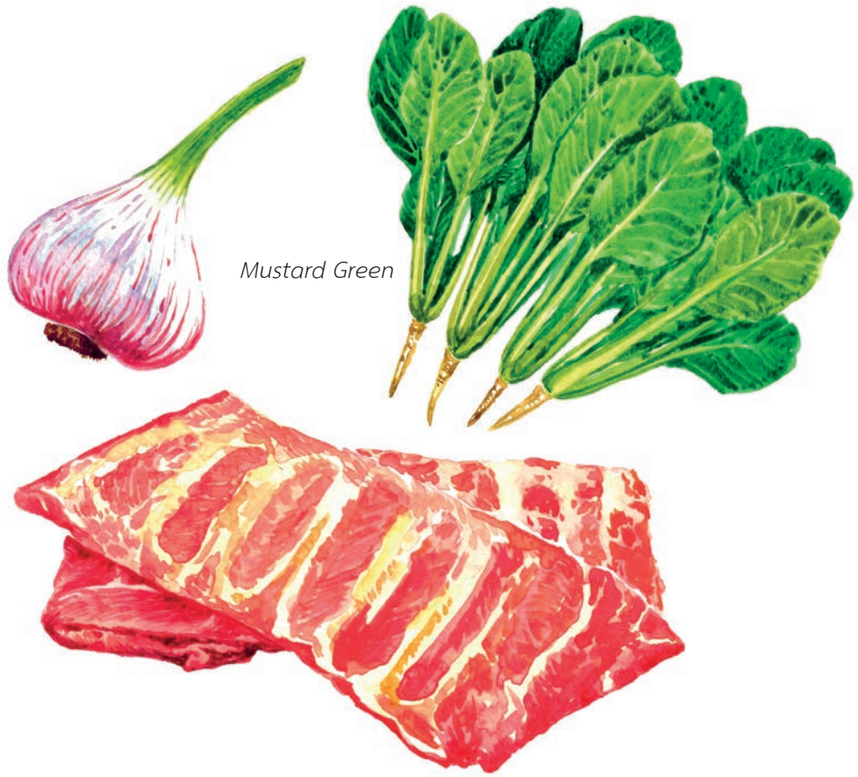
Khaotom hua ngok is not overly sweet, yet rich in the aroma and creaminess of coconut, the nutty crunch of peanuts, and the naturally juicy sweetness of ripe *Namwa* bananas. Therefore, *khaotom hua ngok* is an energy-rich dessert that provides healthy fats from coconut and peanuts, while *Namwa* bananas, high in dietary fibre, support healthy digestion and bowel function.





***Khao Nuk Nga* (Sticky Rice with Perilla Seed),** or *khao nuk nga khimon,* is a traditional Lanna snack commonly prepared during the cool season after the harvest. The word *nuk* in the northern Thai dialect means to knead, mix, or combine, reflecting the simple agricultural way of life and local wisdom. The dish is made from freshly harvested sticky rice, steamed until hot, then kneaded and mixed with roasted and pounded perilla seeds and salt. It is then shaped into brownish-grey round or flattened cakes. It has a chewy texture and a mild, savoury flavour with a rich, nutty aroma that is suitable for enjoying as a breakfast or comforting snack during the cool season. It is also a dish that represents the community's generosity, as local people traditionally prepare it to share among the neighbours.

Sticky rice provides lasting satiety and is a good source of energy, while perilla seeds are rich in healthy fats and omega-3, omega-6, and omega-9 fatty acids, which help support brain health and maintain healthy blood lipid levels. They are also a good source of protein and calcium, contributing to strong bones and teeth. Hence, *khao nuk nga* is truly a simple, delicious, yet significant in nutritional value.



***Cho Phakkat* (Mustard Green Soup)** is an ancient northern Thai dish that reflects the wisdom of food preservation and the thoughtful use of seasonal ingredients. The word *cho* in the local dialect refers to a cooking method in which vegetables are boiled in water until tender. The dish originated from the simple, frugal way of life of past communities. *Phakkat jon,* or flowering Chinese mustard greens, are easy to grow at home and produce abundant crops during the cool season. Lanna communities therefore traditionally boil the greens with pork ribs.

The distinctive flavour of *cho phakkat* comes from tamarind juice (or fresh tamarind), which provides a well-balanced sweet-and-sour note. Roasted *thua nao,* shrimp paste, or fermented fish can also be added. It is traditionally enjoyed with hot sticky rice and fried dried chillies. Beyond being an everyday household dish, *cho phakkat* is also commonly offered to monks, making it part of Lanna cultural traditions.

In terms of health benefits, *phakkat jon* is rich in dietary fibre, supporting healthy digestion and bowel function. It also provides vitamins and minerals that support eye health, as well as high calcium content that contributes to strong bones and helps prevent osteoporosis. Importantly, it is a low-fat dish, making it an excellent choice for those seeking a wholesome meal while still being able to enjoy the traditional flavours of northern Thai cuisine.







***Tam Khanun* (Young Jackfruit Salad),** known in northern Thai dialect as *tam ba nun,* is an ancient dish rich in flavour and auspicious symbolism. Because the word *khanun* (jackfruit) sounds similar to *nun,* which means to support or uplift, the Lanna people regard it as an auspicious dish. It is traditionally prepared during important festivals, particularly *Wan Sangkharn Long* and Songkran *(Pi Mai Mueang),* as a symbolic blessing for a year filled with support, prosperity, and good fortune.

The dish is prepared by slicing young jackfruit crosswise and boiling it until tender. It is then pounded together with a chilli paste made from dried chillies, shallots, garlic, shrimp paste, and galangal. The mixture is then stir-fried with minced pork or pork crackling until fragrant and well-balanced, combining savoury richness and moderate spiciness. *Tam khanun* is traditionally enjoyed with hot sticky rice, crispy pork cracklings, and fried dried chillies.

Young jackfruit is particularly high in dietary fibre, supporting healthy digestion and bowel function. It is also rich in beta-carotene and antioxidants, and helps support intestinal health while providing a good source of energy. However, as the dish is stir-fried in oil and prepared with minced pork or pork crackling, it is best enjoyed in moderation as part of a balanced diet to help maintain healthy fat levels.



***Tam Makhuea* (Grilled Eggplant Relish),** called *tam ba khuea* by the northern Thais, is a popular traditional dish that reflects the simple way of life and self-sufficiency of northern Thai communities. Its main ingredient, *makhuea* (Thai eggplant), is usually grown in home gardens along fences.

The Thai eggplants (or aubergine) are slowly grilled over charcoal until tender and fragrant, then the skin is peeled. The flesh is pounded together with roasted *phrik num,* shallots, garlic, shrimp paste, and cooked fermented fish until well combined. Many families also briefly stir-fry the mixture in oil to enhance its aroma and round out the flavour. It is traditionally served with hot sticky rice, crispy pork cracklings, and boiled eggs, which contrast with the relish's heat.

Nutritionally, *tam ba khuea* is a wholesome dish, as eggplant is rich in essential vitamins and minerals, particularly potassium, vitamins A and C, and antioxidants that help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, support eye health, and contribute to overall well-being.





***Namphrik Kha* (Galangal Chilli Paste)** is a traditional staple chilli paste of Lanna cuisine, particularly popular in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Phrae provinces. It is commonly served with *chin nueng* (steamed beef, pork, or buffalo meat), as well as steamed mushrooms and an assortment of boiled vegetables. The dish originated from local culinary wisdom that made use of locally abundant mature galangal to create a dry chilli paste served alongside meats at traditional merit-making ceremonies, helping cut through the richness of the meat.

Namphrik kha is a fried yet slightly moist chilli paste, which allows it to be stored longer without losing its flavour. The paste is made by pounding mature galangal, roasted dried chillies, shallots, garlic, shrimp paste, and *makhwaen* (northern Thai Sichuan pepper), a signature northern Thai spice. The result is a hot, spicy flavour with a gentle tingling sensation on the tip of the tongue and an aromatic fragrance of roasted herbs and spices.



Namphrik Ta Daeng **(Red Chilli Paste)** is a charming traditional northern Thai dish that takes its name from the vivid red colour of roasted dried chillies pounded into a fine paste with an intensely spicy and savoury flavour, illustrating a characteristic of Lanna cuisine. Unlike many chilli relishes from central Thailand, it is traditionally not sweetened. The burst of fragrance of *namphrik ta daeng* comes from roasted herbs—garlic and shallots—combined with the umami of fermented fish, dried fish, and *thua nao* (fermented bean disk) or grilled shrimp paste. Some may add slight sourness from tamarind or olives to complement the flavour.

The dish is commonly served as part of a *khan tok* feast, along with hot sticky rice and fresh or boiled vegetables, which pair perfectly with crispy pork crackling or grilled fish. Beyond its bold flavour, this dish reflects the refined traditional food preservation method, using available ingredients to create a chilli paste that can be stored over an extended period.

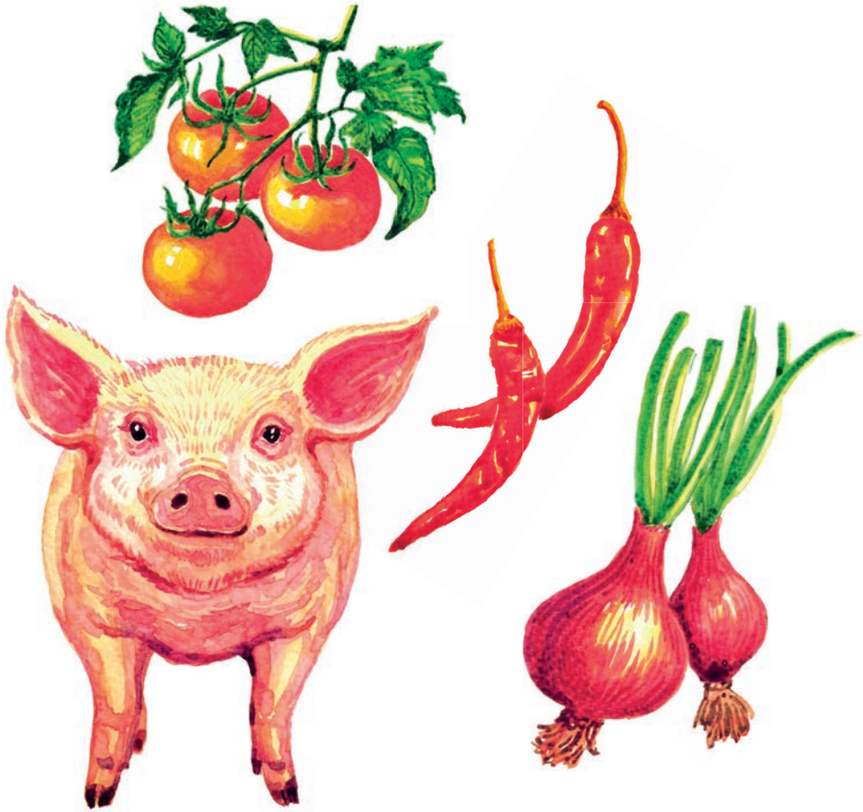
Nutritionally, *namphrik ta daeng* can stimulate the appetite, is rich in antioxidants from dried chillies, and can support the body's element balance. A simple dish deeply rooted in northern Thai culinary heritage passed down through generations.



***Namphrik Num - Khaep Mu* (Green Chilli Dip and Crispy Pork Crackling),** a beloved pair of staples in traditional Lanna cuisine, has become an iconic local souvenir of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Lamphun provinces. Together, they reflect the simple way of life and the bond between communities and local ingredients. Although there is no concrete record of its exact origins, *namphrik num* has long been regarded as one of the traditional chilli relishes enjoyed by northern Thai people across generations.

The heart of this dish is *phrik num* (northern Thai green chilli), large spur green chillies that have not yet fully ripened. They are roasted over a low flame with shallots and garlic until fragrant with a subtle smoky aroma. The skins are then removed, and the ingredients are roughly pounded together for a vibrant green dip. The flavour is moderately spicy and pleasantly savoury. It is traditionally paired with *khaep mu,* crispy, puffy, golden-brown fried pork rinds, along with hot sticky rice, fresh vegetables, and steamed vegetables.

Namphrik num is a low-energy, almost fat-free dip, rich in capsaicin from phrik num, which helps stimulate metabolism, relieve flatulence, and support the body's elements. Roasted shallots and garlic provide antioxidants and are traditionally valued for supporting the immune system, while the accompanying vegetables add fibre and may help moderate the absorption of cholesterol from the pork crackling.

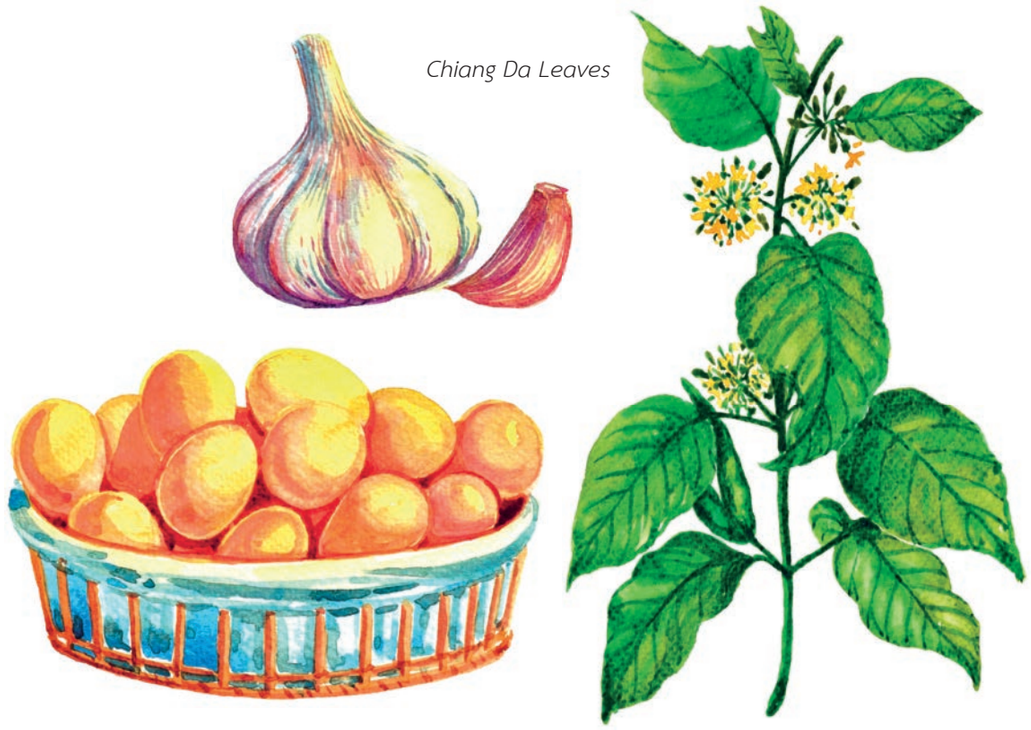


***Namphrik Ong* (Tomato and Pork Chilli Dip),** a traditional Lanna chilli dip with a long history, reflects the northern Thai tradition of eating dishes alongside vegetables and also bears the influence of Burmese and Yunnanese culinary traditions.

The word *ong* refers to the slow-simmering cooking method over low heat until the mixture thickens and reduces, with the oil naturally separating. *Namphrik ong* is thus made by simmering finely minced pork with *Si Da* tomatoes, creating an appealing orange-red colour. Its flavour is mildly spicy, with a gentle tang and sweetness from the tomatoes. Shrimp paste and grilled *thua nao* add umami, while aromatic herbs provide a fragrant finish. It is commonly served as part of a *khan tok* feast, whether welcoming guests and visitors or during traditional merit-making celebrations throughout Northern Thailand. It is enjoyed with fresh and steamed vegetables, as well as crispy pork cracklings.

Nutritionally, *namphrik ong* is considered another wholesome dish. Heating and simmering tomatoes releases lycopene, an antioxidant that is more readily absorbed by the body, combined with protein from pork and the traditional benefits of shallots and garlic—aiding digestion and relieving flatulence.





***Phak Chiang Da Phat Khai* (Stir-fried *Chiang Da* Leaves with Egg)** is a simple traditional Lanna dish that reflects the uncomplicated way of life of northern Thai communities, where vegetables grown around the home are often gathered and turned into everyday meals. Its main ingredient is the tip of *phak chiang da* (gymnema), a climbing vine commonly found in the wild and along household fences. The leaves have a mildly bitter taste with a subtle sweetness, making them easy to enjoy. They are stir-fried with garlic, shallots, and chicken eggs, along with tomatoes to enhance the colour and balance the flavour. Beyond stir-frying with egg, northern Thai people commonly use *phak chiang da* in *kaeng pla haeng* and *kaeng khae,* or serve it as a blanched vegetable accompaniment to various chilli relishes.

From a nutritional and medicinal perspective, *phak chiang da* is considered a highly beneficial herb and has earned the nickname 'diabetes vegetable'. It contains compounds such as gymnemic acid, which reduce sugar absorption in the intestines and support pancreatic health. It is also rich in vitamin C and antioxidants, and is traditionally considered cooling, helping to reduce internal heat and relieve fever. Its high fibre content also supports healthy digestion and bowel function.



Yam Kai **or** ***Yam Chin Kai*** **(Chicken Salad)** —with *chin* meaning meat in the local dialect— is a traditional dish rooted in local rituals and beliefs. Its origins can be traced to the practice of turning boiled free-range chicken used in ancestral offerings or dry-season merit-making ceremonies into a new dish to prevent food waste, reflecting the Lanna people's simple way of life and wit in making the most of ingredients.

The dish features boiled free-range chicken shredded into pieces and tossed with *phrik larb mueang* (northern Thai chilli paste) made from dried chillies, shrimp paste, and toasted spices. Young banana blossom, *phak phai* (Vietnamese coriander), culantro, and kaffir lime leaves contribute to the dish's layers and distinctive aromas. The result is a brownish-red watery salad with a bold spiciness, followed by savoury and sour notes, rounded by the fragrance of toasted spices.

Yam chin kai is high in protein from the free-range chicken and low in fat, while the variety of herbs in the *phrik larp* and accompanying local vegetables also provide additional benefits such as aiding digestion, stimulating metabolism, and relieving flatulence. These ingredients thus make *yam chin kai* a dish that brings together cultural heritage, flavour, and nutritional value.





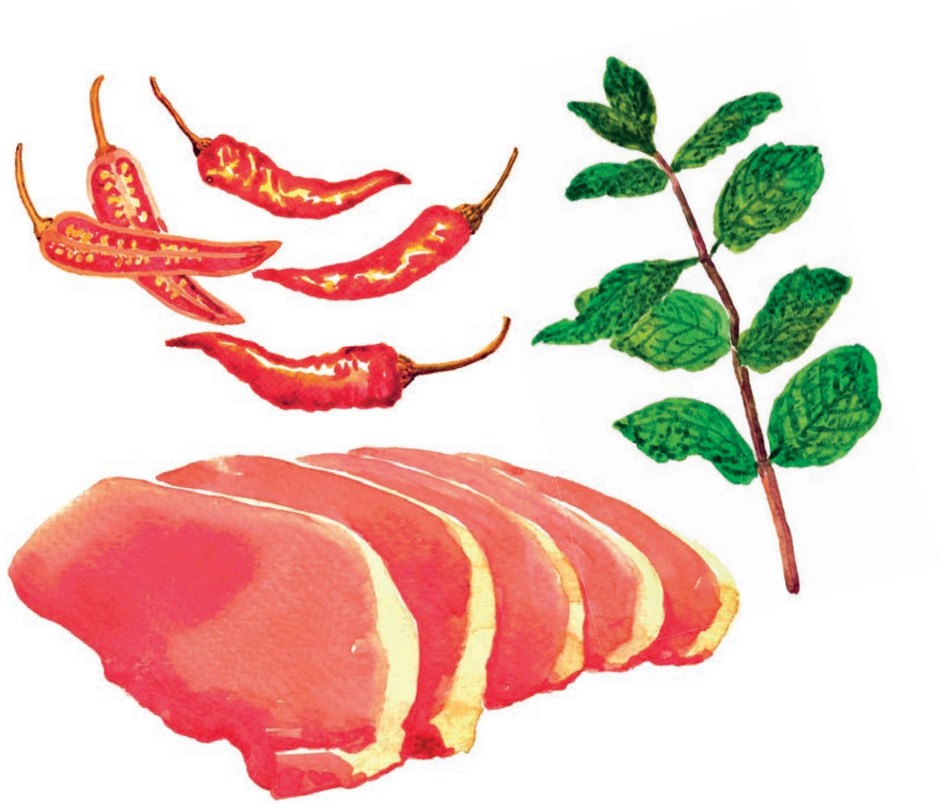
Buffalo skin





***Yam Nang (Kwai)* (Buffalo Skin Salad)** is a traditional Lanna dish that reflects the frugal way of life and resourcefulness of farmers in the past, where buffalo skin from butchery is carefully prepared and preserved to be stored for later consumption. The key is the meticulous preparation of the skin: roasted over an open fire, then scraped clean to remove the hair before being simmered for more than four hours until the once-thick and tough skin becomes tender and chewable. It is then tossed with a robust northern Thai chilli paste made from dried chillies, shallots, garlic, galangal, lemongrass, and shrimp paste, topped with crispy fried garlic for fragrance. The dish is spicy and savoury, with a well-rounded flavour and the rich aroma of toasted herbs.

Simmered buffalo skin is a natural source of collagen, which helps support healthy skin, joints, and bones. Combined with the benefits of herbs such as galangal, lemongrass, and shallots in the paste—which relieve flatulence, ease bloating, and support the immune system—*yam nang,* a rare local delicacy, is truly Lanna's precious culinary heritage.



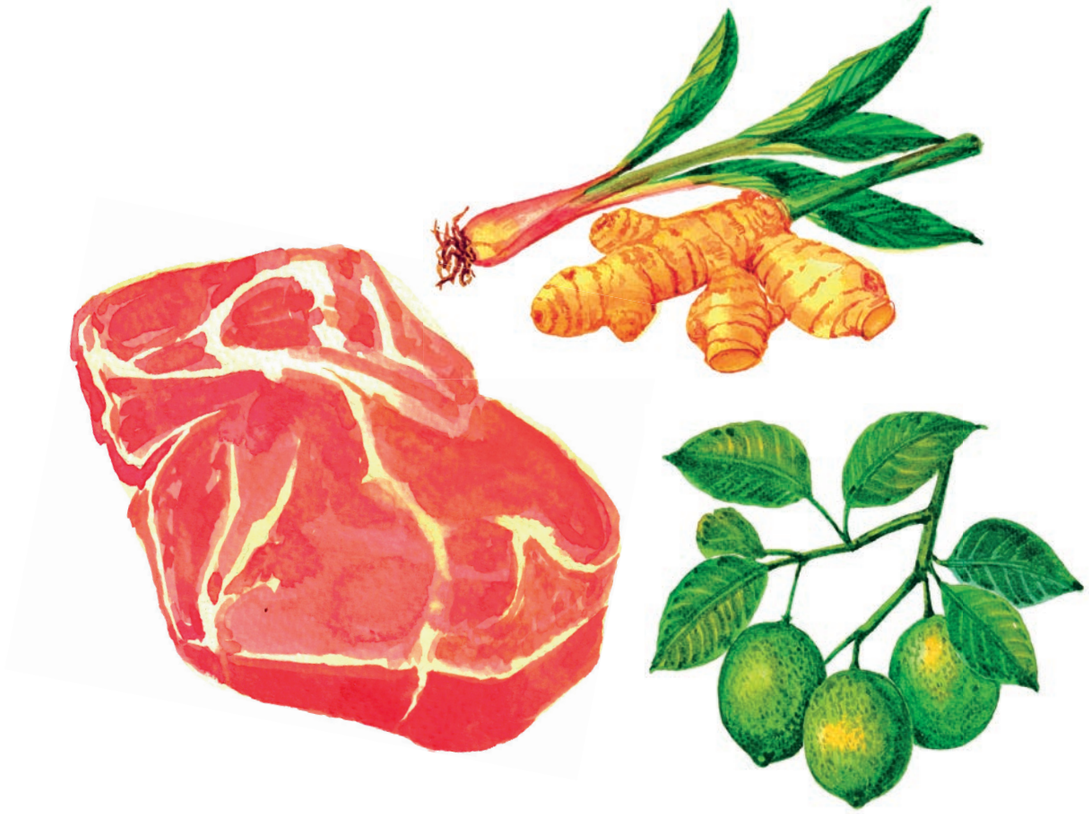
***Larb Khua* (Northern Thai Minced Meat Salad)** is an ancient northern Thai dish that reflects a culture of communal gathering and belief in auspiciousness. The word *larb,* similar to *laap* (which means fortune or good luck in Thai), led the Lanna people to believe that eating *larb* would bring smoothness, prosperity, and good fortune to life. In the past, *larb khua* was especially prepared for merit-making ceremonies, traditional festivals, and gatherings to welcome important guests, as it required cooperation among community members to prepare and chop meat from large animals such as pork, beef, or buffalo, and to season and cook it. Therefore, *larb khua* became a dish that beautifully mirrored the spirit of community and solidarity.

Larb khua is made with finely minced meat, including offal and pork or pork skin, then mixed with *phrik larb,* a northern spice blend containing 10 to 20 herbs and spices, such as *makhwaen,* long pepper, and cloves. The mixture is then dry-fried until fragrant, resulting in a spicy, aromatic flavour with a gentle tingling sensation on the tip of the tongue, a distinctive character that clearly sets it apart from northeastern Thai *larb.*

Beyond its flavour and high protein content, the wide variety of spices in *phrik larb* also offers traditional medicinal benefits, including helping to relieve flatulence, ease bloating, and support the body's immune system.







Larb Mu Dip **(Northern Thai Raw Pork Salad),** also known as *larb mueang,* is a traditional Lanna dish commonly prepared for merit-making ceremonies, traditional festivals, and other special occasions by combining local spices and the tradition of eating raw meat. Its preparation has traditionally served as a focal point for community gatherings, as making *larb mueang* requires the labour and cooperation of many people—from chopping the meat and roasting the *phrik larb* to preparing the ingredients—and thus reflects the strong bonds of community and solidarity.

The finest cuts of fresh pork are selected for *larb mu dip.* They are finely minced and mixed with fresh pork blood and cooked offal, such as pork skin, liver, and intestines. The mixture is then combined with *phrik larb,* the aromatic blend of local herbs and spices that is the heart of the dish. In particular, *makhwaen* provides its characteristic spicy, tingling sensation, complemented by long pepper and ground chillies. The result is a smooth-textured *larb* with a well-balanced, warming flavour and a distinctive herbal aroma.

The wide variety of herbs and spices in *phrik larb,* including *makhwaen,* cloves, and nutmeg, have traditionally been valued for their medicinal properties. They are believed to help relieve flatulence, support the body's elements, ease bloating, and stimulate digestion.



***Sai Ua* (Northern Thai Sausage)** is an ancient food deeply rooted in Lanna culture with a long history dating back to the 13th – 18th centuries. The word *ua* in the local dialect refers to stuffing or filling meat. The dish originated from the ingenious food-preservation practices of northern Thai communities, who combined minced pork and pork fat with an intensely aromatic chilli paste made from galangal, lemongrass, shallots, garlic, turmeric, dried chillies, and kaffir lime leaves. The mixture is then stuffed into pork intestines and slowly grilled over charcoal until thoroughly cooked, dry, and fragrant. This dry-grilling method not only helps eliminate the meat's gamey odour but also extends its shelf life, making *sai ua* easy to carry and reheat to enjoy with hot sticky rice.

Sai ua is more than an everyday food. It is also an important dish at merit-making ceremonies and traditional festivals, as well as a staple in the *khan tok* feasts served to welcome guests and visitors. Nutritionally, *sai ua* is a high-energy food containing protein and fat, complemented by the benefits of fresh herbs and spices. Turmeric is traditionally valued for supporting digestive health, while galangal and lemongrass are believed to help relieve flatulence and bloating. Kaffir lime leaves are also valued for supporting heart health while contributing a refreshing fragrance.

Central Charm: Culinary Artistry of the Chao Phraya Basin

Stretching across the Chao Phraya River basin at the heart of Thailand, including Bangkok, this land has long been known as the country's 'rice bowl'. Its abundance of grains, vegetables, freshwater fish, and seasonal fruits has provided exceptional ingredients that have sustained communities and shaped its culinary culture embedded with refinement and meticulous care. The complexity of spices and the layers of flavour of central Thai cuisine are the products of centuries of cultural exchange dating back to the Ayutthaya period. Trade and interaction with neighbouring and distant polities introduced a diverse range of influences, from the coconut milk and spices from India to Chinese techniques such as wok cooking, stir-frying, deep-frying, and noodle-making. As these influences merged with the refined culinary traditions of the royal court, central Thai cuisine was elevated into an art form of exceptional cultural value, with harmonious and balanced flavours that bring together sour, sweet, salty, and spicy notes.



The characteristic of central Thai cuisine is exemplified by *tom yum kung,* which combines galangal, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, and rich shrimp fat for an extraordinary flavour. The dish has gained international recognition and was inscribed by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Another beloved staple, *phat kaphrao,* has also captured the hearts of diners around the world. Its distinctive character comes from the eight herbs and aromatics—holy basil, bird's eye chilli, garlic, pepper, galangal, lemongrass, shallots, and kaffir lime leaves. Another defining feature of central Thai cuisine is its use of seasonal ingredients. Fresh river fish, home-grown vegetables, and local fruits are creatively transformed into dishes. This culinary refinement can be seen in techniques such as slowly simmering stocks, reducing coconut milk until it releases its natural oils, and precisely controlling heat to draw out the full aromas and flavours of Thai herbs and spices.

The heart of central Thai food culture lies in the tradition of a meal set or *samrap.* Steamed rice is the centre of the meal, accompanied by a variety of dishes ranging from curries (or soups) and stir-fries to spicy salads and chilli dips, offering a flavourful meal with dishes that complement one another. This culinary art exemplifies the thoughtful pairing of side dishes and accompaniments, as seen in *namphrik long ruea,* traditionally served with sweet pork, crispy shredded catfish, salted egg, and an assortment of local vegetables. The presentation of food and the delicate art of fruit and vegetable carving elevate the meal even further.

The accumulated culinary wisdom and heritage over centuries demonstrate that each dish represents far more than a collection of recipes or ingredients. It is a living record of history, knowledge, and culinary artistry passed down through generations and a source of pride in Thailand's cultural identity.



25 Central Thai Dishes





***Kaeng Khiao Wan Kai* (Green Chicken Curry)** is a coconut-based curry that is widely enjoyed in Thailand. In 2025, it was ranked among the 100 Best Foods in the World by TasteAtlas. It is a traditional Thai dish with a bold flavour believed to have originated during the reigns of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) to King Prajadhipok (Rama VII), based on two important historical sources: the revised edition of *Maekhrua Hua Pa* and *Khumue Maekhrua,* published in 1926.

The main ingredient is chicken, cooked in a curry made entirely from Thai herbs such as Thai sweet basil, kaffir lime leaves, Thai eggplants, and pea eggplants. The name *khiao wan* (sweet green) refers to the curry's pale green colour, which comes primarily from green spur chillies and green bird's eye chillies blended with coconut milk. Its flavour is spicy, followed by salty, creamy, and slightly sweet notes from coconut sugar and rich coconut milk. Eggplants or coconut crown may be added. The curry is commonly served with steamed rice or fermented rice noodles. It is also a popular main dish prepared for merit-making ceremonies.

The curry paste contains beneficial herbs such as galangal, lemongrass, and shallot, which can help relieve flatulence, support the digestive system, and promote blood circulation. Pea eggplant and Thai sweet basil provide fibre that aids digestion, while green chillies contain vitamin C that supports eye health and the immune system. Coconut milk also contains beneficial fatty acids that the body can use as a source of energy.



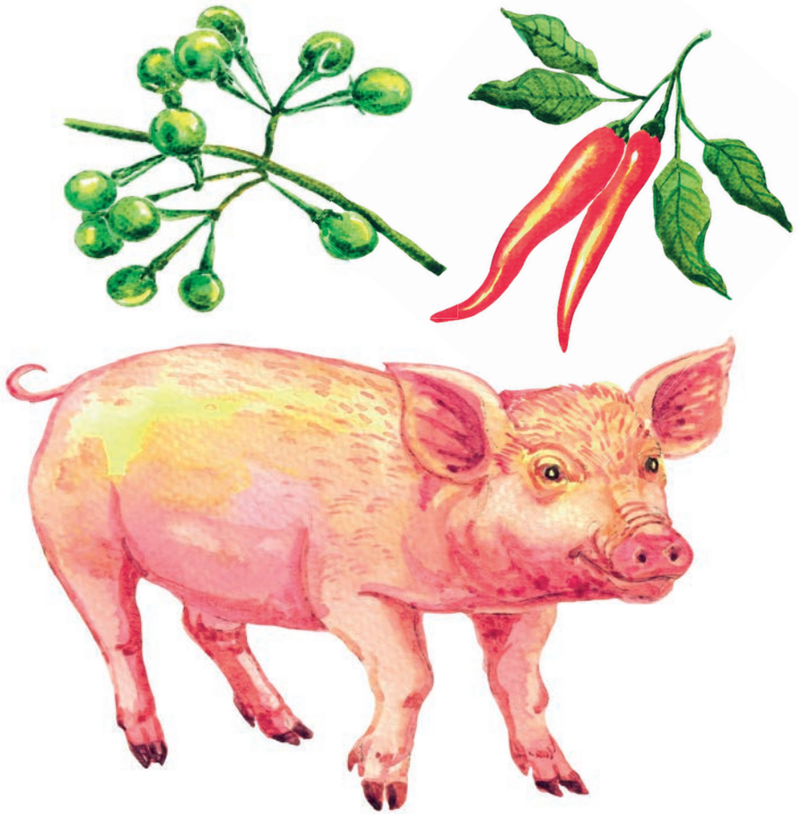


Potatoes

***Kaeng Massaman Kai* (Massaman Chicken Curry)** ranked first in the world's 50 best foods in 2021 by CNN Travel. The dish has been influenced by Melayu and Persian cuisines and is believed to have been introduced to Thailand by Persian Muslims, or *khaek chao sen,* during the Ayutthaya period. The name *massaman* is presumed to be derived from the Persian word *Musulman,* meaning Muslims.

The original recipe was predominantly salty and rich, but after being adapted into Thai culinary culture, it has evolved into a distinctive Thai style. The curry has a deep orange or reddish-brown colour from slowly simmering coconut cream with curry paste. It is characterised by the fragrant aroma of spices, including coriander seeds, cumin seeds, nutmeg, mace, cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon. The main ingredients are chicken or beef, potatoes, onions, and peanuts, creating a curry that is rich, creamy, salty, sweet, and slightly sour from tamarind paste.

Kaeng massaman is a nutritious dish that provides high energy and protein from chicken. Cinnamon helps improve blood circulation, relieve bloating and flatulence, and help reduce blood sugar levels. Clove helps relieve flatulence, while cumin seed is traditionally valued for supporting the digestive system.



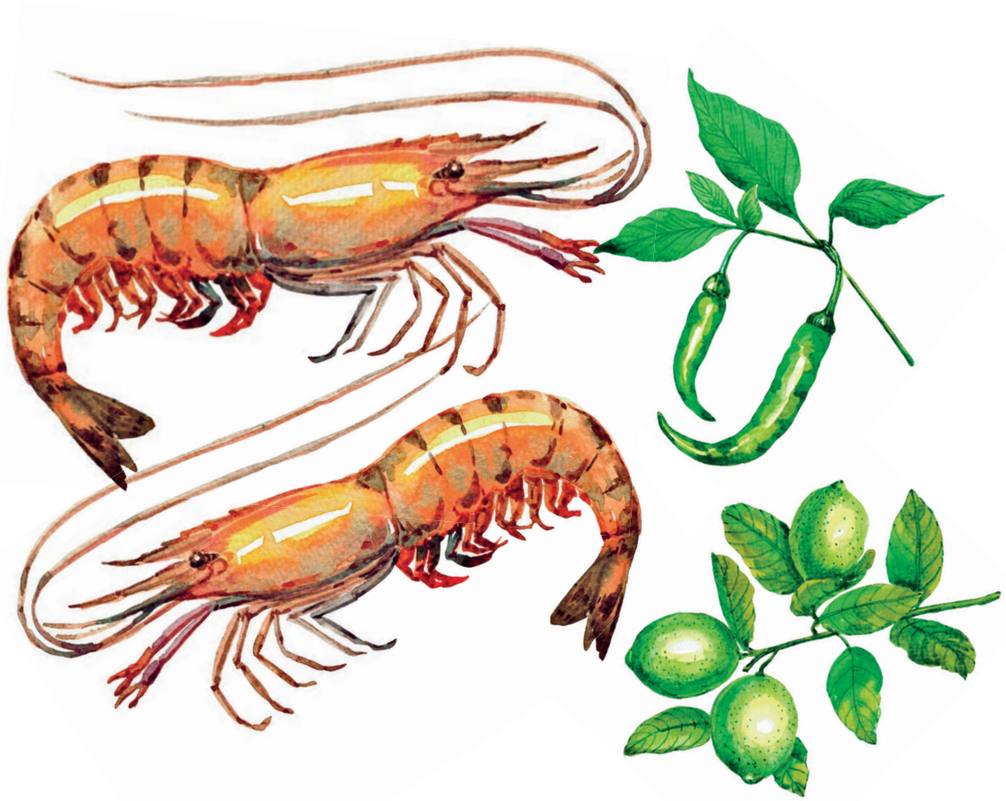
Kaeng Phanaeng Mu **(Phanaeng Pork Curry)** is a rich Thai curry ranked as the world's best curry and stew by TasteAtlas in 2023. *Phanaeng* curry reflects the influence of Indian spices, such as coriander seeds, cumin, and cinnamon, combined with local ingredients to suit Thai tastes.

The earliest record of *phanaeng* dates to the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) in *Tamra Kap Khao,* a recipe book by Mhom Somchin Rachanupraphan, published in 1890. The book records a dish called *kai phanaeng,* consisting of grilled chicken topped with curry paste and coconut milk.

The curry has a thick consistency, with a predominantly salty taste followed by sweetness, the rich aroma of coconut milk, and a mild spiciness. Today, the main ingredients typically are thinly sliced pork or pork loin, and curry paste made from dried chillies, galangal, lemongrass, coriander root, garlic, shallots, shrimp paste, and a blend of spices. A generous amount of thick coconut cream is used to achieve its characteristic richness. The dish is garnished with finely sliced kaffir lime leaves and diagonally sliced red spur chillies.

Phanaeng mu is high in protein, while its herbs help relieve flatulence, ease bloating, and support digestion. It is therefore best enjoyed in moderation and served with fresh vegetables to increase dietary fibre.





***Kung Maenam Phao* (Grilled River Prawns)** is one of Thailand's most popular dishes, renowned for the freshness, natural flavour of the prawn, as well as the rich, creamy flavour of the prawn fat. Large freshwater prawns with hard, translucent shells, firm flesh, and a dark blue or bluish-green colour, commonly found in the rivers of Central Thailand, are typically selected. The prawns are split along the back, deveined, and grilled over a charcoal fire using medium heat to keep the flesh firm, succulent, and naturally sweet.

The distinctive feature of this dish is the rich, intense flavour of orange prawn fat. When served with steamed rice and spicy seafood dipping sauce, it became one of Thailand's signature dishes and a culinary symbol of Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province.

In addition to its outstanding flavour, *kung maenam phao* is an excellent source of high-quality protein, and the meat is low in fat, which helps support muscle growth and repair. It is also rich in calcium, phosphorus, and magnesium, contributing to healthy bones and teeth. It also contains omega-3 fatty acids that support brain and eye health, as well as selenium and zinc, two essential minerals that help strengthen the immune system and promote healthy hair.



***Kaeng Som* (Sour Curry)** is a traditional Thai curry that has long been a staple of Thai home cooking. It is prepared using locally available ingredients, such as home-grown vegetables and freshwater fish. The curry is simple to make with pounded curry paste. Unlike coconut-based curries, the broth is clear and contains neither coconut milk nor oil. Pounded fish—snakehead fish, sea bass, gourami, or even prawns—is added to the curry paste to give the broth a rich texture, along with a variety of vegetables —such as Chinese cabbage, *dok khae* (vegetable hummingbird), green papaya, morning glory, and lotus stems. The curry has a reddish-orange colour derived from dried chillies and fish, distinguishing it from its southern Thai cousin, *kaeng lueang* (yellow sour curry), which uses turmeric. Its flavour is predominantly sour from tamarind, followed by spicy, salty, and slightly sweet notes.

Kaeng som reflects the Thai traditional way of preparing meals with vegetables grown in home gardens or along waterways. It is thus a healthy Thai dish that is low in fat but high in dietary fibre, helping to support digestive health. Ingredients such as shallots, dried chillies, and shrimp paste also help strengthen the immune system and protect against illnesses such as seasonal colds.





***Khai Phalo* (Five-Spice Braised Egg and Pork Belly Soup)** is a dish of Chinese origin. The word *phalo* is believed to derive from the Hokkien Chinese word *pha-lo* or the Teochew Chinese word *pha-lou.* Originally, it referred to a method of braising meat with salt, soy sauce, and Chinese spices. After being introduced to Thailand, it became a popular home-cooked dish, with the recipe adapted to suit Thai tastes.

The boiled eggs and pork belly are slowly simmered in dark soy sauce and palm sugar until they are brown. The dish is characterised by the harmony of sweet and salty flavours, together with the aroma of *phalo* spices, including cinnamon, cloves, star anise, black pepper, and coriander seeds. The main ingredients are boiled eggs—traditionally duck eggs, which have a firmer texture than chicken eggs—pork belly, and tofu.

Khai phalo is an everyday dish that is also nutritious, with a good source of protein. The egg and pork contribute protein and energy, while the spices help strengthen the body's vital elements, relieve abdominal discomfort, and aid digestion. However, it should be consumed in moderation, as it may be high in sodium and saturated fat.



Khao Khluk Kapi **(Shrimp Paste Fried Rice)** is a traditional Thai single-dish meal that brings together a variety of ingredients. It is prepared by stir-frying cooked rice with *kapi* (fermented shrimp paste) and serving with accompaniments. The overall flavour is a balance of sour, sweet, and salty tastes. The dish is believed to have evolved from *khao khluk pla duk yang* (rice mixed with grilled catfish). Shrimp paste itself reflects a method of food preservation, developed by fishing communities to ferment shrimp for long-term consumption.

The rice is traditionally made with aged Thai jasmine rice, which remains firm when stir-fried with shrimp paste. The rice then turns light brown, with a fragrant aroma, and a flavour that combines salty, sweet, sour, and spicy notes. Essential accompaniments include sweet pork, fried dried shrimp, shredded omelette, shredded green mango or *madan,* finely sliced shallots, sliced bird's eye chillies, cucumber, and lime.

Khao khluk kapi provides all five essential food groups. It is a source of calcium and vitamin B12, which help maintain healthy bones and teeth and reduce the risk of anaemia. Shallots have antibacterial properties, mangoes provide vitamin C, and cucumbers are believed to help relieve thirst.





***Khao Chae* (Scented Rice in Water with Assorted Savoury Accompaniments)** is a dish inherited from the Mon culinary tradition. Originally known in the Mon language as *poeng datch* (*poeng* means rice and *datch* means water), it was prepared as an offering to sacred beings, deities, ancestors, and Buddhist monks during the Songkran Festival. The dish was first adopted into Thai society during the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV) through the royal court by Chao Chom Manda Klin, who refined the dish by scenting it with Thai candle smoke.

The delicateness of *khao chae* lies in the care and attention given to every stage of preparation. The rice is carefully cooked and repeatedly rinsed to remove excess starch, providing translucent, separated grains that do not cloud the water. The rice is then immersed in chilled, fragrant water infused with the aromas of Thai flowers—such as jasmine, Mon rose, and *chommanat*—with ice to keep it cool. It is served with an assortment of savoury accompaniments, including fried shrimp paste balls, stuffed sweet peppers, stuffed shallots, sweet shredded dried beef, and stir-fried salted mustard greens.

Khao chae is perfectly suited to the hot season, as it is a refreshing and thirst-quenching meal that helps relieve body heat. It is also easy to digest and helps balance the body's internal temperature and provide freshness.



Pork

***Khao Tang Na Tang* (Crispy Rice Cracker with Coconut Pork Dip)** is a sweet and rich appetiser with a well-balanced flavour that reflects the culinary wisdom of earlier generations in using ingredients. The dish has a long history, mentioned in *Kap He Chom Khrueang Wang,* a royal composition by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI); it originated from dried cooked rice at the bottom of a pan that people did not wish to discard. The rice was scraped off into thin sheets, dried thoroughly in the sun, and deep-fried until puffed and crisp, called *khao tang.* It is served with *na tang,* a traditional dip similar to *lhon* (coconut milk chilli dip), made by simmering fresh coconut milk with minced pork, minced prawns (or crab meat), and ground roasted peanuts, and seasoned to be sweet, salty, and sour. The dish has traditionally been served as a welcoming snack for guests and visitors, even at stately occasions.

Khao tang na tang also provides nutritional benefits. The fried rice crackers provide energy, while *na tang* is rich in protein and beneficial fatty acids from peanuts and coconut milk. When topped with white or black sesame seeds, it provides vitamin B, calcium, phosphorus, and iron.







***Khao Niao Mamuang* (Mango Sticky Rice)** has no concrete evidence of its origin. Still, it is believed that the culinary practice of *mun,* or mixing sticky rice with coconut milk, dates back to the late Ayutthaya period. *Khao niao mun* was originally commonly eaten with kaya custard or dried fish before evolving into a dish served with seasonal ripe mangoes, as a solution to utilising the abundant produce during the hot season from March to May. It has since become a popular Thai sweet that has been passed down to the present day.

Khao niao mamuang is made by mixing *Khao Niao Kiao Ngu* sticky rice with fresh coconut milk, coconut or palm sugar, and salt until the rice are glossy and white. It is served with ripe *Nam Dok Mai* or *Ok Rong* mangoes, topped with lightly salted coconut cream and roasted golden mung beans, adding fragrance and a crunchy texture.

In addition to its wonderful flavour, *khao niao mamuang* contains high energy, making it a suitable dish for a quick energy boost. It also contains vitamins A, C, and E, as well as dietary fibre from mangoes, which help support eye health, skin, and digestion. With its distinctive flavour, *khao niao mamuang* has become an internationally popular Thai dessert and was ranked the second-best pudding in the world by TasteAtlas.



***Tom Kha Kai* (Coconut Galangal Chicken Soup)** is a classic Thai coconut soup defined by its balance of sour, salty, and creamy flavours, accompanied by the fragrant aroma of Thai herbs. The preparation is relatively simple, simmering galangal, lemongrass, and kaffir lime leaves in thin coconut milk with chicken and mushrooms. The soup is then seasoned before adding coconut cream and lime juice at the end to create a rich yet refreshing finish.

The dish balances flavours between the natural sweet creaminess of coconut milk, the acidity of lime or tamarind paste, the saltiness of fish sauce, and a gentle heat of bird's eye chillies. The aromatic combination of galangal, lemongrass, and kaffir lime leaves further enhances its appeal.

Tom kha kai is highly nutritious and offers health benefits, such as supporting intestinal well-being. Reflecting its distinct characteristics, TasteAtlas ranked the soup as the world's best chicken soup in 2023.







***Tom Yum Kung* (Spicy and Sour River Prawn Soup)** is one of Thailand's most renowned dishes, earning recognition for its distinct flavours. The dish features river prawns in either clear or creamy broth with evaporated milk, with the combination of sourness, spiciness, saltiness, and the fragrant aroma of Thai herbs such as galangal, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, chillies, and culantro, along with straw mushrooms or oyster mushrooms.

Tom yum kung has been in Thai cuisine for many generations. Evidence of the dish dates back to the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), in *Pathanukrom Kan Tham Khongkhao Khongwan Yang Farang Lae Siam* (1898) and later in *Maekhrua Hua Pa* (1908)—the cookbook by Lady Plian Bhaskarawongse.

In 2024, *tom yum kung* was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In 2025, it was recognised as one of CNN Travel's 20 best soups in the world and ranked fourth among the world's best seafood soups by the renowned food guide website TasteAtlas.

Tom yum kung is also valued for its health-promoting properties. It helps aid digestion, relieve cold symptoms and nasal congestion, reduce bloating, promote perspiration, support the body's fire element, and strengthen the immune system. Today, *tom yum kung* is a staple on the menus of Thai restaurants around the world and has become one of the most recognised Thai dishes internationally.

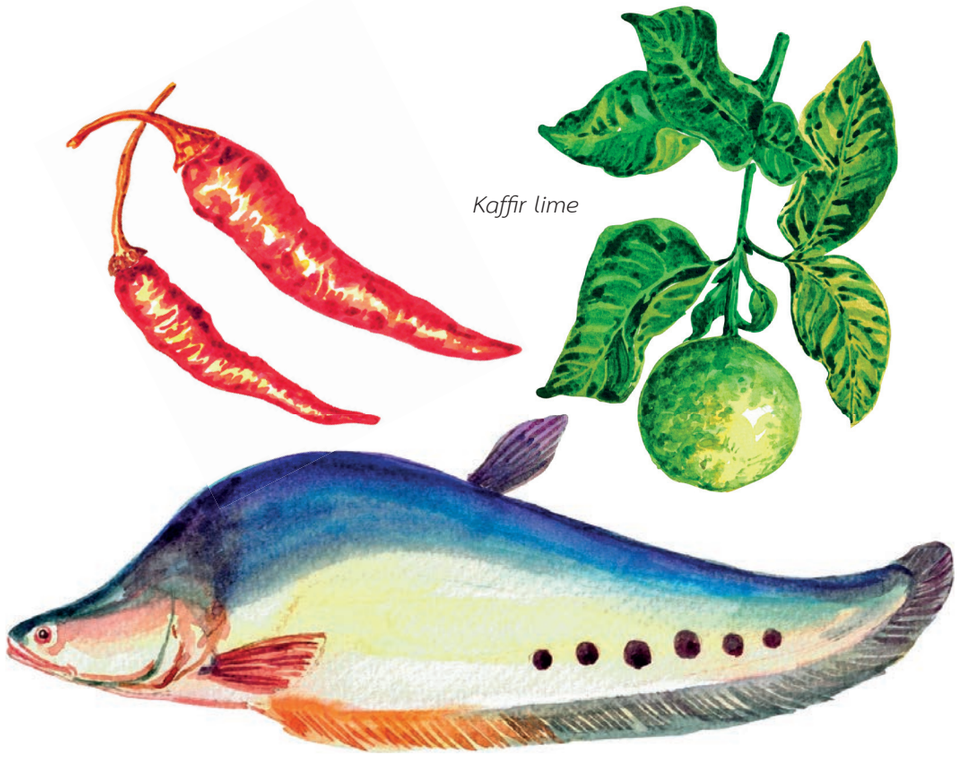


The *Thong* Family of Sweets - *Thong Yip, Thong Yot, Foi Thong,* and *Met Khanun* (Golden Egg Yolk Sweets) are the auspicious Thai sweets. They were influenced by Portuguese confectionery in the Ayutthaya period by Thao Thong Kip Ma (Marie Guimar), who adapted the knowledge of cooking egg yolks and sugar, which were commonly used in savoury Portuguese dishes, for sweets. By adjusting the flavours to suit Thai tastes, they subsequently became a cultural heritage passed down to the present day.

The four auspicious sweets—*thong yip, thong yot, foi thong,* and *met khanun*—are all primarily made from egg yolks and sugar. The word *thong,* meaning gold, symbolises wealth, prosperity, and success. *Thong yip* (literally 'gold picking'), shaped like a flower, symbolises the ability to turn whatever one takes into money and gold. *Thong yot* (literally 'gold dripping') is shaped like a droplet, representing wealth flowing throughout one's life. *Foi thong* (literally 'shredded gold') consists of long golden strands, symbolising love and continuous prosperity. *Met khanun* (literally 'jackfruit seed') is shaped like a jackfruit pit, representing support and encouragement towards progress and success in life, as the word *nun* also means to support in Thai.

Because of their auspicious meanings, all four sweets are commonly served at auspicious occasions, such as weddings, housewarming ceremonies, and important celebrations. In addition to being delicious, they provide protein from eggs that provide high energy, making them suitable for those who need a quick source of energy. However, as they are relatively high in sugar and fat, people with diabetes or kidney disease, as well as those managing their weight, should consume them in careful amounts.





***Thot Mun Pla Krai* (Thai Spicy Fish Cakes),** known in Central Thailand as *pla hed,* is a traditional Thai dish with a long history. It is mentioned in the Thai classic literature *Khun Chang Khun Phaen, Pratithin Bat Lae Chotmaihet* (1898), and *Tamrap Sai Yaowapha* (1935). It is believed that the name pla hed may have been derived from the Khmer word *prahit,* referring to fried minced meat balls, before later evolving into the *thot mun pla krai* known today and becoming one of the signature dishes of Nakhon Sawan Province.

The dish is prepared by kneading minced featherback fish with salted water until the flesh becomes firm and sticky, before mixing it with curry paste, Thai herbs, finely sliced kaffir lime leaves, and chopped yardlong beans. *Thot mun pla krai* is characterised by its round, flattened shape, reddish-orange colour, and chewy, springy texture, with a spicy and salty flavour. It is traditionally served with *achat* (a sweet-and-sour cucumber relish) that adds freshness and balances the richness of the fried fish cakes.

Thot mun pla krai is an excellent source of high-quality, easily digestible protein. It is rich in unsaturated fatty acids and omega-3 fatty acids, which help support brain and heart health. The herbs in the curry paste, such as chillies, galangal, and lemongrass, help relieve flatulence and ease bloating. The dish also provides calcium and iron, which contribute to healthy bones and the production of red blood cells.

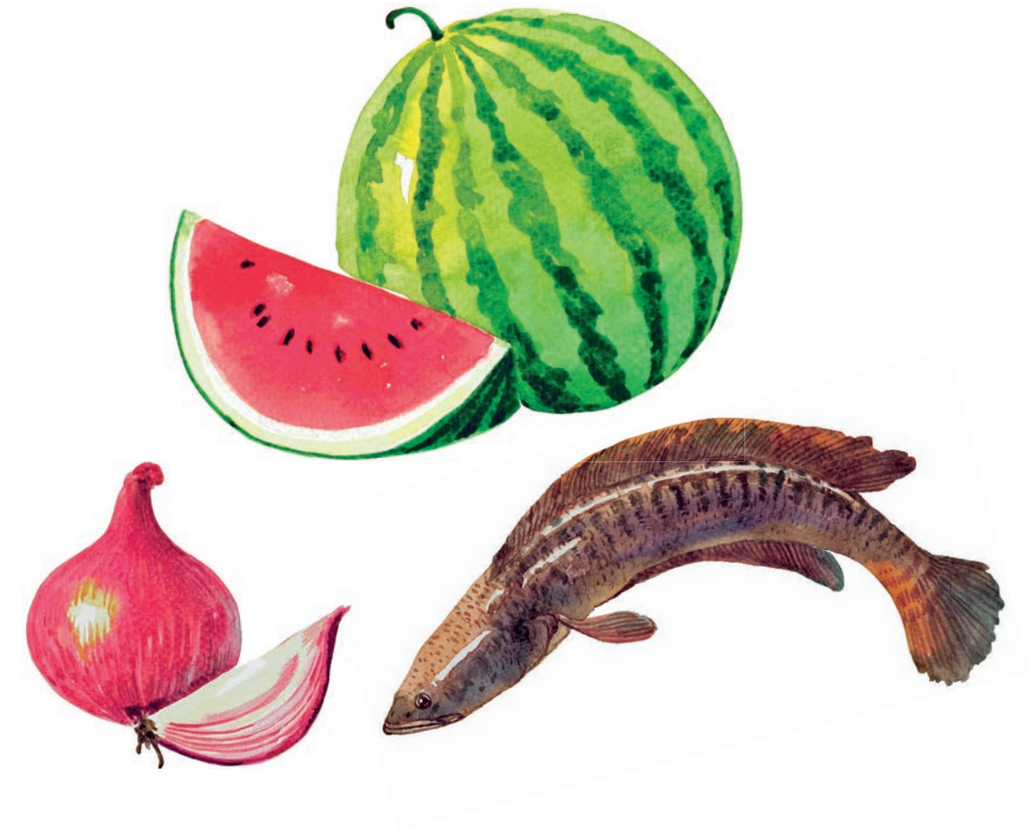


***Namphrik Long Ruea* (Fermented Shrimp Paste Chilli Dip with Sweet Pork)** originated at Suan Sunandha Palace. The dish was created by Chao Chom M.R. Sadap Ladavalya while accompanying Princess Saisavali Bhiromya, the Princess Suddhasininat Piyamaharaj Padivaradda—the royal consort of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V)—on boat excursions along the canals. As only limited ingredients were available for meals on board, *namphrik kapi* (fermented shrimp paste chilli dip) was adapted by stir-frying with sweet pork, crispy catfish, and various accompaniments to make the dip richer and more convenient to serve on the boat. This became the origin of the name *namphrik long ruea* (literally meaning 'on-boat chilli dip').

The *namphrik kapi,* which is spicy, sour, salty, and sweet, is typically stir-fried with sweet pork, crispy or grilled catfish, salted egg yolk, pickled garlic, and bird's eye chillies. It is served with an assortment of fresh and blanched vegetables, such as Thai eggplants, cucumbers, yardlong beans, and water mimosa.

Namphrik long ruea is regarded as a nutritious dish that helps stimulate digestion, while ingredients such as shallots, garlic, galangal, and lemongrass are valued for helping to relieve flatulence and support the body's vital elements. The accompanying vegetables also provide vitamins and dietary fibre.

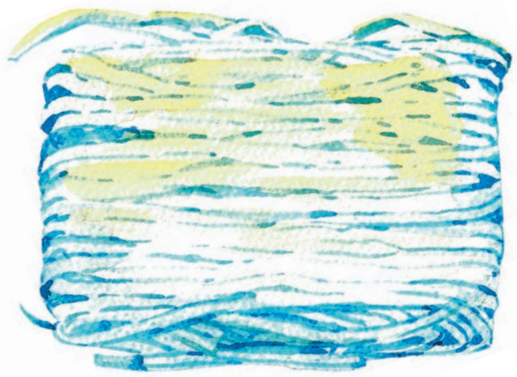




***Pla Haeng Taeng Mo* (Dried Fish with Watermelon)** is a rare traditional dish that reflects the culinary wisdom and refinement of Thai cuisine from the Ayutthaya period through the present Rattanakosin period. It is recorded in the chronicles of Princess Narintaradevi as one of the dishes served at the celebration of the Emerald Buddha in 1809. In addition to being a favourite dish among the royal court, it was also a traditional dish of the Thai-Mon people that helps cool down the heat.

The charm of this dish lies in the contrasting flavour pairing. Juicy, sweet fresh watermelon is cut into bite-sized cubes and served with *na pla haeng,* made from dried snakehead fish or Thai anchovy. The fish is grilled until fragrant, deboned, and pounded finely, then roasted with granulated sugar and fried shallots until dry, fluffy, and golden yellow. Eaten together, the dish combines the cool, juicy sweetness of watermelon with the salty, savoury flavours of the dried fish, helping quench thirst and lower body temperature. It is also rich in vitamin A, vitamin C, and lycopene, an antioxidant, as well as protein and calcium, which help maintain healthy bones and teeth.







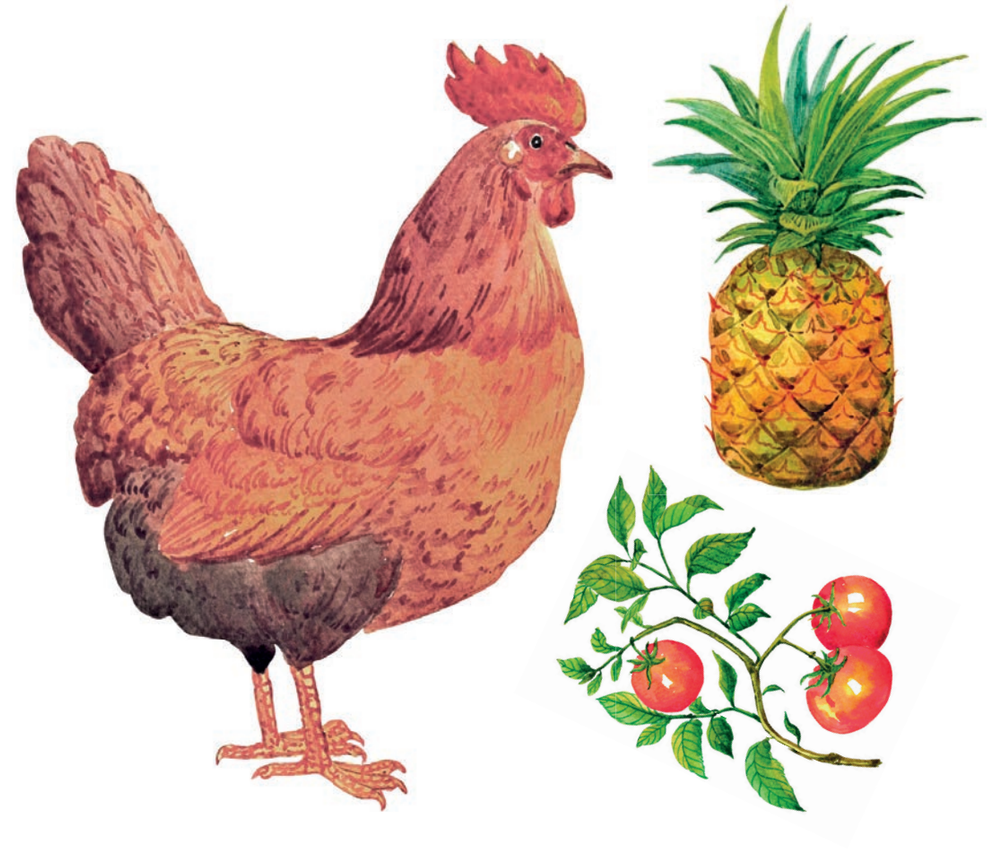
Yellow tofu

***Pad Thai* (Thai-style Stir-fried Noodles)** is Thailand's iconic noodle dish. It was created during the administration of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram as part of a national campaign encouraging Thai people to consume more noodles in order to reduce rice consumption, since rice was the country's principal export, and to help relieve the economic issues during wartime.

The dish was adapted from Chinese stir-fried noodles into Thai style by stir-frying thin rice noodles or *sen chan* rice noodles, with a sauce made from tamarind juice, fish sauce, and palm sugar. Other ingredients include yellow tofu, dried shrimp, eggs, bean sprouts, garlic chives, shallots, and roasted peanuts. The dish has sour, salty, and sweet flavours, and is traditionally served with lime wedges, fresh garlic chives, and banana blossom.

Pad thai is one of Thailand's most popular street foods that has gained worldwide recognition for its balanced flavour. In 2025, TasteAtlas ranked *pad thai* fifth among the world's best stir-fried dishes. It is also a nutritious meal, providing protein and fibre to support digestive health and help reduce cholesterol levels, while also containing vitamin C, calcium, and phosphorus.



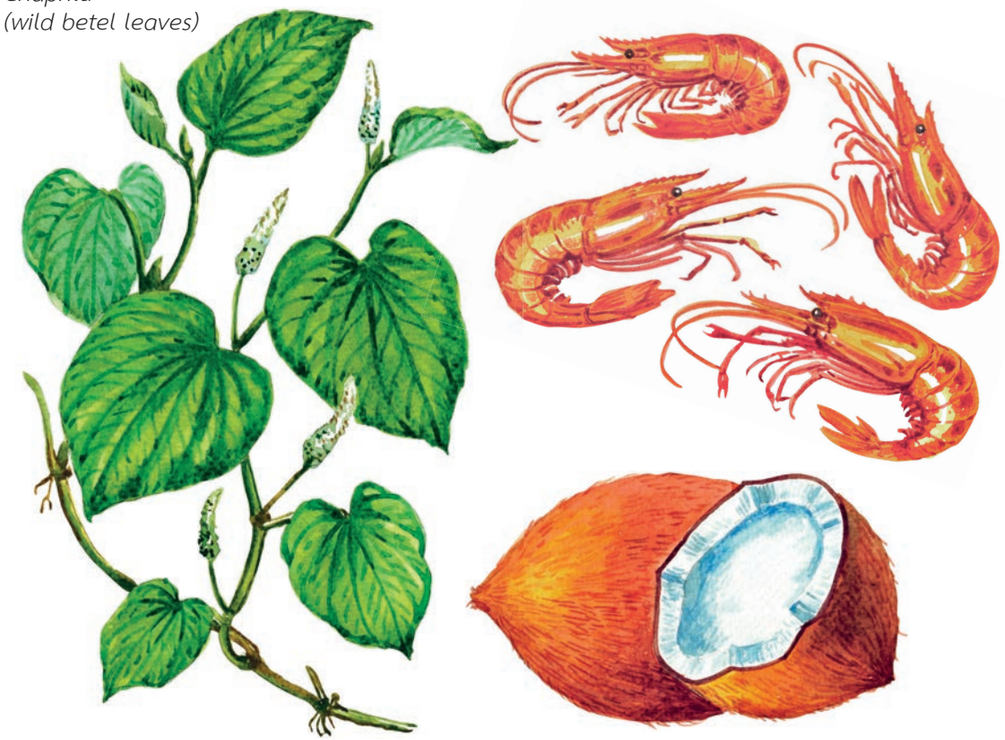


***Phat Priao Wan* (Sweet and Sour Stir-Fry)** was influenced by Chinese cuisine and is believed to have originated in Hunan Province. This flavour profile was originally known in the Tang dynasty as tang chu, referring to a sauce made by combining sugar and vinegar for a sweet-and-sour taste. The dish was introduced to Thailand during the early Rattanakosin period. The first published recipe for *phat priao wan Thai* was in the cookbook named *Kapkhao Ocharot* in 1942.

The Thai version uses local vegetables and fruits, such as pineapple, cucumber, tomatoes, and onions, including tomato ketchup in later years, giving the dish its well-rounded flavour and vibrant colour and making it a popular dish.

Phat priao wan is a healthy dish when prepared with appropriate ingredients. Using lean, high-protein meat, a reduced-sodium recipe, and a small amount of oil provides beneficial nutrients,including vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, which help nourish the skin and reduce the risk of cancer.

Chaphlu
(wild betel leaves)



***Miangkham* (Thai Herbal Wrapped Bite)** is believed to have originated in the Lanna Kingdom of Northern Thailand, where the word *miang* originally referred to fermented tea leaves traditionally chewed by people of the North. Over time, fresh local leaves, such as *chaphlu* (wild betel leaves) or *thonglang* (Indian coral leaves), replaced the traditional ones, and the dish was then elevated to a royal appetiser. The preparation requires meticulous care in making the sauce and preparing the accompaniments, as recorded in *Kap He Chom Khrueang Wang,* a royal composition by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI).

The charm of *miangkham* is the variety of flavours brought together in a single bite. Finely chopped accompaniments—including ginger, shallots, peel-on lime, fresh bird's eye chillies, roasted coconut, roasted peanuts, and dried shrimp—are wrapped in gently pungent *chaphlu* or *thonglang* leaves and topped with *miangkham* sauce. The rich, sweet-and-salty sauce is made by simmering palm sugar, shrimp paste, galangal, lemongrass, and dried shrimp until thick and sticky. *Miangkham* thus brings together not only flavours but also the benefits of a wide range of herbs traditionally believed to help relieve flatulence and bloating, soothe coughs, clear phlegm, relieve cold symptoms, and aid digestion.







Winged bean

Yam Thua Phu **(Winged Bean Spicy Salad)** reflects the wisdom of Thai cuisine in transforming local vegetables into a delicious dish. Winged beans, which are widely available, are thinly sliced and combined with fresh prawns, minced pork, roasted coconut, fried shallots, bird's eye chillies, roasted chilli paste, and coconut milk. Boiled eggs are sometimes added before the salad is seasoned for sour and sweet flavours, resembling a Western-style salad.

The key to perfecting the dish is to blanch the winged beans in boiling water before immediately plunging them into iced water. This keeps the beans crisp and bright green, resulting in a flavourful salad while being highly nutritious. The dish provides protein from meat, which supplies energy and supports muscle development. It is also high in fibre, which promotes digestive health, while vitamin A helps maintain healthy vision, vitamin C supports the immune system, and calcium contributes to healthy bones and teeth. Most importantly, winged beans also help relieve internal heat, quench thirst, reduce fever, and help lower blood sugar levels, making it suitable for people with diabetes.



***Yam Pla Duk Fu* (Crispy Catfish Spicy Salad)** is a traditional Thai dish that commonly prepared in the royal kitchens. It is a Thai appetiser or spicy salad that requires remarkable skill. Grilled catfish is pounded and finely chopped, often mixed with breadcrumbs, then deep-fried in very hot oil until the meat becomes light, crisp, and fluffy, forming golden clusters.

The dressing is sweet-and-sour, with gentle spiciness and balanced saltiness from lime juice, fish sauce, palm sugar, and bird's eye chillies. Its accompaniments include shredded green mango, sliced shallots, coriander, and fried peanuts or cashew nuts. The dish is a harmonious balance of the four essential Thai flavours: spicy, sour, sweet, and salty.

Although deep-fried, *yam pla duk fu* is nutritious. The catfish provides a high level of protein and omega-3 fatty acids, which are associated with helping to reduce inflammation in the body. The herbs and vegetables also provide vitamins and minerals that are believed to help reduce the risk of heart disease, cold symptoms, and strengthen the immune system.

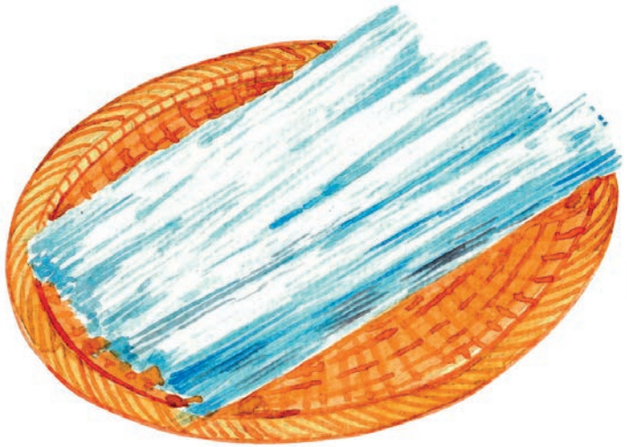




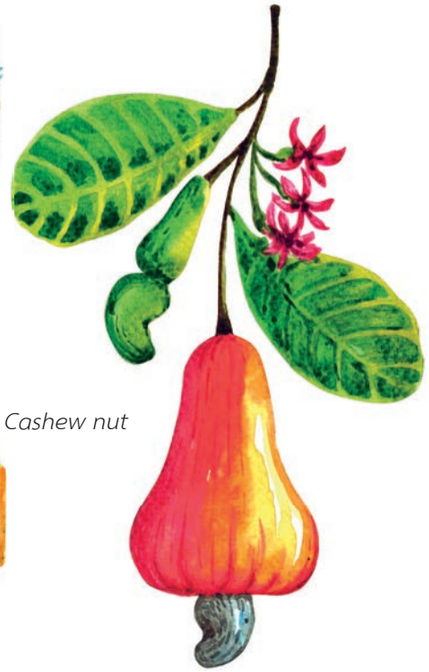
Mung bean

***Luk Chup* (Mung Bean Thai Marzipan),** a traditional Thai sweet, is influenced by Portuguese marzipan made from ground almonds mixed with sugar. *Luk chup* was introduced during the Ayutthaya period through Portuguese communities and is believed to have emerged around the same period that Thao Thong Kip Ma (Marie Guimar) introduced the *thong* sweets family.

As almonds were once rare and expensive, Thai people adapted the recipe by using mung beans cooked with coconut milk, which gives a sweet, creamy flavour instead. The mung bean mixture is shaped into small fruits and vegetables —such as mangoes, mangosteens, rose apples, and spur chillies. The pieces are then painted in bright colours to imitate the real thing before being dipped in clear jelly. This process not only gives the sweets a glossy surface but also reflects culinary knowledge in retaining moisture and preventing the mung bean mixture from drying and cracking. With their beautiful shapes and vivid colours, *luk chup* are commonly served at banquets, auspicious occasions, and festivals. Mung beans are also a good source of protein and dietary fibre that provide energy for the body. However, as the sweets contain sugar and coconut milk, they should not be excessively consumed.



Yellow tofu



Cashew nut

***Mi Krop Song Khrueang* (Thai Crispy Noodles)** is a distinctive sweet-and-sour dish that became widely known since the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). According to a popular narrative, while the King was travelling through the Talat Phlu area by boat, he caught the inviting aroma of stir-fried noodles and stopped to sample the crispy noodles made by a Hainanese Chinese named Chin Li. The dish is hence traditionally referred to as *mi krop chao wang* or *mi krop chin li,* representing a combination of Chinese culinary culture—the rice vermicelli—with Thai flavours—the sauce made with *som sa* (bitter orange).

The preparation begins by soaking the white rice vermicelli in water until softened before frying, resulting in a crisp texture that is not too airy. The crispy noodles are then tossed with a rich golden-brown sauce that is sweet and sour with a slight salty note. The sauce is typically made with coconut sugar, tamarind juice, and fish sauce. The dish is enhanced with fried yellow tofu, dried shrimp, shredded omelette, fried shallots, and pickled garlic. An essential ingredient, som sa peel, enhances the flavour and fragrant aroma. The dish provides carbohydrates, protein, and vitamins from the accompanying herbs.





Lemongrass

***Mu Satay* (Grilled Satay Pork)** is a dish that reflects the assimilation of Middle Eastern, Indonesian, and Thai culinary cultures. It is believed to have originated in Java or Sumatra, Indonesia, under the name *satay,* before being introduced to Thailand during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). The dish was later adapted at Suan Sunandha Palace into *satay lue,* where pork replaced beef and the spices were made less pungent to better suit Thai preferences, eventually turning into the *mu satay* widely enjoyed today.

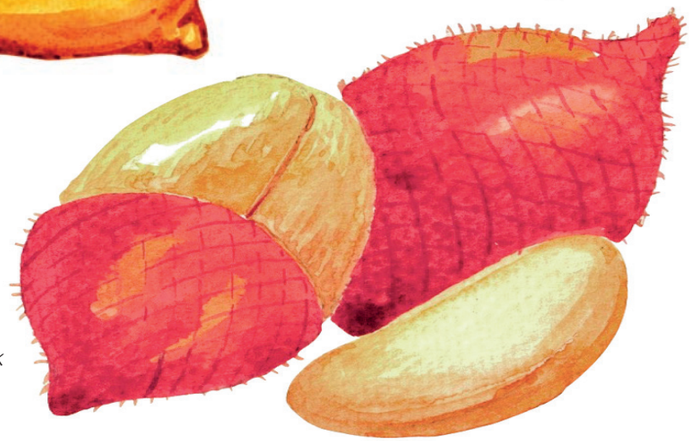
The dish is made by marinating pork loin in coconut milk and spices such as turmeric, lemongrass, cumin, and curry powder, then skewering and grilling over charcoal until tender, fragrant, and golden. It is traditionally served with peanut sauce and *achat.*

In addition to its outstanding flavour, *mu satay* is a source of high-quality protein. The spices, which contain antioxidants, can help stimulate digestion, while *achat* provides vitamins, minerals, and dietary fibre. Today, *mu satay* is widely enjoyed as both a light meal and a popular street food dish.





Ice



Salak

***Sala Loi Kaew* (Salak in Syrup)** is a popular Thai dessert that reflects Thai culinary wisdom in transforming sour fruit into a delicate, refreshing dish. It is a favourite dish during the season when salak is abundant or overly sour. The fruit is prepared in the *loi kaew* style to preserve and extend its life, turning it into a refreshing sweet that can help relieve the heat.

Skill is required when peeling and removing salak seeds to get a beautiful yellow or soft-orange flesh. The fruit is then soaked in clear syrup infused with pandan leaves. The dish is seasoned for a well-balanced sweet taste with hints of sourness and saltiness, and is often served with ice.

Salak is a source of vitamin C and antioxidants. When made as *sala loi kaew,* it helps quench thirst, relieve heat, and refresh the body. However, the dessert contains a relatively high amount of sugar from the syrup, so people with diabetes or those managing their weight should consume it in appropriate amounts.

The Heritage of Isan: The Soulful Flavours of the Plateau

Across the vast Khorat Plateau encompassing over 20 provinces in Northeastern Thailand, communities have long faced periods of arid conditions. Yet, they have transformed these challenging conditions into a rich culinary culture. Isan cuisine is renowned for its balanced combination of spicy, savoury, and soulful flavours, reflecting an extraordinary ability to adapt to live in harmony with nature.

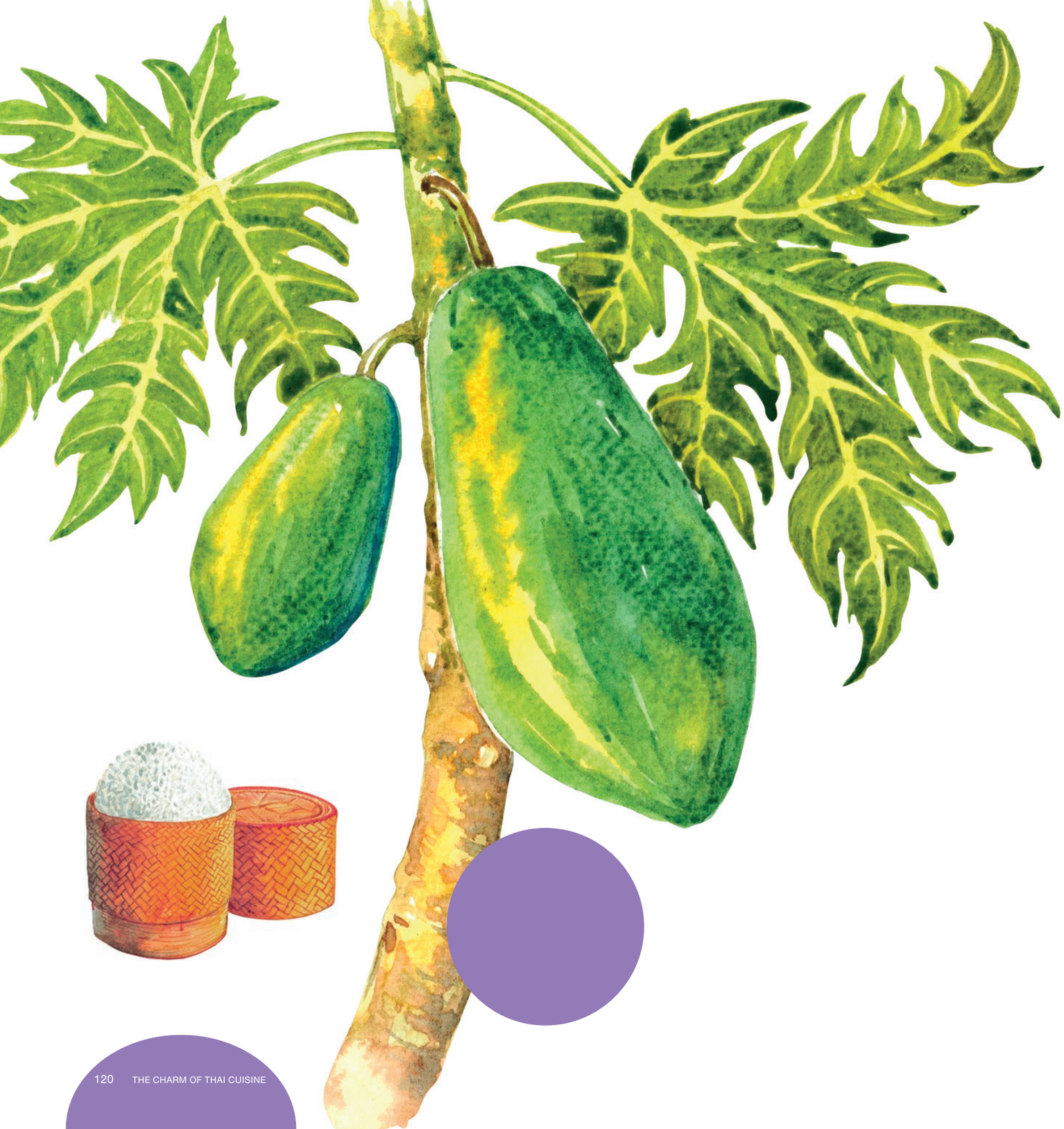
Isan cuisine's heart lies in ingenious knowledge of food preservation, ensuring that ingredients could be stored and enjoyed throughout the year. *Pla ra,* fermented fish, is the signature of Isan cuisine, lending dishes their distinctive aroma when creatively used with local ingredients—including freshwater fish, insects, ant eggs, and wild vegetables. Dishes are seasoned with heat from chillies, sourness from tamarind or *makok* fruit, while freshly pounded roasted rice adds fragrance and texture.



The warm social spirit of Isan people is reflected in the tradition of gathering around a shared meal, with steaming sticky rice bringing the flavours of each dish together as its centre. Most Isan dishes are simple and make little use of coconut milk or oil, but instead rely on boiling, steaming, grilling, and simmering. Isan food is thus naturally wholesome, with dishes rich in dietary fibre from fresh vegetables and *jaew* or *pon* chilli dips. The cuisine is also closely intertwined with local traditions and rituals—from *khao ji* made for merit-making ceremonies to *larb* found in auspicious occasions—every Isan meal is therefore celebrating more than flavour. It embodies the spirit of the people, their generosity and their warmth, through every shared bite.

Today, the distinctive charm of Isan cuisine has reached an international audience. Beloved dishes such as *som tam* have become cultural ambassadors of Thai cuisine, captivating people around the world. The combination of local herbs, fresh vegetables and *nua* (rich-mellow-soulful) flavours has also inspired a new generation of chefs to reinterpret and refine Isan cuisine while preserving its authenticity, sincerity and spirit of hospitality. This culinary heritage, expressed through its bold vibrancy, ensures that every bite continues to carry stories of life, culture and the warmth of the Isan people.

25 Northeastern Thai Dishes







Kaeng Kai Sai Wunsen (Chicken and Glass Noodles Soup) is a traditional dish that vividly reflects the way of life and cultural traditions of Isan, also known as *kaeng sen ron.* It originated from the practice of taking the leftover boiled chicken from a *Bai Si Su Kwan* ceremony, cutting it into pieces and simmering it with glass noodles to make enough food for family members or guests attending the ceremony.

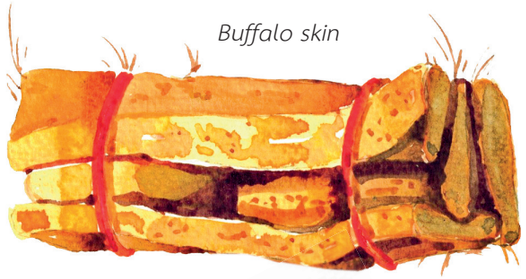
The soup has a clear, reduced broth similar to *kaeng pa* or *kaeng om,* yet rounded with fermented fish sauce, while dried chillies, shallots, and lemongrass provide a gentle heat. Fresh local herbs such as dill and lemon basil leaves add aroma. It is commonly enjoyed with hot sticky rice or steamed rice.

Kaeng kai sai wunsen is high in protein and relatively low in fat, as it uses free-range chicken and contains neither oil nor coconut milk. The glass noodles and light hot broth make it easy to digest, a comforting dish that suits the cold weather or when recovering from a cold. Dill and lemon basil leaves are valued for relieving flatulence and bloating, while lemongrass and shallots help ease nasal congestion and support the body's immune system.





Khilek leaves



Buffalo skin



Yanang leaf

***Kaeng Khilek Sai Nang Khwai* (Siamese Cassia Soup with Buffalo Skin)** is considered more than an everyday dish—it is one of the signature dishes of Isan. It serves as a symbol of community and togetherness, traditionally prepared and enjoyed among family members or at merit-making ceremonies and local festivals.

Young *khilek* leaves and flowers are selected and boiled once or twice, with the water discarded to reduce their bitterness to a pleasant level. Dried buffalo skin is then grilled over a fire, beaten until tender, and boiled until soft before being cut into bite-sized pieces. A quality of buffalo skin is its ability to absorb broth, allowing it to take on the dish's flavours while retaining a tender, chewy texture. The soup is enhanced with fresh, aromatic *yanang* leaf juice and the umami of fermented fish sauce, complemented by the heat of herbs such as lemongrass, shallots, and fresh chillies. It is finished with dill, spring onions, and *phak i-tu*.

Khilek leaves and flowers are traditionally valued for their cooling properties, their ability to promote restful sleep, and their antioxidant content. Buffalo skin provides protein and natural collagen, while the herbs aid digestion and relieve flatulence and bloating.



Lemon basil leaf



Wood ear mushroom



Lentinus mushroom



Enoki mushroom



King oyster mushroom



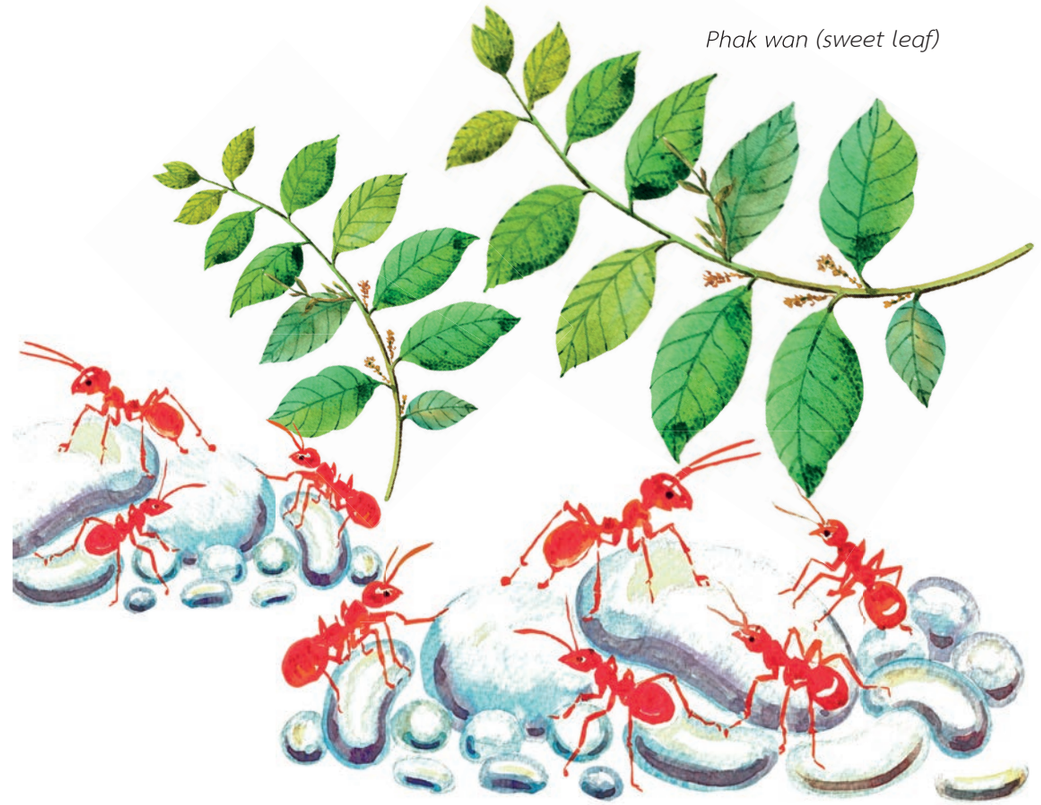
Shiitake mushroom

***Kaeng Het Ruam* (Mixed Mushroom Soup)** is a popular local dish among northeastern Thais and ethnic groups living along the Mekong River basin. The dish reflects the wisdom of relying on nature to sort ingredients according to the seasons, especially from the beginning to the middle of the rainy season, when wild mushrooms emerge in abundance.

The soup is often prepared in a large pot to be shared among family members and neighbours. It has a rich, deep-green broth made with *yanang* leaf juice, thickened with *khao buea* (soaked sticky rice pounded into a fine paste), which also lends the soup a smooth, soulful flavour. The soup's distinct aroma comes from aromatic local herbs such as *phak i-tu* (lemon basil, in the local dialect), lemongrass, and the soulful smell of fermented fish—the heart of northeastern Thai cuisine.

Kaeng het ruam is a low-calorie, low-fat dish, making it particularly suitable for those who are managing their weight. Wild mushrooms are a good source of protein and polysaccharides, which help support a healthy immune system. *Yanang,* traditionally regarded as a cooling herb, helps restore balance in the body, reduce fever, and counteract toxins, and is also rich in antioxidants.





***Kaeng Phak Wan Khai Mot Daeng* (Sweet Leaf and Red Ant Egg Soup)** is a dish born from the seasonal foraging practices of northeastern Thai communities. The dish is enjoyed mostly during the hot season, when wild *phak wan* (sweet leaf) produces young tips and red ants are laden with plump, fully developed eggs. The soup is fragrant with fresh herbs such as chillies, lemongrass, and shallots. Some versions also add pounded *yanang* leaves to give the broth a richer consistency. It harmoniously combines the naturally delicate sweetness of wild *phak wan* with the rich, crunchy texture and mild sourness of red ant eggs.

Kaeng phak wan khai mot daeng is considered a highly nutritious dish. Red ant eggs are a good source of protein and relatively low in fat, helping to support muscle growth and repair. Wild *phak wan* is rich in dietary fibre that supports healthy digestion and bowel function. It also contains beta-carotene, vitamin C, calcium, and phosphorus, which contribute to eye health and strong bones and teeth, as well as antioxidants that help support overall health.



Peppercorn

***Kai Yang Khao Niao* (Grilled Chicken with Sticky Rice)** is a traditional Isan meal that reflects the region's simple way of life. *Kai yang* is made by marinating free-range chicken with herbs such as lemongrass, garlic, and coriander roots, then grilling it over charcoal until the skin turns golden and has a smoky aroma, while the meat remains tender and juicy. It is traditionally served with soft, chewy, well-formed, steamed sticky rice, neither soggy nor overly moist. The meal is commonly accompanied by *jaew* dipping sauce or spicy *som tam.*

This combination is well suited to the lifestyles of farmers and agricultural workers, as it is easy to carry and provides sustained satiety, making it ideal for outdoor work that requires physical exertion. Nutritionally, free-range chicken is a good source of high-quality protein, vitamin B6, and niacin, which support muscle development and nervous system function. Steamed sticky rice, meanwhile, is an important source of carbohydrates, providing sustained energy.





***Kaeng Normai Som Sai Pla Chon* (Sour Bamboo Shoot Soup with Snakehead Fish)** is an Isan local dish rooted in knowledge of food preservation and a reliance on nature. The dish is made with *normai som,* or fermented bamboo shoots—the highlight ingredient of the rainy season, traditionally preserved by local communities—and fresh snakehead fish caught in natural waterways.

The soup has a reduced, orange-red broth with sour, salty, and spicy flavours, complemented by the rich umami aroma of cooked fermented fish. The snakehead fish is tender and naturally sweet, pairing perfectly with the crisp, sour fermented bamboo shoots. Fresh herbs such as lemon basil or *phak kha* (climbing wattle, in the local dialect) add aroma, reflecting the practical way of life of communities along the Mekong River, where local vegetables are transformed into flavourful dishes.

Fermented bamboo shoots contain probiotics and beneficial microorganisms that help support a healthy gut microbiome and digestive function. Snakehead fish is an excellent source of lean protein, with tender meat that is relatively easy to digest, making it a suitable choice for those watching their health. Herbs such as chillies, lemongrass, and lemon basil help relieve flatulence, ease bloating, and stimulate digestion, while cooked fermented fish provides calcium and other essential minerals.



***Kaeng Normai Bai Yanang* (Bamboo Shoot and *Yanang* Soup),** also known as *kaeng poe,* is a popular northeastern Thai (Isan) dish commonly eaten among family and traditional merit-making celebrations. Bamboo shoots and *yanang* (Tiliacora triandra) leaves are seasoned with cooked fermented fish and fresh local herbs, creating a rich, deep-green broth with a distinctive aroma from freshly squeezed *yanang* leaf juice.

The soup features sliced or shredded fresh bamboo shoots, boiled until their bitterness is gone, combined with a variety of local vegetables such as sponge gourd, pumpkin, straw mushrooms, climbing wattle, and lemon basils. The dish reflects local culinary wisdom and a close reliance on nature during the rainy season when bamboo shoots grow abundantly. They are transformed into a comforting hot soup that helps warm the body while bringing balance to the meal.

Yanang leaf juice is traditionally regarded as a cooling herb rich in antioxidants, which help protect cells from oxidative stress. It is also believed to help reduce internal heat, relieve symptoms associated with heatiness, and reduce fever. The soup itself is low in calories and energy but high in dietary fibre from the vegetables, making it beneficial for digestion and healthy bowel function.





Rattan shoots



***Kaeng Wai Kai Ban* (Young Rattan Shoot and Free-range Chicken Soup)** is a signature dish of Isan, particularly in Sakon Nakhon Province, reflecting a simple and sustainable reliance on nature. At the beginning of the rainy season, locals commonly venture into the forest to gather tender rattan shoots for cooking. The dish is often prepared for family meals or to be offered at traditional merit-making ceremonies and festivals.

It has a deep-green broth from freshly squeezed *yanang* leaf juice and *khao buea,* highlighting the rattan shoots' unique bitterness and a crisp texture reminiscent of young coconut crowns. They pair beautifully with the tender yet chewy meat of free-range chicken, the heat of the chilli paste, and the aromas of fresh local vegetables and herbs such as *phak sa-ngae* (wild celery), lemon basil, sponge gourd, and pumpkin.

Rattan shoots and the herbs used in the soup are valued for stimulating appetite and digestive juices, relieving flatulence and bloating, and providing antioxidants that support a healthy immune system. The dish is also relatively low in calories and fat, while providing high-quality protein and fibre from fresh vegetables, which supports healthy digestion and bowel function.



Kaeng Hoi Khom **(Freshwater Snail Soup)** is a popular traditional dish that makes use of *hoi khom* (freshwater snail) gathered from natural sources such as rice fields, ponds, and streams. The snails are made into a hot, comforting soup that helps warm and restore the body after a *long khaek* (communal rice harvesting) practice.

In its traditional form, *kaeng hoi khom* has a reduced broth without coconut milk, with a rich, spicy, and savoury flavour, and is full of fragrance from fresh herbs such as lemon basil, lemongrass, and dried chillies. The snails are meticulously prepared by trimming the ends of the shells to make it easier to suck the meat out, while some versions even remove the meat from the shells before cooking to ensure its tender and chewy texture that pairs nicely with the intensely flavoured broth.

Nutritionally, freshwater snails are a good source of easily digestible protein and are relatively low in calories. They are also rich in calcium and iron, which contribute to strong bones and teeth and help prevent iron-deficiency anaemia. The fresh herbs used are also valued for relieving flatulence and bloating and helping to balance elements within the body.







Dill



***Kaeng Om* (Northeastern Dill Soup)** is a popular traditional soup among northeastern Thai and Lao communities. *Kaeng om* takes its name from the cooking method of slowly simmering a variety of vegetables and meat—such as free-range chicken, catfish, or beef—using only a small amount of liquid.

Kaeng om is a reduced-broth soup enriched with *khao buea* (soaked sticky rice pounded into a fine paste) and seasoned with cooked fermented fish, while fresh local herbs such as dill, lemon basil leaves, spring onions, Thai eggplants, galangal, and lemongrass provide an abundance of fragrance. Simple and economical, *kaeng om* uses vegetables gathered around the home, transforming them into everyday meals enjoyed with hot sticky rice, making it a staple for everyday family meals.

As *kaeng om* contains no coconut milk, it is relatively low in fat and provides moderate energy. Herbs such as galangal and lemongrass help relieve flatulence and bloating while also supporting digestion. The wide variety of local vegetables also provides vitamins, minerals, and fibre, helping to support healthy bowel function.



***Khao Ji Tha Khai* (Grilled Sticky Rice with Egg Wash)** is a traditional dish made by shaping steamed sticky rice into round or flattened balls, threading onto skewers, and grilling over charcoal until lightly charred. The sticky rice is then dipped in salted egg wash—sometimes also filled with sugarcane syrup for sweetness—before being grilled again until fragrant and cooked through. The result is a rich, savoury sticky rice ball with a crisp yet soft texture and distinctive smoky aroma.

This dish reflects the ingenuity of using leftover steamed sticky rice—or even freshly steamed rice—to create a simple breakfast or portable meal for work in the fields. It is particularly popular during the cooler months as a warming food and is closely associated with the traditional *Bun Khao Ji* merit-making ceremony, which is part of the Isan *Heet Sip Song* festivals traditionally held in the third lunar month, around Magha Puja. The ceremony involves offering *khao ji* to monks as an auspicious act.

Nutritionally, sticky rice is an important source of energy and helps generate body heat, while eggs provide high-quality protein essential for growth and tissue maintenance. As the rice is grilled, the dish contains little added fat, making it a simple and wholesome traditional food.





Kho Mu Yang Nam Jim Jaew **(Grilled Pork Neck with Jaew Dipping Sauce)** originates from communities residing along the Mekong River. This dish brings together the art of grilling meat with the soulful flavours of northeastern Thai cuisine. Pork neck, favoured for its fine layers of fat, is selected and marinated until thoroughly seasoned, then grilled over charcoal until browned and fragrant, while the inside remains tender, succulent, and juicy.

The dish becomes even better when served with *jaew,* a dipping sauce made from tamarind juice or lime juice, fish sauce, ground dried chillies, freshly toasted rice powder, and sliced shallots. It gives sour, salty, and intensely spicy flavours that cut through the richness of the pork beautifully. The dish is thus widely enjoyed both as an everyday meal and during traditional merit-making ceremonies and *Heet Sip Song* (Twelve Traditional Festivals) of Northeastern Thailand.

Nutritionally, grilled pork neck provides a good amount of protein to support tissue repair, but it should be enjoyed in moderation due to its relatively high fat content. The chilli in *jaew* contains capsaicin, which helps stimulate metabolism, while shallots are valued for relieving flatulence. Serving the dish with fresh vegetables such as Chinese cabbage, sweet basil, or cucumber adds fibre and helps support healthy digestion.



***Jaew Pla Daek - Pla Daek Bong* (Fermented Fish Chilli Dip),** also known as *jaew bong,* is a distinctive Isan chilli dip renowned for its bold flavours and thick, paste-like consistency, setting it apart from other types of chilli relishes. It has a savoury, umami and spicy flavour, combined with the rich aroma of finely chopped fermented fish and roasted herbs and spices. This relish originated from the local wisdom of fermenting fish caught during the flood season to preserve it for later consumption. It is compact, making it convenient to carry and eat while working in the rice fields or farms, reflecting the generosity and sharing spirit of Isan society.

Jaew bong provides protein from fermented fish, including probiotics valued for their digestive properties. Herbs and spices such as chilli, galangal, lemongrass, and shallots help relieve flatulence and indigestion, and support the immune system. For safety, however, it is advisable to choose a thoroughly cooked option, such as stir-frying or boiling. As fermented fish products can be high in sodium, they should be consumed in appropriate amounts.



***Sup Makhuea* (Thai Eggplant Salad)** is a popular traditional dish made from Thai eggplants that are boiled and mashed. They are tossed with fermented fish, ground dried chilli, toasted ground sticky rice, and shallots, then topped with fragrant herbs such as dill, spring onions, and culantro. The dish is a savoury, umami relish with moderate heat commonly served with sticky rice and fresh vegetables.

The dish reflects the Isan tradition of making simple, affordable meals from readily available ingredients and sharing them among family. Nutritionally, *sup makhuea* is low in fat and rich in fibre. Thai eggplant provides fibre that supports healthy digestion and bowel function, making it suitable for those seeking a lighter meal. It also contains antioxidants that may help reduce blood cholesterol levels and have anti-inflammatory properties, contributing to overall health.



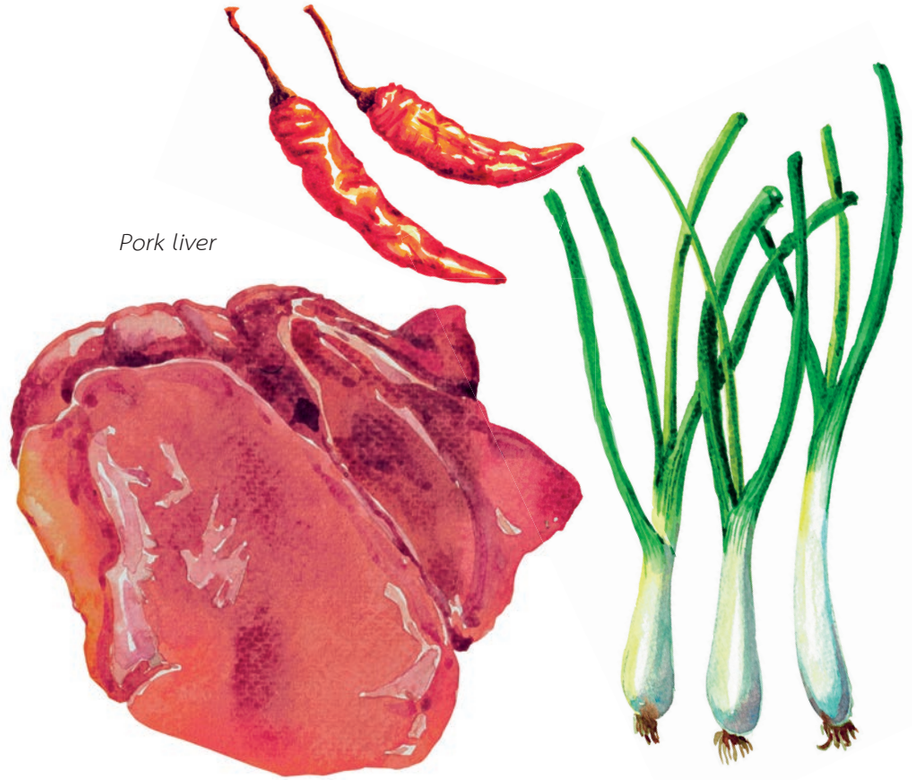
Lemon basil leaf

***Sup Normai* (Bamboo Shoot Salad)** is another Isan signature dish. *Sup* in the local dialect means to mix or toss ingredients together, like a *yam.* Rooted in local culinary wisdom, the dish is made by shredding fresh bamboo shoots harvested during the rainy season into long strips and simmering them with *Yanang* leaf juice until well absorbed. It has a dark greenish-brown, thick, slightly watery consistency, with a bold spicy flavour balanced by the savouriness of fermented fish sauce, the tang of lime, and the fragrance of freshly toasted ground sticky rice and dried chilli flakes. The dish demonstrates a way of life closely connected to nature in using herbs and vegetables grown around the home, such as lemon balm, spring onions, culantro, and lemon basil. It is typically served with hot sticky rice, *som tam,* and side fresh vegetables.

Bamboo shoots are rich in dietary fibre, which supports healthy digestion and bowel function, as well as calcium, which contributes to bone health. *Yanang* leaves are rich in antioxidants and are believed to help cool and balance the body. Chilli and shallots are also traditionally valued for their digestive and circulation-promoting properties.







***Tap Wan* (Spicy Liver Salad),** another member of the *larb* family of Isan cuisine, is made with briefly blanched fresh pork or beef liver until just cooked, preserving its tender texture without becoming tough. The liver is then tossed with spicy, sour, and salty seasonings, balanced by the liver's natural sweetness, aromatic freshly toasted rice powder, and fresh herbs. The dish originated from the traditional practice of slaughtering livestock for a meal for guests during festivals, reflecting the local wisdom of making full use of fresh ingredients. It is commonly enjoyed as part of a shared meal alongside *som tam,* sticky rice, and an assortment of fresh vegetables.

Tap wan is rich in protein and iron, which support healthy blood production and circulation and help prevent iron deficiency. It also contains vitamins A and B, which contribute to healthy eyesight and nervous-system function. However, liver is relatively high in cholesterol and sodium, so it should be thoroughly cooked and consumed in appropriate portions.



Snakehead Fish

***Pon Pla* (Pounded Fish Dip)** is a popular traditional Isan dish originated from the local practice of using abundant wild snakehead fish caught during the flood season to boil with herbs, then pounding until light and fluffy. It has a deep reddish-brown, thick consistency with a spicy, savoury flavour enriched by cooked fermented fish, a subtle sour note, and a fragrant aroma of roasted and toasted herbs such as galangal, lemongrass, and kaffir lime leaves.

The dish reflects a simple way of life closely connected to nature. Easy to prepare while producing a generous quantity, it is well suited to sharing among family members and neighbours. *Pon pla* is typically served with hot sticky rice, fresh vegetables, and seasonal blanched vegetables such as *phak kadon* (wild guava) and *phak tiu* (mampat).

Nutritionally, snakehead fish is a good source of easily digestible protein that supports muscle building and is relatively low in calories. The dish uses Thai herbs and spices such as chilli, shallots, garlic, galangal, and lemongrass, which support digestion and help relieve flatulence and indigestion.





***Pla Duk Tom Pla Ra* (Boiled Catfish with Fermented Fish)** is a traditional Isan dish with the culinary wisdom of combining *pla ra* (fermented fish) with catfish, a freshwater fish abundantly found in rice fields and natural waterways. The catfish is simmered in a cloudy brown broth enriched with dissolved fermented fish, creating a savoury, soulful flavour. The tender catfish absorbs the rich taste of the broth well, while fresh herbs such as young tamarind leaves, lemongrass, lemon basil, and crushed fresh chillies add fragrance and help balance the fishy aroma.

The dish symbolises the warmth of family and the traditional Isan custom of gathering around a shared meal. In terms of nutrition, catfish provides high-quality, easily digestible protein, while cooked fermented fish is a source of calcium and microorganisms produced during fermentation, which can support digestive health. Fresh herbs further contribute to the dish's digestive benefits and relieve flatulence.

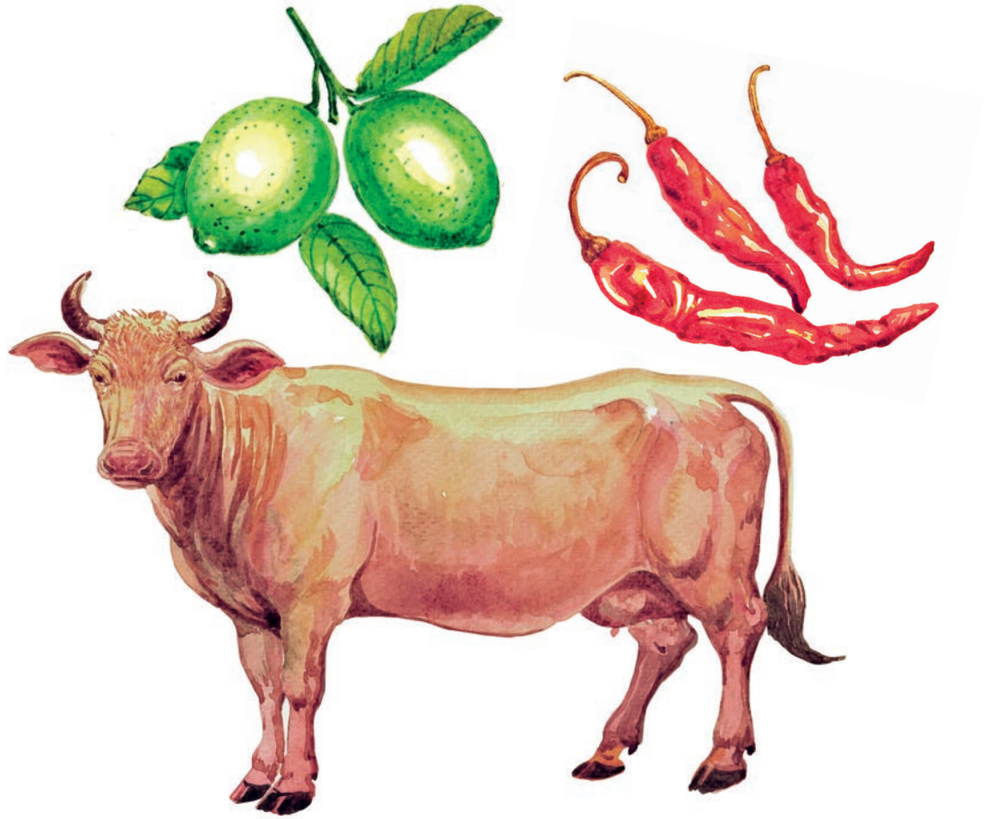


Silver barb

***Pla Som* (Fermented Fish)** is a traditional form of food preservation from Isan river basin communities such as Khon Kaen and Yasothon provinces. *Pla som* originates from the traditional way of life encapsulated in the saying, 'There are fish in the water and rice in the fields'—a fertile land with fish and rice. Freshwater fish—such as silver barb, tilapia, or Asian carp—are fermented with cooked rice and garlic to extend their shelf life. The fermentation turns the fish into a pinkish-white, tender yet slightly firm flesh, with a well-balanced sourish flavour. *Pla som* is commonly served with sticky rice, fresh vegetables, and fresh chillies, and is also a popular local speciality that generates income for communities.

Pla som is a good source of protein that contains probiotics and beneficial microorganisms produced naturally during fermentation, which can support digestive health. However, it should always be thoroughly cooked before consumption to reduce the risk of parasites and foodborne pathogens from raw freshwater fish. It is best enjoyed in appropriate amounts as part of a balanced diet.

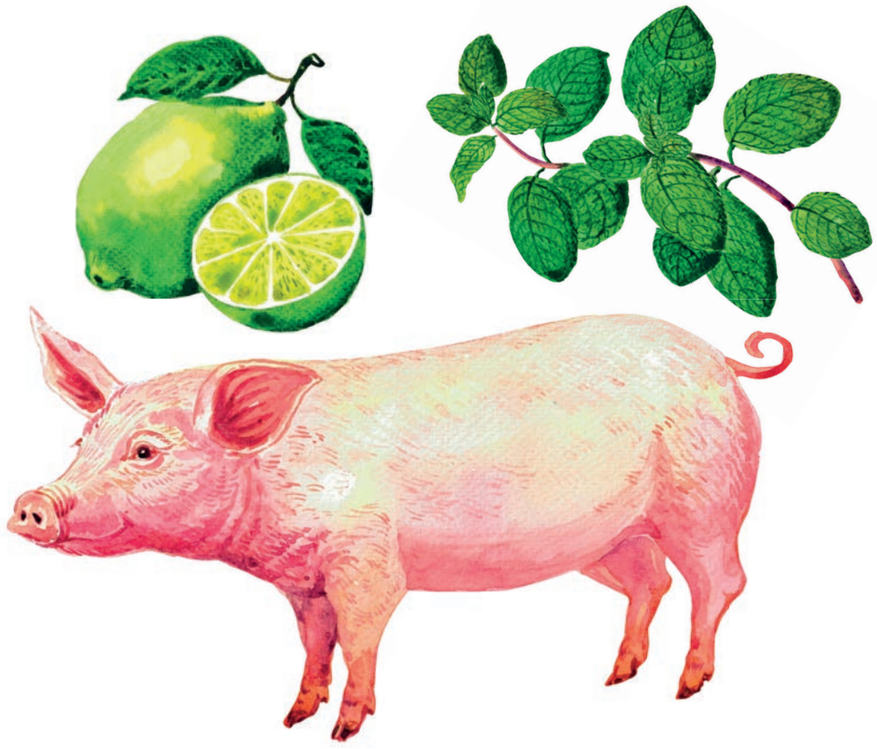




***Yang Suea Rong Hai* (Grilled 'Crying Tiger' Beef),** a popular grilled dish made from beef brisket, is renowned for its rich fat marbling throughout the lean meat and a layer of fat. When slowly grilled over a low fire, the beef fat gradually melts and drips onto the hot charcoal, giving a smoky, irresistible aroma. The result is tender yet chewy meat with a succulent, juicy texture.

The name *'suea rong hai',* literally meaning crying tiger, comes from a popular legend. It is said that this particular cut of beef was protected by the rib bones, making it impossible for a tiger to reach the meat. The tiger could then only lick the fatty meat on the outside and was left crying in frustration. Northeastern communities traditionally grill various cuts of beef over charcoal and enjoy them with hot sticky rice and intense *jaew* dipping sauce.

Nutritionally, beef brisket is considered a high-quality protein, supporting muscle growth and tissue repair. It is also rich in iron and zinc, which play important roles in maintaining healthy blood, supporting the immune system, and providing energy for the body.



***Larb Mu* (Spicy Minced Pork Salad)** is a widely popular dish influenced by Yunnanese and Lao cuisines, distinguished by its finely minced pork, gently cooked until just done, then tossed with a bold seasoning. The dish is made relatively dry, with a balance of sourness, saltiness, and spiciness, complemented by the aroma of freshly toasted rice powder and fresh herbs such as spring onions, culantro, and lemon balm.

Beyond its mesmerising flavour, *larb mu* is considered an auspicious dish because its name resembles the word *laap,* which means fortune and luck. It is therefore commonly served at merit-making ceremonies, weddings, and social gatherings. The preparation itself requires cooperation—from mincing the meat and pounding the toasted rice to picking and preparing the fresh herbs—reflecting the traditional values of harmony and close bonds within families and communities.

Larb mu contains neither oil nor coconut milk, making it low in fat, easy to digest, and a good source of energy. The pork provides high-quality protein to support the growth and repair of body tissues, while the fresh herbs and vegetables, such as cucumber and yardlong beans, provide vitamins, minerals, and fibre that support healthy digestion and bowel function.



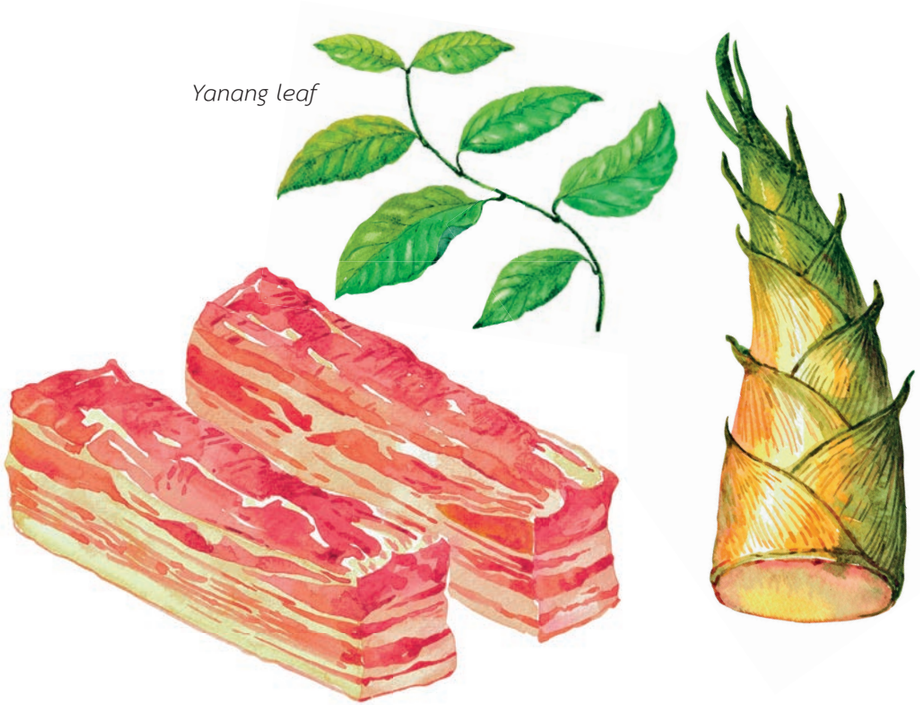


Catfish

***Mhok Pla* (Steamed Fish Wrapped in Banana Leaf),** a popular steamed dish of Northeastern Thailand and Laos, reflects a simple and practical approach to cooking. Fresh fish is mixed with curry paste, home-grown vegetables, and savoury fermented fish sauce, then carefully wrapped in banana leaves before being steamed or grilled over charcoal until cooked through.

What distinguishes *mhok pla* from other *mhok* dishes is the absence of coconut milk. This allows the fish to remain succulent rather than dry, while the banana leaves impart a smoky aroma and fresh herbs such as lemongrass, lemon basil, and kaffir lime leaves add a refreshing fragrance. The dish therefore reflects the traditional way of life relying on natural waterways and local vegetables around their homes.

Mhok pla is considered a healthy dish, as it is prepared by steaming without oil or coconut milk, making it low in fat and providing high-quality, easily digestible protein. The fresh herbs also contribute beneficial properties, traditionally valued for relieving flatulence and supporting healthy digestion.



***Mhok Normai Sai Mu Sam Chan* (Steamed Bamboo Shoots with Pork Belly Wrapped in Banana Leaf)** is a distinctive steamed dish of Isan cuisine. *Mhok* is a cooking method in which ingredients are wrapped in banana leaves and steamed until cooked. The dish stands out for its thick texture due to *khao buea* (soaked sticky rice pounded into a fine paste), which pairs well with shredded bamboo shoots and pork belly, enhancing the spicy flavour. Cooked fermented fish provides savoury depth, complemented by the fat of the pork belly, while lemon basil leaves, lemongrass, and kaffir lime leaves enhance the aroma.

Mhok normai sai mu sam chan reflects local culinary wisdom during the rainy season, when fresh bamboo shoots emerge along the fields and farmland. Local communities traditionally boil the shoots with *yanang* leaf juice to reduce their bitterness and enhance their richness before seasoning, wrapping them in banana leaves, and steaming them. This method helps preserve the aromas and extend their life.

Yanang leaves are traditionally regarded as cooling and balancing for the body. Bamboo shoots are rich in fibre, supporting healthy bowel function, while fresh herbs such as lemongrass, lemon basil, and kaffir lime leaves are traditionally valued for relieving flatulence and bloating, as well as supporting respiratory health. Garlic and shallots also support the immune system. However, as the dish contains both bamboo shoots and fatty pork belly, those with high uric acid levels or high blood lipids should consume it with caution.

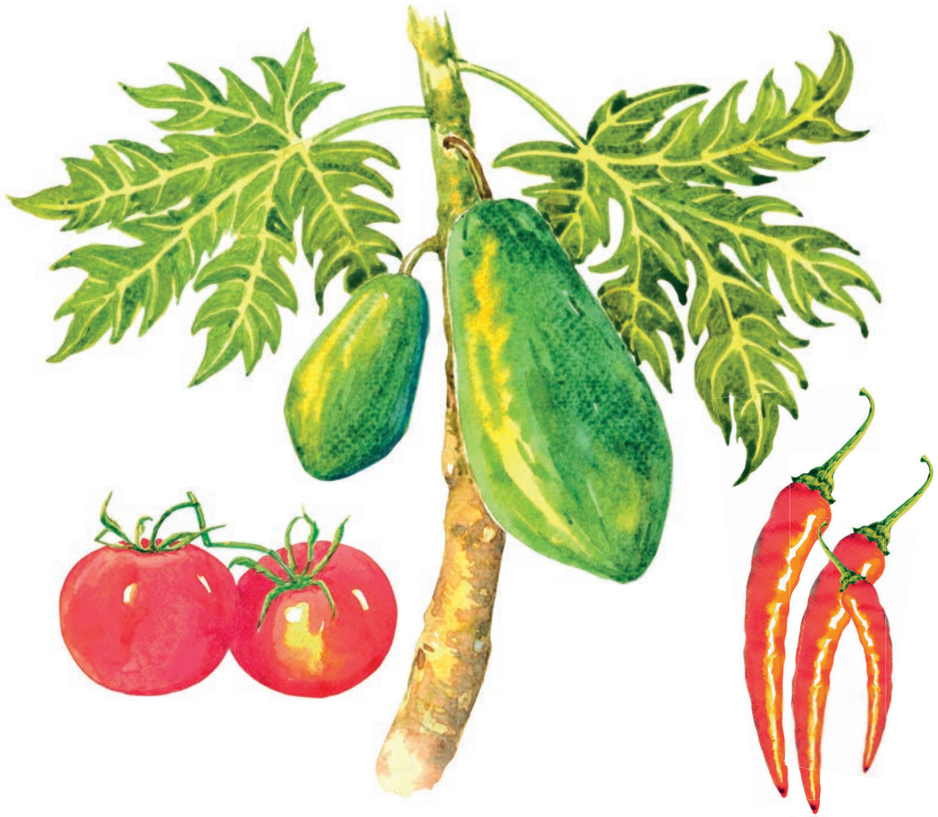




***Saikrok Isan* (Isan Sausage)** is an Isan signature speciality that reflects the region's traditional wisdom in food preservation, particularly in Chaiyaphum and Khon Kaen provinces. Its origins can be traced to the practice of hunting wild animals and slaughtering cattle and buffaloes in the past, which often resulted in large quantities of meat that needed to be preserved for long-term consumption. Over time, pork became the primary meat used in the sausage.

Saikrok Isan is a small, bite-sized sausage chain made by stuffing a mixture of minced pork, pork fat, sticky rice, and seasonings into pork casings, then letting it ferment naturally until pleasantly sour and full of the aromas of garlic and black pepper. When grilled or fried, the casing becomes crisp while the interior remains juicy and tender. It is commonly served with fresh cabbage, ginger, and bird's eye chillies to balance the richness of the sausage.

Nutritionally, *saikrok Isan* is a source of protein from pork, which helps support muscle growth and repair. The natural fermentation process also produces beneficial microorganisms. However, as the sausage can be relatively high in fat and sodium, it should be consumed in moderation.



***Som Tam* (Papaya Salad)** is a world-renowned signature dish of Northeastern Thailand. In 2023, it ranked sixth in TasteAtlas's list of the world's best salads. The word *som* in the local dialect refers to a sour taste, while *tam* means to pound ingredients together. Although papaya is not an indigenous plant, it was long introduced to Thailand and subsequently adopted by Isan communities, who mixed it with local ingredients such as fermented fish, giving rise to the dish's distinctive character.

Som tam is made by pounding and mixing shredded green papaya with tomatoes, long beans, chillies, and lime, together with fermented fish sauce. The result is a harmonious sour, spicy, salty, and sweet flavour. The crisp, juicy papaya strands absorb the dressing, creating a dish that reflects the Isan way of making delicious food from fresh, available ingredients around them.

Som tam is rich in dietary fibre from green papaya, which supports healthy digestion and bowel function. It is also naturally low in fat, suitable for those seeking to manage their weight. Lime and tomatoes provide vitamin C, which contributes to healthy skin and supports the body's immune system.

Southern Cuisine Aesthetics: The Herbal and Cultural Connections of Two Seas

Southern Thai cuisine is a chronicle of cultural acculturation, herbal wisdom, and the culinary traditions of the southern seas stretching across a fertile peninsula bordered by the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. The southern 14 provinces have long been blessed with an abundance of fresh ingredients from the waters and have served as an important centre of maritime trade since ancient times, fostering a powerful convergence of cultures that has profoundly shaped its culinary traditions.

Southern Thai cuisine is hence bold, intense, fiery, savoury and aromatic due to the herbs and spices. It is widely regarded as one of Thailand's most complex culinary traditions, emerging from the integration of traditional food-preservation wisdom and diverse cultural influences—from the robust spices of South India and the Malay-influenced use of *kapi* and *nam budu,* to stir-frying, deep-frying and braising techniques introduced by Chinese immigrants. One notable example is *gao yuk,* a Phuket speciality of steamed pork belly with dried vegetables.

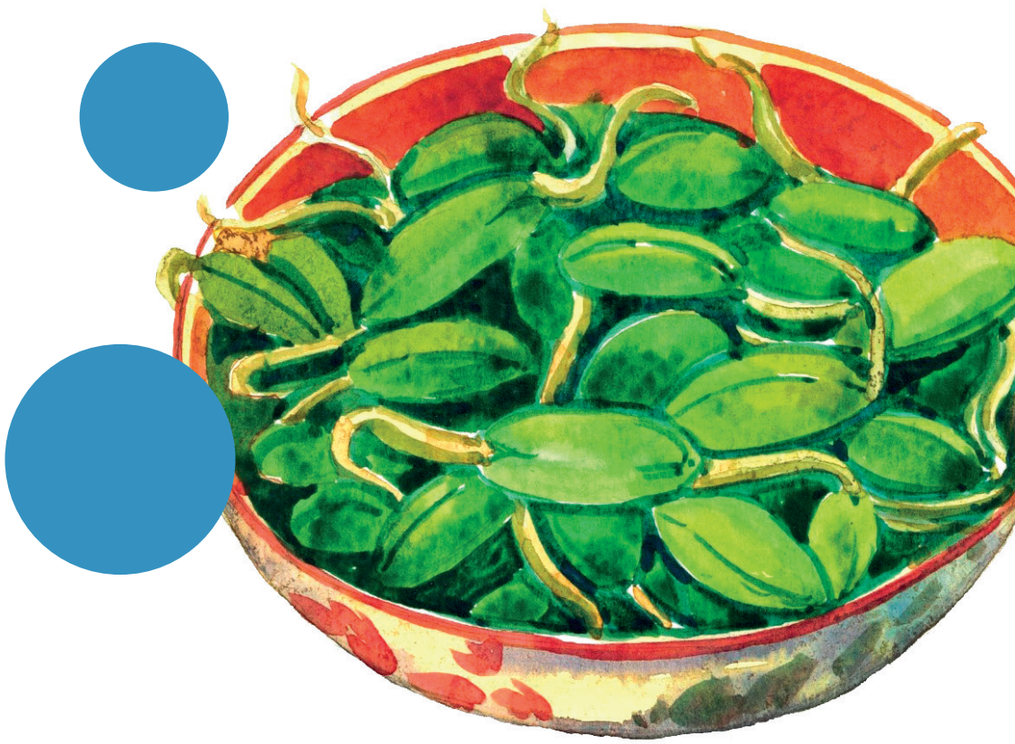


At the same time, the intensely spicy, distinctly salty, and refreshingly sour flavours of southern cuisine reflect a form of culinary wisdom suited to the region's hot, humid, and rainy climate. Turmeric and other herbs used in strong-flavoured curries or soups, such as *kaeng tai pla* and *kaeng lueang,* help neutralise the fishy smell of seafood while contributing to the body's perspiration and immune system. Southern cuisine's harmonious balance comes through the combination of the savouriness of quality *kapi* and the bright acidity of *som khaek,* which enhances and rounds out the flavours. Equally essential is *phak no,* an assortment of local fresh vegetables and herbs served alongside the main dishes, including *yot mui, sato, luk riang, yot man pu* and *phak kut.* Their varied astringent, nutty, sour and aromatic flavours provide a refreshing counterpoint to the intense heat of southern dishes. Accordingly, every southern Thai meal is more than an expression of fiery flavours. It is an art and science of culinary wisdom, bringing together inherited insights, herbal knowledge and the spirit of the life beside the sea.

Today, the distinct character of southern Thai cuisine has travelled far beyond its geographical boundaries and gained recognition internationally. Its unique flavours are direct, vibrant and full of character—from *phat sato kung sot,* which celebrates the rich flavour of the local ingredients, and *tom som pla* with refreshing *som khaek,* to *khao yam pak tai,* a vibrant composition of fresh herbs and *nam budu.* Together, these dishes offer international diners an exciting and distinctive culinary experience. The sophisticated blending of fresh herbs, the skilled heat control, and the emphasis on the freshness of local seafood have inspired the new generation of chefs to reinterpret southern culinary wisdom and elevate it to the realm of fine dining, while retaining their bold identity, intense flavours, and authentic culinary spirit.



25 Southern Thai Dishes





***Kai Ko Lae* (Grilled Golek Chicken),** also known as *kai kho,* is a traditional dish of Thai Muslims in Thailand's southern border provinces. It originated and remains popular in Pattani, particularly in the Thung Phla community of Khok Pho District. The name *ko lae* (or *kho*) derives from the Malay word *golek,* meaning 'to roll', referring to the technique of repeatedly turning and rolling the coconut milk-seasoned chicken over the fire while grilling to achieve tender meat infused with a smoky aroma.

Chicken thigh or breast is skewered and grilled while being coated with a rich spice paste made from dried chillies, shallots, lemongrass, turmeric, shrimp paste, and thick coconut milk. The finished chicken has a glossy yellow-orange to reddish colour from the curry paste and turmeric, with a spicy flavour balanced by creamy sweetness from the coconut milk and a savoury finish. It is commonly served with sticky rice or *khao lam* (roasted glutinous rice in a bamboo tube) and is popular during Muslim festivals and community celebrations.

Kai ko lae is a nutritious dish. Chicken provides high protein, while turmeric contains curcumin, a natural antioxidant. Chillies also help stimulate metabolism, while lemongrass and shallots are traditionally valued for supporting digestion.

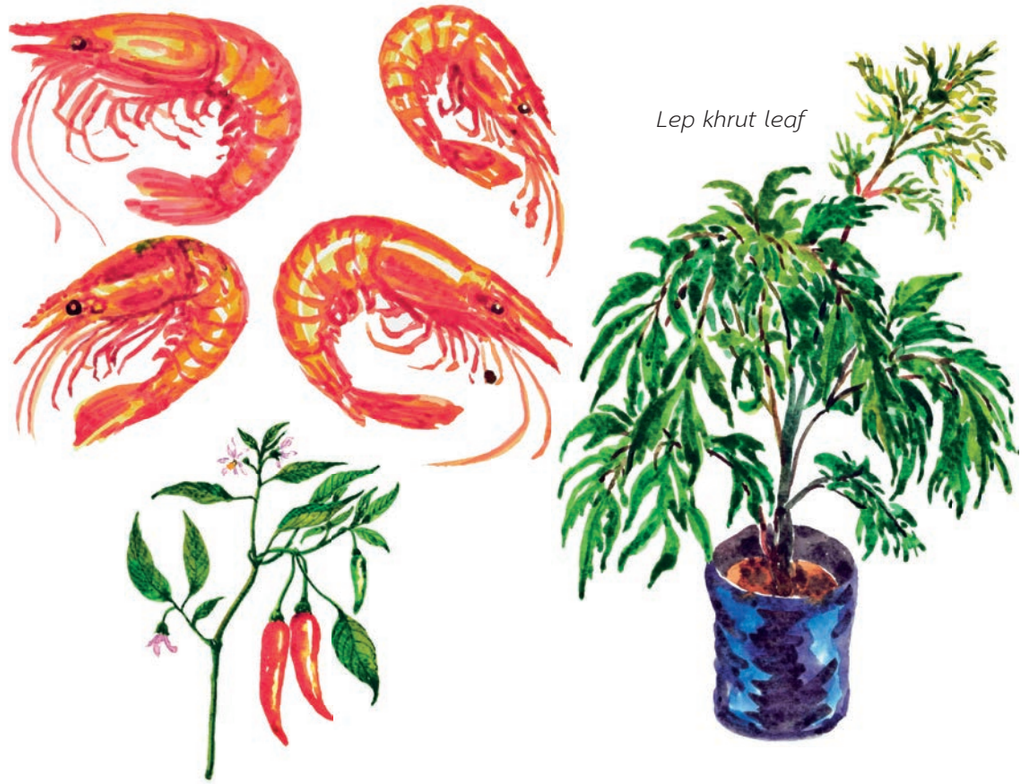




Kaeng Khua Phrik Kraduk Mu (Spicy Pork Rib Curry), sometimes called *kaeng phrik* or *kaeng khua phrik kraduk on,* is an authentic southern Thai curry without coconut milk. It has a thick, dark yellow broth from turmeric and heat from a generous amount of peppercorns. The secret of the dish lies in simmering pork ribs until tender, blending the rich stock from the bones and curry paste.

The dish also reflects traditional food preservation wisdom, preventing the food from spoiling with its intense spiciness and salty flavour. It is therefore commonly served with steamed rice, Thai omelette, and a variety of *phak no* (accompanying fresh local vegetables in southern dialect) to balance the flavours and reduce the intense heat.

The dish reflects the lifestyle of southern Thai communities in the monsoon region, where heavy rainfall and humid weather are common. Spicy curries containing herbs such as peppercorns, bird's eye chillies, turmeric, lemongrass, and galangal help keep the body warm. Peppercorns and bird's eye chillies contain capsaicin, which helps increase metabolism, promote perspiration, and relieve cold symptoms. Turmeric contains curcumin, which helps reduce inflammation in the body and support the digestive system. Lemongrass and galangal help relieve flatulence and bloating, and support blood circulation. The pork cartilage is a source of protein and calcium and helps support joints.



Lep khrut leaf

***Kung Thot Bai Lep Khrut* (Crispy Shrimp with *Lep Khrut* Leaf)** reflects local culinary wisdom through the creative use of *lep khrut* leaves, an auspicious plant commonly grown around households in Southern Thailand, transformed into a delicious crispy snack. The dish is prepared by coating *lep khrut* leaves in a batter made with rice flour, *kaeng khua* curry paste, and salt before placing fresh shrimp on top and deep-frying until crispy. The result is a delightful, crispy-yet-juicy texture. The slightly bitter and aromatic flavour of the leaves blends harmoniously with the spicy and savoury notes of the curry paste, along with the natural sweetness of the shrimp. It is commonly served with sweet dipping sauce or chilli dips.

Lep khrut leaf is considered a medicinal herb containing antioxidants such as saponin and panaxynol that support intestinal function and promote digestive health. However, as this dish is deep-fried, it should be consumed in moderation as part of a balanced diet.



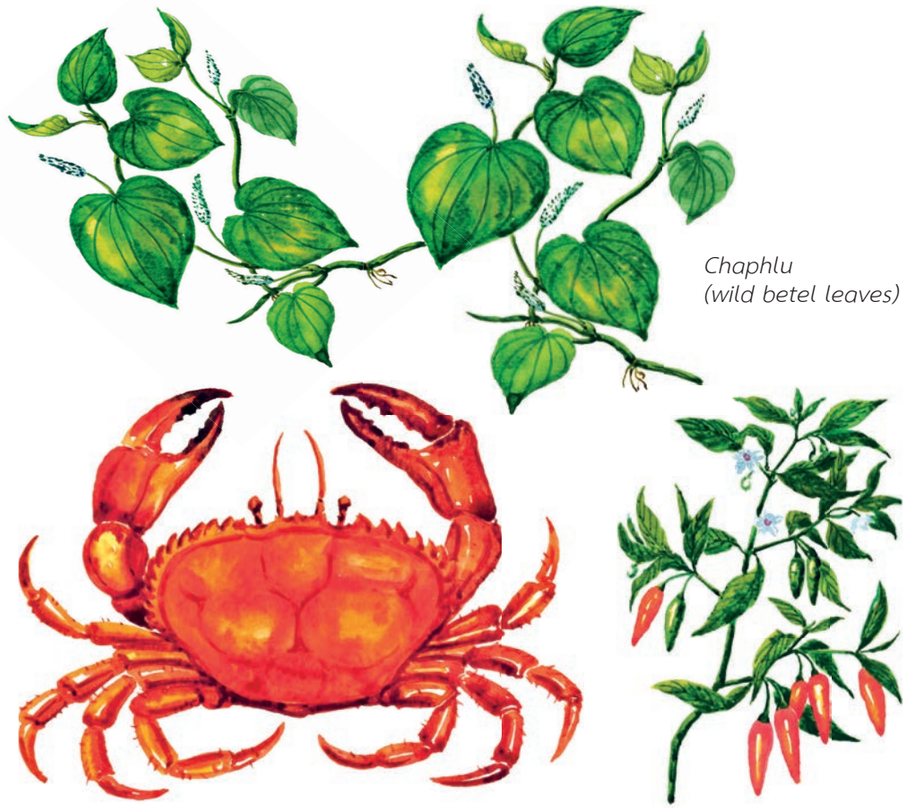




***Kaeng Tai Pla* (Fermented Fish Entrail Curry),** commonly known among the southern Thai as *kaeng phung pla,* is a local dish that reflects the food preservation wisdom of fishermen in the past. The entrails of sea fish (known as *phung pla* in Southern Thailand), such as local mackerel and Indian mackerel, are fermented with salt for approximately 10–30 days to preserve them before being used.

The curry has a thick, brown or dark red broth with intense spiciness, well-rounded flavour, and characteristic saltiness from the fermented fish entrails. It is a traditional southern Thai curry made without coconut milk. Key ingredients include fermented fish entrails and chilli paste of pounded dried bird's eye chillies, turmeric, shallots, lemongrass, and galangal. Grilled fish is added along with a variety of local vegetables, such as fresh bamboo shoots, Thai eggplants, yardlong beans, rattan shoots, pumpkin, and kaffir lime leaves, resulting in a rich and nutritious dish.

Kaeng tai pla is rich in Thai herbs that offer health benefits. Turmeric contains curcumin, which helps reduce inflammation and support digestive health. Galangal and lemongrass help relieve flatulence and ease bloating, while shallots contain antioxidants that help relieve cold symptoms. However, fermented fish entrails and the seasonings contain relatively high levels of sodium, so the dish should be consumed with caution, particularly by people with high blood pressure or kidney disease.



Chaphlu
(wild betel leaves)

***Kaeng Pu Bai Chaphlu* (Crab Curry with Wild Betel Leaves),** also known as *kaeng khua pu bai chaphlu,* is a popular traditional dish of Southern Thailand. It is a signature dish of Phuket, Phang-nga, and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces, as these coastal areas are abundant in blue crabs and naturally grown *chaphlu* (wild betel).

This coconut-based curry has a rich yellow or deep orange colour from the curry paste and coconut milk. The main ingredient is crab, typically blue crab claws or whole fresh blue crabs. The dark green *chaphlu* leaves have a pungent aroma with a mildly spicy sensation, helping to mask the crab's fishy smell. People in the South commonly eat the curry with *khanom chin* (fermented rice noodle) or hot steamed rice.

The dish also offers health benefits. *Chaphlu* leaves are high in beta-carotene, which supports eye health, relieves bloating and flatulence, and promotes digestion. They are also high in calcium, which helps maintain healthy bones. However, *chaphlu* leaves contain high levels of oxalate, so people with kidney disease or those at risk of kidney stones should consume them in limited amounts.





***Kaeng Pla Duk Bai Yi Ra* (Catfish Curry with Shrubby Basil)** is a distinctive dish from Southern Thailand, known for its intense and spicy flavour. *Bai yi ra* (shrubby basil), also known as *bai ra,* is used as a main ingredient to help mask the fishy smell of catfish. It is a coconut-based curry with a rich curry paste that gives the dish a deep orange or dark red colour.

The main ingredients are fresh catfish cut into pieces and aromatic *bai yi ra,* complemented by the intense southern Thai curry paste, made with fresh bird's eye chillies, dried chillies, galangal, lemongrass, garlic, shallots, and shrimp paste. It is simple to prepare, with the ingredients readily available, as *bai yi ra* is a herb commonly grown around the home. The dish reflects the distinct culinary culture of Southern Thailand, where strongly flavoured, intensely spicy food is widely enjoyed.

Bai yi ra also has medicinal properties. It helps relieve flatulence and bloating and supports digestion. It is high in beta-carotene, which has antioxidant properties, helps nourish the body, and promotes perspiration. However, because the dish is very hot and spicy, people with gastric conditions should consume it with caution, and *bai yi ra* may have a sedative effect and cause drowsiness.



Turmeric





***Kaeng Lueang Pla Kapong* (Yellow Sour Sea Bass Curry),** or *kaeng som* in southern dialect, is named after the colour of its broth. Sea bass, a high-quality ingredient widely available in coastal areas, is commonly used. The broth has a bright yellow colour from fresh turmeric and is bold, sour, spicy, salty, and slightly sweet, with aromatic shrimp paste and herbs.

Fresh white sea bass with firm, naturally sweet flesh is commonly used, while common vegetables include young coconut crowns, green papaya, lotus stems, morning glories, or pickled bamboo shoots, adding textures to the dish. The curry combines local resources, including herbs—such as turmeric, chillies, and garlic—with fresh seafood, resulting in a strong-flavoured dish that promotes perspiration and helps relieve allergies caused by weather changes in the hot and humid climate of Southern Thailand.

The sour and spicy flavour of southern *kaeng som* also stimulates the appetite and effectively helps mask the fishy smell. Southern people commonly eat *kaeng lueang* with hot steamed rice and *phak no,* reflecting a simple way of life that relies on nature.

The dish is low in fat and beneficial to the body. Turmeric contains curcumin, which provides antioxidant effects and helps relieve bloating, allergies, and colds. Chillies and the curry paste help stimulate metabolism and relieve flatulence. Sea bass is full of high-quality, easily digestible protein and beneficial fats, while the vegetables provide dietary fibre, which supports digestion and bowel movements.





Kai Tom Khamin **(Chicken Turmeric Soup)** is a popular healthy dish in many provinces, particularly Songkhla. The dish is influenced by the specialisation in traditional herbs and spices used in cooking, especially among Thai-Muslim families, who have long used turmeric and herbal spices in their cuisine.

Kai tom khamin has a beautiful golden-yellow broth from finely pounded fresh turmeric and a fragrant aroma from herbs including lemongrass, galangal, and kaffir lime leaves. Despite its name, it has a bold flavour that is spicy, hot, and salty, with a slight sourness usually from *som khaek* (asam gelugur) or tamarind paste.

Free-range local chicken is commonly used and simmered until tender, making this a nourishing family dish. It is also highly beneficial due to the herbs it contains, including turmeric, pepper, shallots, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, and garlic, which help relieve bloating and flatulence, ease cold symptoms and nasal congestion, soothe the throat, and support immunity. *Som khaek* also helps break down fat.



***Kai Thot Hat Yai* (Hat Yai Fried Chicken),** originating from Hat Yai District, is believed to have been created by marinating unsold fresh chicken with spices before frying, reflecting a culinary fusion wisdom of Thai, Malay, and Chinese cultures.

It has golden-brown, crispy skin and tender, juicy meat, with an intense aroma from a blend of spices including cumin, coriander seeds, pepper, and the traditional *sam kler* (coriander roots, garlic, and pepper mix). An essential element is the generous topping of crispy fried shallots, which adds fragrance and texture. It is commonly paired with sweet chilli dipping sauce and hot sticky rice, making it a convenient and satisfying meal that suits the fast-paced lifestyle of locals and visitors.

Nutritionally, *kai thot hat yai* provides high-quality protein from chicken, while the herbs and spices in the marinade offer traditional health benefits, such as supporting digestion and helping relieve bloating. However, as it is a deep-fried dish with relatively high fat and calorie content, it should be consumed in moderation or paired with fresh vegetables for a more balanced meal.



Glutinous rice flour

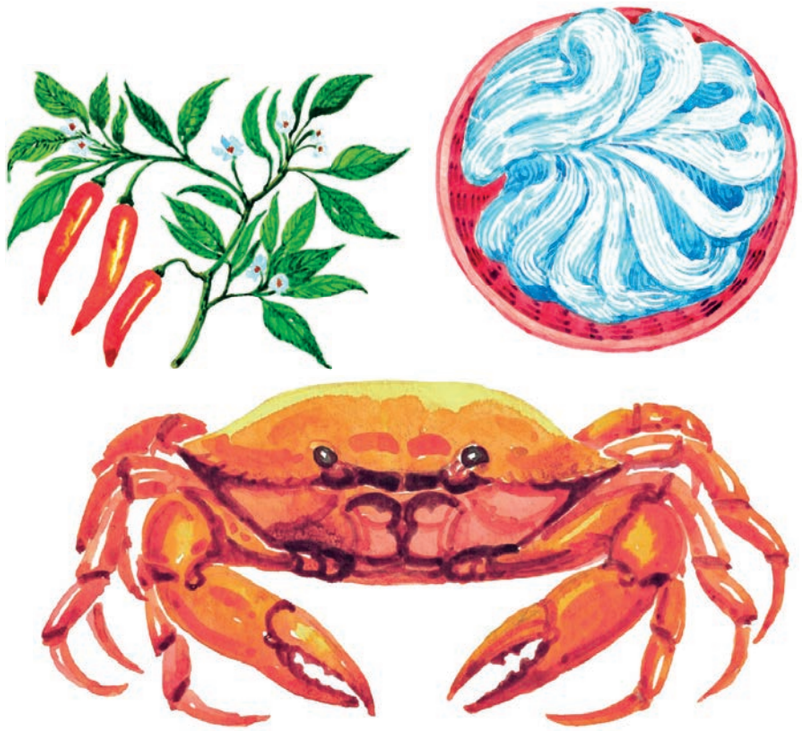


***Khanom Kho* (Southern Thai Glutinous Rice Ball with Palm Sugar Filling)** is a passed-down traditional southern Thai sweet and a staple in significant merit-making traditions, such as the *Sat Duean Sip* Festival, as well as local rituals including offerings to guardian spirits and household deities.

Making *khanom kho* is a family activity, where relatives gather to prepare the sweet together during holidays and special occasions. The sweet is small, bite-sized balls, similar to *khanom tom khao* from Central Thailand. It is made by kneading glutinous rice flour into a soft, chewy dough, filling it with small pieces of *nam tan waen* (jaggery made from either palm sugar or coconut sugar), and coating with grated coconut mixed with salt. The slightly savoury flavour of the coconut balances the rich sweetness of the melted sugary filling.

There are two main variations of *khanom kho:* the dry variation, in which the balls are boiled until cooked and coated with grated coconut, and the coconut milk variation, where cooked balls are served in sweetened coconut milk.

Therefore, *khanom kho* provides high energy from glutinous rice flour, while coconut and coconut milk provide beneficial fats and minerals. However, as it contains significant amounts of sugar and coconut milk, it should be consumed in controlled amounts as part of a balanced diet.



***Khanom Chin Nam Ya Pu* (Fermented Rice Noodles with Crab Curry)** is another popular dish with Peranakan roots—a blend of Chinese immigrants and the local Malay community—in Phuket. Its distinctive character lies in the combination of fresh seafood with southern Thai curry paste. The curry is rich with coconut milk and chunks of fresh blue crab meat, has an intense, spicy flavour, a golden-yellow hue from turmeric, and is salty, balanced with the natural sweetness of the crab.

People in Southern Thailand commonly pair it with fermented rice noodles, locally known as *nom chin,* which are light brown, soft and chewy, and have a distinctive aroma. It is a popular dish that can be enjoyed throughout the day, even for dinner in some areas such as Chumphon Province.

The southern Thai concept of *Pa–Na–Le* (Forest–Field–Sea) is embedded in their life. The tradition of eating *khanom chin* represents a way of life closely connected to and dependent upon nature: vegetables gathered from forests or home gardens *(phak no),* rice noodles from the fields, and seafood—crab meat—from the sea.

The dish is also nutritious. Crab meat provides protein, while the curry paste contains beneficial herbs. Turmeric has antioxidant properties and supports digestive health, garlic and shallots help strengthen the immune system, and *phak no* is high in dietary fibre, which supports healthy.





***Khanom Chin Nam Ya Pak Tai* (Fermented Rice Noodles with Southern Thai Curry),** particularly from Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, has its own distinctive identity. The characteristic of southern *nam ya* (curry) is its thick consistency and vibrant yellow colour from turmeric, the principal herb used to eliminate the fishy smell.

The curry paste is a combination of pounded dried bird's eye chillies, shrimp paste, garlic, shallots, and lemongrass, then mixed with boiled fresh fish such as catfish, Nile tilapia, or striped bonito for a rich curry with intense spiciness and a fragrant herb aroma. When served with soft, chewy fresh *khanom chin* and local fresh vegetables—such as *sato, luk niang,* young cashew leaves, *yot man pu,* pickled mustard greens, and bean sprouts—the flavour is enhanced and balances the spiciness.

This dish is enjoyed throughout the day, from breakfast until evening. It is a symbol of southern hospitality and is commonly prepared to welcome guests at merit-making ceremonies, traditional celebrations, and family gatherings. The dish also offers numerous health benefits. It is high in protein from the fish, while the fresh vegetables provide vitamins and dietary fibre. The warming properties of turmeric and chillies help relieve flatulence, ease bloating, and stimulate metabolism.



***Khanom La* (Southern Thai Sweet Rice Flour Net)** is a traditional southern Thai sweet, renowned in Pak Phanang and Tha Sala Districts of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. It has delicate, golden, thread-like strands woven into a thin net resembling fabric. The texture varies from crispy when fried to soft when rolled or folded into layers.

The sweet is made from fermented rice flour mixed with coconut sugar or *nam tan waen* and coconut milk. Making *khanom la* requires great skill and precision, as the batter must be drizzled precisely. It is considered one of the five significant traditional sweets offered to monks during the southern Thai *Sat Duean Sip* Festival, preserving local beliefs and cultural heritage.

Khanom la symbolise clothing and fabrics. southern Thai people traditionally prepare it as an offering to dedicate merit to deceased ancestors, with the belief that the sweet serves as new garments for them to wear in the after life. Nevertheless, *khanom la* provides energy mainly from rice flour and sugar. Due to its high carbohydrate and sugar content, excessive consumption may negatively affect health and increase the risk of elevated blood sugar levels.





***Khao Yam Pak Tai* (Southern Thai Rice Salad)** is a popular local dish in the Lower Southern Thailand, especially in Yala and Narathiwat provinces. Influenced by Malay culture (*nasi kerabu*), it reflects the region's simplicity and local wisdom.

The dish is typically prepared with normal cooked rice, such as jasmine or brown rice. In some recipes, the rice is cooked in butterfly pea flower water to give it a beautiful blue hue. Its distinct freshness and layers of flavour come from a wide variety of finely sliced fresh vegetables and herbs, including lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, *bai kraphang hoam (yan pha hoam),* torch ginger flowers, yardlong beans, bean sprouts, green mango, pomelo, and *sato.* The rice is further enhanced with aromatic accompaniments such as grated coconut, ground dried shrimp, and ground fish (salted Spanish mackerel or mackerel), before mixing with *nam budu*—a traditional seasoning made by fermenting sea fish with salt for approximately one year, then simmering with palm sugar, lemongrass, galangal, kaffir lime leaves, and shallots until it develops a well-balanced salty flavour with a lingering sweetness. The result is a harmonious combination of fragrant, rich, and savoury flavours.

Khao yam pak tai is commonly eaten as a breakfast dish or as a complete one-dish meal. It provides all five essential food groups in a single serving, making it a well-balanced, healthy dish that supports weight management while reflecting the nutritional harmony of Thai cuisine.



***Khua Kling Mu* (Southern Thai Curry Paste Stir-fried Minced Pork)** is a popular dish long enjoyed in southern Thailand. The dish is a dry-fried dish made by frying minced meat, such as pork, in a wok with curry paste until completely dry and crumbly, easily rolling around in the wok, giving the name *'khua kling'*. The curry paste coats the meat thoroughly, giving it a beautiful yellow colour from turmeric, an intensely spicy flavour from fresh peppercorns and the curry paste, and a fragrant aroma from local herbs. The dish thus reflects the local culinary wisdom of using Thai herbs in cooking, including turmeric, pepper, galangal, and lemongrass. With its intense spiciness, the dish is typically eaten with various fresh vegetables, such as cucumber and young cashew leaves, to reduce the heat and add nutritional value.

As a dry dish, it can be kept for a relatively long time, reflecting a way of life in which people worked outside and needed food that was easy to preserve. It also contains beneficial herbs such as turmeric, galangal, and lemongrass, which have antioxidant properties and help support immunity and the digestive system. Pork provides a high-quality source of protein. However, as the dish is strongly flavoured and is often seasoned with salt, attention should be paid to sodium intake.

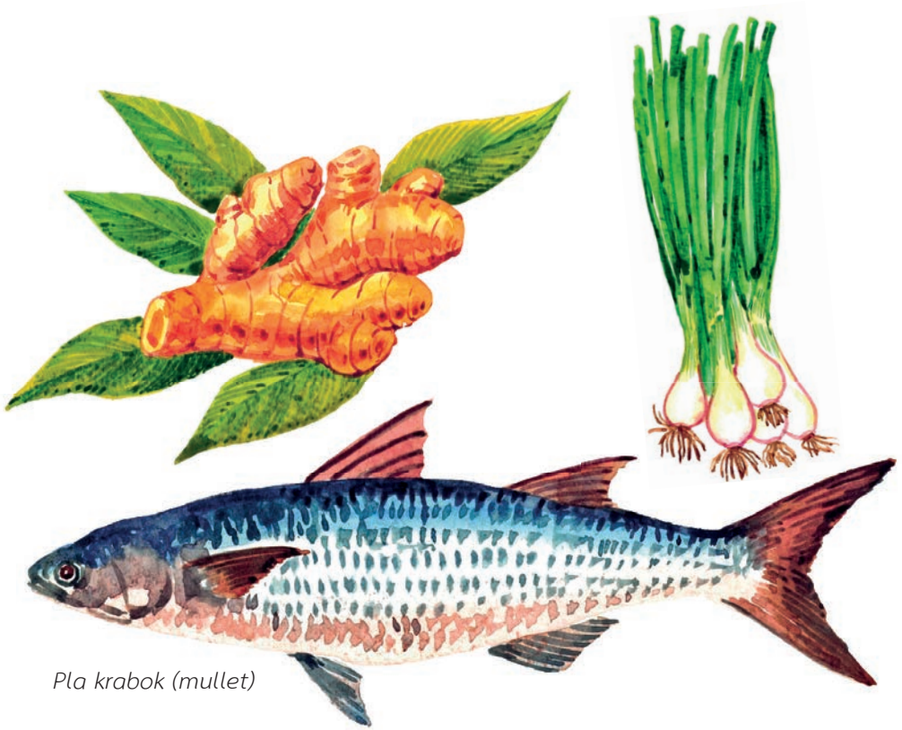




***Chuchi Pla Thu Phrik Kaeng Tai* (Southern Chuchi Mackerel Curry)** is a Thai dish distinguished by its spicy, aromatic, and rich flavour, combining local ingredients with refined cooking techniques. *Chuchi* curry has its roots in royal Thai cuisine and appears in cookbooks such as *Mae Khrua Hua Pa* (1909). Its heat comes from turmeric, while the curry paste provides the distinctive aroma characteristic of southern Thai cuisine.

The curry has a thick consistency, with oil sitting beautifully on the surface, and a deep reddish-orange colour from southern Thai curry paste and turmeric. It has a rich, spicy flavour and a fragrant aroma of curry paste ingredients—such as turmeric, galangal, and lemongrass—balanced by the rich sweetness of coconut milk and rounded out with fish sauce and palm sugar. The main ingredient is fresh or steamed mackerel, a widely available saltwater fish. Local turmeric is also a key ingredient in the southern Thai curry paste, helping to mask the fishy smell.

The dish also offers health benefits. Mackerel is an excellent source of protein that helps build muscle and repair damaged tissues. It also contains essential omega-3 fatty acids, which support brain health and reduce the risk of heart disease. Turmeric in the curry paste has anti-inflammatory properties, while galangal and lemongrass help relieve flatulence, and chillies support metabolism.



Pla krabok (mullet)

Tom Som Pla Krabok **(Sour Mullet Soup)** is a local dish reflecting the way of life of coastal communities along the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman coast. As *pla krabok* (mullet) is an abundant local fish found along the coast and in river mouths, it is easy for local people to catch and prepare at home.

Although it is called *tom som,* this southern Thai version has its own distinctive characteristics. The yellow broth from turmeric is moderately rich, with a bold spicy and sour flavour, followed by saltiness and the natural sweetness of the fish and vegetables. The distinctive sourness comes from local ingredients such as tamarind and *mamuang bao* (local small sour mangoes).

The dish uses easily accessible ingredients and is widely available locally. Its main ingredients are mullet—either whole or cut into pieces—and southern Thai curry paste made from fresh and dried bird's eye chillies, turmeric, garlic, shallots, and shrimp paste, along with local vegetables such as papaya and morning glory.

Tom som pla krabok is low in fat and contains no coconut milk. The fish provides easily digestible protein and beneficial fatty acids. The curry paste contains herbs such as turmeric, which has antioxidant properties and supports digestive health. Garlic, shallots, and chillies help relieve flatulence and ease cold-like symptoms during seasonal changes, while the vegetables provide high levels of dietary fibre that support digestion and bowel movements.

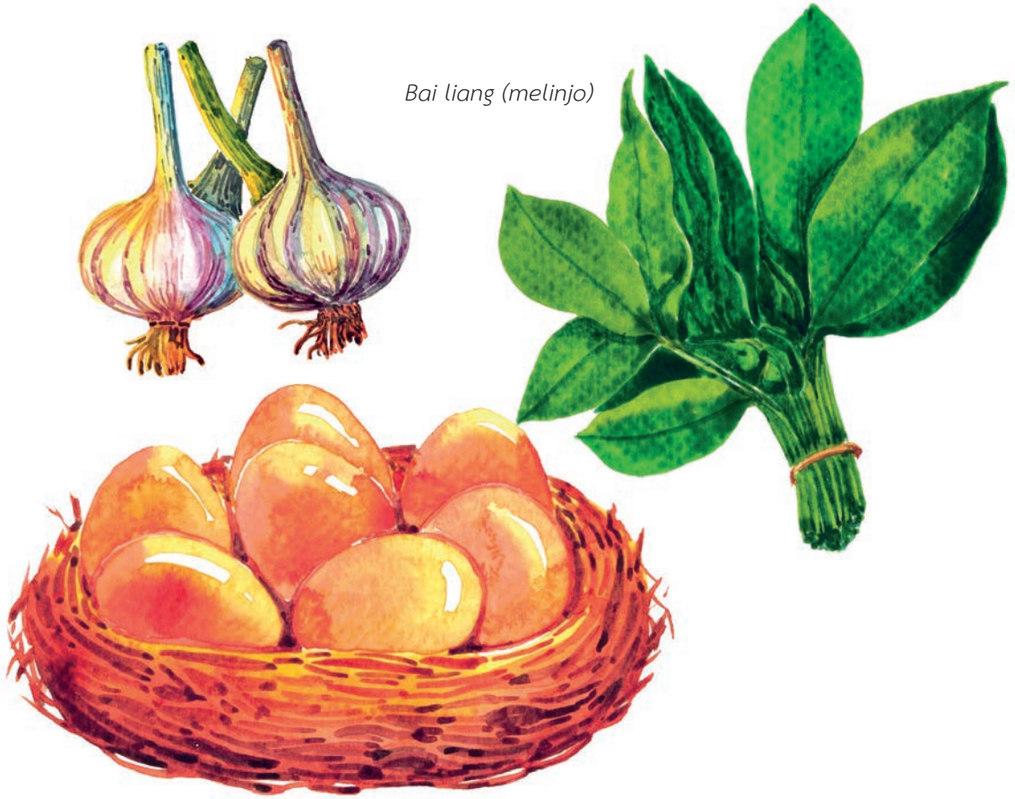




Namphrik Kung Siap **(Smoked Dried Prawn Chilli Paste)** is a well-known local dish of Southern Thailand that originated in Phuket Province, drawing on the food preservation wisdom of fishing communities in Phuket and along the Andaman coast.

Its main ingredients include *kung siap*—fresh prawns skewered, smoked, and grilled until dry and fragrant—along with shrimp paste, fresh bird's eye chillies, shallots, garlic, palm sugar, and lime juice. The ingredients are pounded together into a coarse paste, retaining the texture of the herbs and prawns and giving the dish its distinctive crunchy texture. It has a bold flavour that combines spiciness, saltiness, sourness, and sweetness, together with its characteristic smoky aroma.

It is commonly served with fresh side vegetables, such as *sato, luk niang,* young cashew leaves, and other fresh or blanched vegetables, making it highly nutritious. It is rich in protein and calcium from the smoked dried prawns. Its main ingredients, including chillies, shallots, and garlic, help relieve flatulence, support digestion, and strengthen the immune system. Eating it with side vegetables also provides plenty of dietary fibre, vitamins, and minerals.



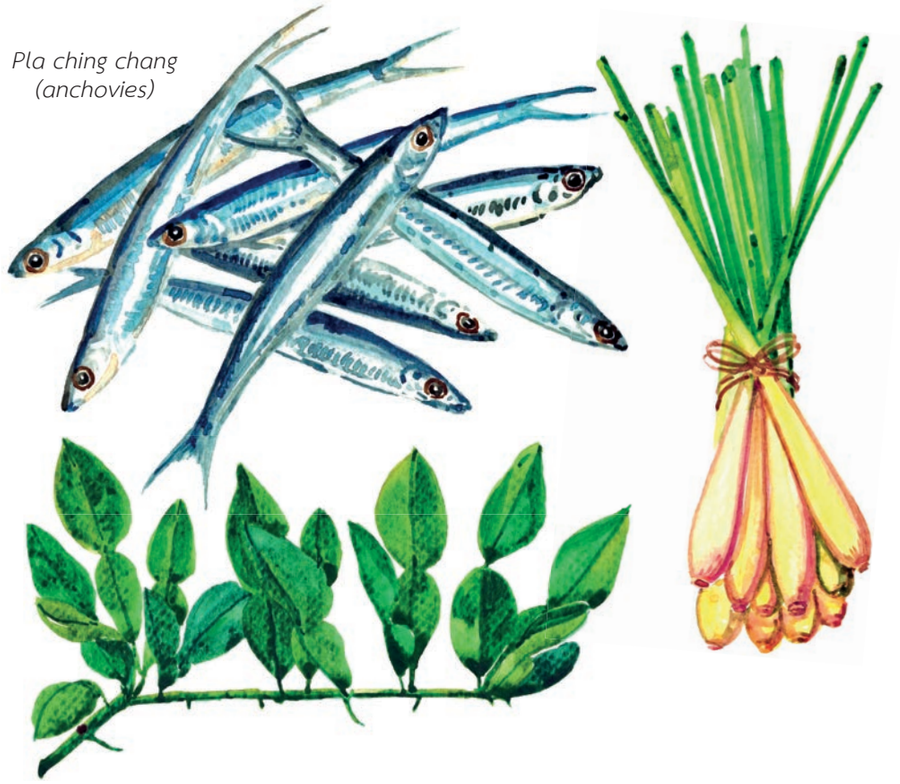
Bai liang (melinjo)

***Bai Liang Phat Khai* (Stir-fried Melinjo with Egg)** is known as the queen of southern Thai local vegetables. *Bai liang* (melinjo), also known as *phak miang* or *phak phriang,* is a local nutritious vegetable familiar to households throughout the region. It is particularly common in Upper Southern provinces such as Chumphon, Surat Thani, Ranong, and Nakhon Si Thammarat, where it typically grows on plains and foothills in moist forest areas.

Originally a wild vegetable, local people traditionally used its young leaves in dishes such as coconut milk soup and *kaeng liang*. Today, *phak liang* has become an important economic crop that generates income for farmers.

It is also a nutritious and medicinal food. It supports eye and skin health due to its high levels of beta-carotene, vitamin A, and antioxidants. The vitamin B content helps support the nervous system, while calcium and phosphorus help strengthen bones and teeth. It also helps combat bacteria, reduce blood sugar levels, and reduce inflammation.



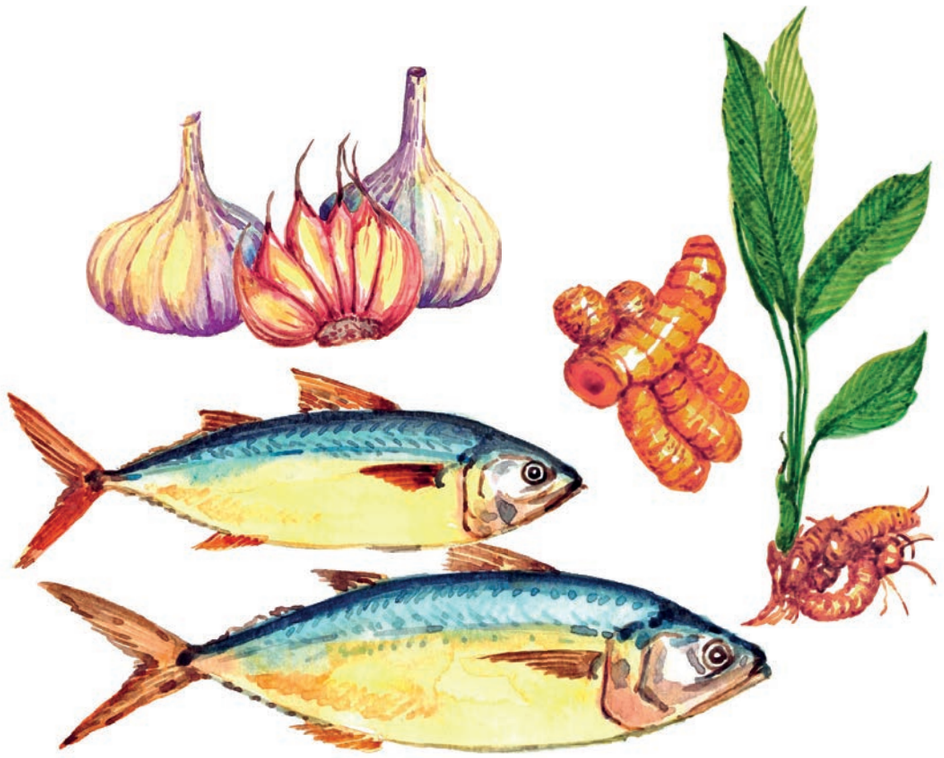


Pla ching chang
(anchovies)

***Pla Ching Chang Thot Samunphrai* (Herb-fried Anchovy)** is the Andaman coastal area's local dish, particularly in Phuket, Phang Nga, Ranong, Krabi, and Satun provinces, where abundant marine resources have shaped local culinary traditions. The dish reflects the traditional food preservation wisdom of coastal fishing communities, who dry *pla ching chang* (anchovies), tiny silvery fish, to extend their shelf life. Today, dried *pla ching chang* has become an important community economic product of the region.

When fried, *pla ching chang* becomes golden brown and crispy, and can be enjoyed whole. It is tossed with crispy Thai herbs such as kaffir lime leaves, dried chillies, and fried garlic, creating a fragrant and savoury dish that can be enjoyed as a snack or served with steamed rice and hot rice porridge.

Nutritionally, *pla ching chang* is rich in calcium, which helps strengthen bones and teeth, as well as omega-3 fatty acids that support brain and heart health. It also provides protein, potassium, and selenium. Thai herbs such as kaffir lime leaves and chillies are traditionally valued for their digestive benefits and promoting blood circulation.



***Pla Thot Khamin* (Turmeric-fried Fish)** is a dish that reflects the close relationship between southern Thai communities and the sea. It showcases local culinary wisdom through the use of herbs—turmeric, garlic, shallots, lemongrass, pepper, and salt—marinating with fresh sea fish, such as sand whiting, sand goby, mullet, or red snapper. This not only helps reduce the fishy smell but also gives the dish its distinctive colour.

When fried, the fish develops a beautiful golden-brown and crispy texture, while the flesh remains tender, moist, and full of the aroma of herbs and spices. It is commonly served with hot steamed rice.

Nutritionally, *pla thot khamin* offers the benefits of turmeric and aromatic herbs, which are valued for supporting digestion, relieving bloating, and reducing flatulence. It also contains antioxidant compounds, making it both a delicious and nutritious southern Thai dish.



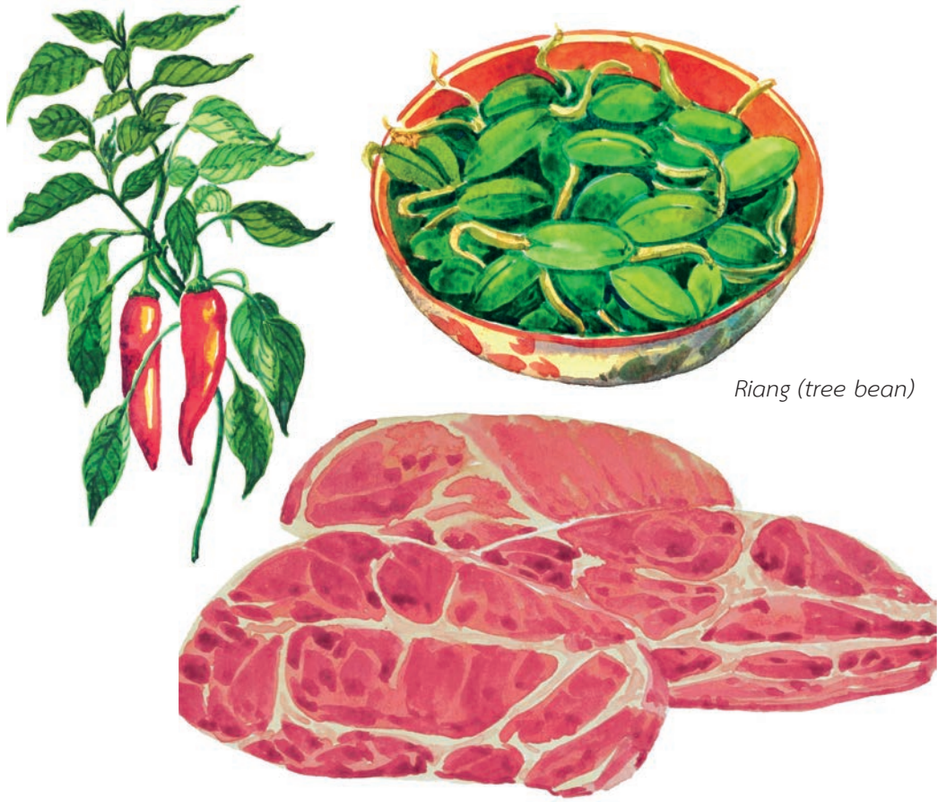




Phat Sato Kapi Kung Sot **(Stir-fried Stink Beans with Shrimp Paste and Fresh Prawns)** features *sato,* a symbolic local vegetable of southern Thai food culture, known for its unique aroma. The *sato* pod is green, long, and flat, with a slightly curved tip and seeds inside. The seeds are bright green with a smooth surface and a distinctive pungent aroma locally described as a greenish smell. They have a rich flavour and crisp texture.

The varieties commonly used for stir-frying are *sato khao,* whose seeds are crisp, sweet, and rich, with a moderate pungent aroma, and *sato dan,* which has a thick shell, large seeds, and a firm texture, with a stronger aroma and more bitter flavour. Sato grows easily in the hot and humid climate of Southern Thailand and can be commonly found throughout the region. It is also an important economic crop. People in the South commonly eat it fresh, as an accompaniment to chilli paste, or stir-fried with shrimp paste and prawns. *Sato phat kung* is therefore a harmonious combination of seafood ingredients—prawns and shrimp paste—and locally grown produce.

The dish is highly nutritious and rich in vitamins A, B1–3, and C, which support digestion. It is high in dietary fibre, supports eye health, strengthens immunity, and contains flavonoids with antioxidant properties that help slow ageing and inhibit the development of heart disease. However, *sato* is high in purines, so people with gout or high blood uric acid levels should avoid or consume it in moderation.



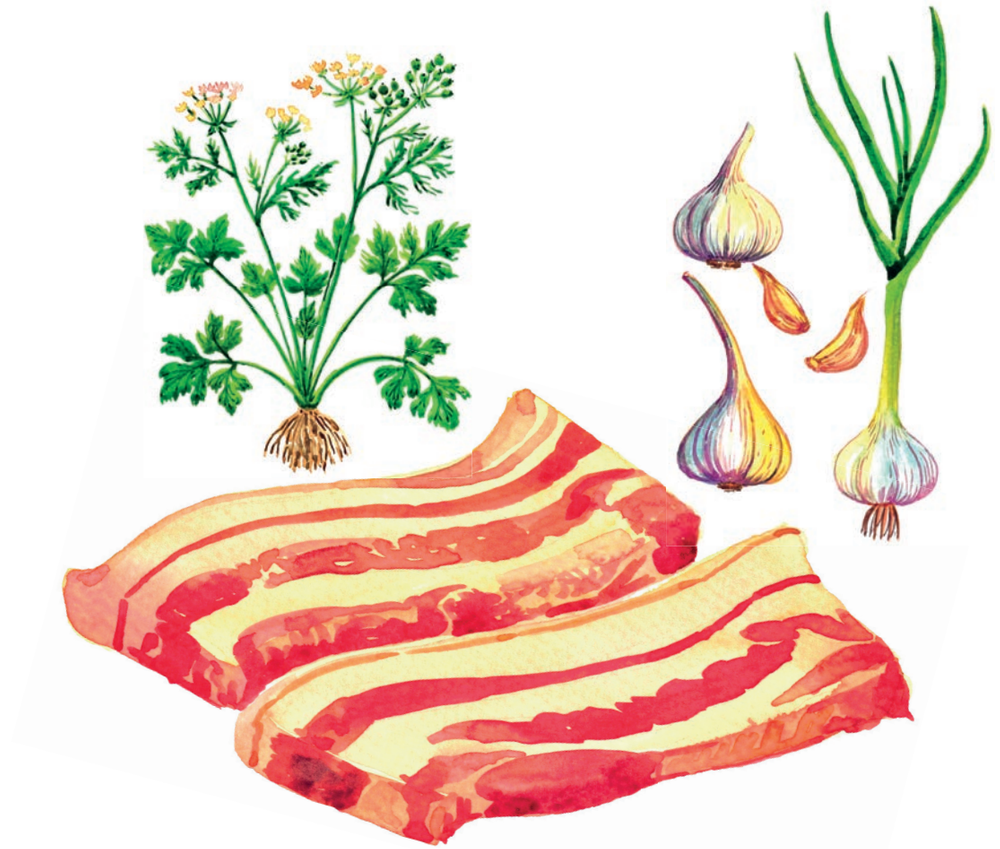
Riang (tree bean)

***Mu Phat Luk Riang* (Stir-fried Pork with Tree Bean)** is a local dish, particularly popular in Lower Southern Thailand, where *riang* (tree bean) trees are abundant in moist evergreen forests and lowland areas. It reflects traditional ways of life in using natural plants to create dishes for the household. The dish is widely enjoyed by both Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims.

People in Southern Thailand commonly eat fresh *luk riang* as an accompanying vegetable with chilli dip or *kaeng tai pla.* However, using it in a spicy stir-fried dish adds variety to the local meal. To prepare the dish, *luk riang* is washed and stir-fried with pork or pork belly. The flavour is enhanced with southern Thai curry paste and shrimp paste, while kaffir lime leaves add fragrance. It is commonly served with steamed rice.

The dish is also nutritious, providing high levels of protein, calcium, and vitamins. However, *luk riang* contains an amino acid known as djenkolic acid. Excessive consumption may cause poisoning, resulting in abdominal pain, difficulty urinating, or blood in the urine. It should therefore be cooked thoroughly and consumed in proper amounts.





***Mu Hong* (Braised Pork Belly),** also known as *Mu Khong,* is a renowned local dish with a distinctive identity of Phuket and Phang Nga provinces. Influenced by Hokkien Chinese immigrants who settled in Southern Thailand, it became an important dish among the Peranakan people (the southern Thai-Chinese culture).

Mu Hong is regularly prepared for celebrations, weddings, and important festivals, as it is considered an auspicious dish symbolising wealth and abundance. Its defining feature is slowly simmering and braising large, diced pieces of pork belly over low heat for 4–5 hours, until the meat becomes tender. The skin develops a pleasantly chewy texture that melts in the mouth.

The sauce is thick and rich, with a deep brown colour from dark and sweet soy sauces. Its flavour is well balanced between sweetness and saltiness, with a fragrance from white pepper, coriander roots, and garlic, while no Chinese five-spice powder is used. As the dish is rich in herbs that help relieve flatulence and bloating, and contains protein and fat, it is also a high-energy food.





Ice



O-aew seeds

***O-Aew* (Local Herbal Jelly)** is a distinctive traditional sweet from Phuket, Phang Nga, and Trang. It was influenced by Hokkien Chinese culture and is believed to have evolved from *aiyu* jelly, a traditional jelly sweet from Taiwan and Southern China.

The dessert has a translucent white to pale yellow flesh, with a soft, smooth, and slightly chewy texture similar to jelly. It is made from *o-aew* seeds, a fig-family plant, combined with the mucilage of ripe banana and *jia go* (gypsum powder). The jelly itself has a subtle flavour and fragrant aroma, so it is commonly served with shaved ice, syrup, and toppings such as red beans or grass jelly.

O-aew reflects the fusion of Chinese culinary traditions with local ingredients and has become a symbol of refreshment in Phuket's hot climate. According to traditional beliefs, it helps relieve internal heat, quench thirst, and restore balance to the body. As the jelly is made from natural plants, it may also support digestive health and help reduce bloating.





Production Team
“The Charm of Thai Cuisine”

Advisor

Yupha Taweewattanakitborvon	Permanent Secretary
Nopporn Boonkaew	Deputy Permanent Secretary

Editorial Team

Dr. Niphatchanok Najpinij	Food Culture Expert, Suan Dusit University
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Pimphatcha Kakham	Gastronomer
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Charuwan Ngaokaew	Plan and Policy Analyst

Publisher

Bureau for the Promotion of National Institutions and National Identity
Office of the Permanent Secretary, the Prime Minister’s Office
Government House, Phitsanulok Road, Bangkok 10300
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Publication Design

Creative Director	Suthipong Suriya (KARB STUDIO)
Photographer	Patthanapat Phatthirakun (PLOENTA STUDIO)
Illustrators	Saksit Buakham
Assist Stylist	Weerasak Sukhasiri
Translator	Nachanok Wongkhaluang
	Amara Pangnamkam



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