# XTRAVAGANCE



WITH THE CHEF'S TABLE, chef Vichit Mukura sets out to transform our cuisine.

## Traditional tastes meet modern presentation in the intimate Chef's Table banquets at Sala Rim Naam

MANOTE TRIPATHI THE NATION

ichit Mukura, executive chef at the Mandarin Oriental Bangkok, loves traditional Thai food, but he also wants it to look modern on the table. He manages to please patrons who love fine dining while at the same time ensuring authenticity.

The pinnacle of his success is in the Chef's Table, a multiple-course feast served to just a handful of diners at a time at Sala Rim Naam, the hotel's restaurant across the river. It's also a chance to witness kitchen magic as it's

You get to watch Vichit in action as he prepares your six- or eight-course dinner, complete with all the frenzy and sound effects. For a recent press preview there were nine courses!

Vichit buys all the ingredients on his own during morning visits to markets like Or Tor Kor. We also had brown rice from his own experimental

paddy in Pattava. "I never knew how fun it is to grow rice," he said. "I have my own milling machine. And it's a wonderful experie able to eat rice that you g

and milled yourself. That's my weekend obsession at the moment." The first course was Goong Thong Piw Som Sa Gub Khao Foo, a deepfried bay prawn with sparkling lime and crispy, fluffy red-jasmine rice, again from his property. The sizeable prawn was garnished with salad and lively with the tang from the rind of a

bitter orange. Next was *Poo Ja*, deep-fried, herbed crabmeat and minced chicken. The dish usually features pork rather than chicken, but the chef is Muslim. In this case the religious stricture proved a blessing. I thoroughly enjoyed the mix



Deep-fried herbed crabmeat and minced chicken



Grilled lamb



of cilantro root, garlic and pepper infused in the crab and chicken along with eggs, coconut milk and fish sauce.

Vichit reckoned it was time for sorbet to prepare the palate for the delights still to come. He whipped up Wan Yen Tom Yum, with a taste akin to real tom yum that left our mouths



Steamed blue river prawn with spicy sauce



Roast duck with lemongrass and garlic egg

## A TRUE FEAST

<< The six-course Chef's Table dineight-course version Bt3,900. Seating is limited to just four to seven people. Reserve your place at (02) 659 9000, extension 7330, or mobkk-restaurants@mogh.com.

The next course was Ped Ob Takrai *Grob Gub Bamee* – roast duck with crispy lemongrass and garlic egg noodles. It was slightly sweet and garlicky but set off by the tang of tamarind juice. Your're supposed to chew a little dried chilli with the duck.

Then there was Tom Yum Pla spicy grouper soup with lemongrass

and kaffir lime leaves - the most aromatic dish of the night thanks to the herbs. The white fish flesh was firm and the soup quite spicy. In terms of Thai flavours, it was the epitome of what soup should taste like.

Next was Goong Nueng Prig Manao Nom Sod, which is steamed blue river prawn with a spicy sauce and white egg. Three ingredients did the trick here: lime juice, egg white and fresh chilli. I couldn't get enough of the salty-sour juice on my plate and wished there had been bread to dip in it.

The heaviest course of the night was Kae Yaang Gub Saranae Rae Makham - grilled lamb with Thai mint and sweet-and-salty tamarind sauce. Where else on earth could you have lamb with tamarind and edible flow-

Served with brown rice, with its characteristic natural fragrance of pandanus leaves, the dish tasted great with the tamarind sauce. You eat the yellow blossoms of dok sanoh (sesbania) and you're astounded at how well flowers pair with lamb.

There was yet more rice from Vichit's farm in the next course, Pla Hima Nom Khao Khing Grob - fried snowfish with green rice and crispy ginger. In this case the rice was five months old, still soft and milky. He boils it in stock and adds the fish and ginger. The result looks like your morning porridge, but it was a gentle finale for our evening culinary journey.

Dessert was red-jasmine-rice ice cream served with the Thai dessert known as "yellow bean pocket", with shredded coconut meat and sugared sesame seeds. This is ice cream that will make you forget about traditional Thai coconut ice cream forever. I never knew brown rice could be so versatile.

We did indeed learn a lot about rice and cooking in general. "With the Chef's Table," Vichit said, "I want to show that Thai food can really be appreciated here at home, and not just

spicy roasted meats. In Western Java,

The dishes in this book range from the

familiar to the exotic. Yuen offers easy-to-

products, fresh herbs and spices. The dishes

laid out in this book reflect the breadth and

The author starts by introducing sambal

depth of Indonesia's vast culinary culture.

dipping sauce, using shrimp paste, peanut, tomato and chilli. She then recommends

follow recipes to introduce each of these

dishes that celebrate the use of organic

Betawi and Sunda reign supreme.

E-mail todinefor@nationgroup.com

#### An evening with the Spadones

Michelin-star chef Marcello Spadone is whipping up wonderful Italian dishes this evening at Jojo, the Italian restaurant at the St Regis Bangkok, starting at

The six-course dinner created by Spadone and his wife Bruna, is paired with selected vintages from Talamonti from 2006-2010 and costs Bt3,200-plus

Advance booking is recommended at **(02) 207** 7777 or by e-mail at fb.bangkok@stregis.com.

#### Hair of the dog



The Bar at the Novotel Bang Na is serving the newest cocktail, a "Salty Chihuahua", made with tequila, grapefruit juice and orange-flavoured liqueur in a salt-rimmed glass. Explore the new cocktail and lots of other drinks with some great savoury snacks. Prices start at Bt199 a shot. There's a happy hour promotion between 4 and 8pm on weekdays and from 4 to

9pm for weekends. Find out more at (02) 366 0505 extension 1440.

#### Jiving with some java

Chill out with a coffee in the Lobby Lounge of the Grand Pacific Sovereign Resort and Spa on Cha-Am Beach in Phetchaburi province. Cappuccino, espresso, mocha, latte and Americano served hot or iced goes for just

Call them up at (032) 709 899.



#### Making friends with Fritz



The Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit launches The Fritz, a contemporary interpretation of a sour fizz cocktail with a Swiss twist. A blend of bourbon, absinthe, Nocello walnut liqueur, agave syrup, lemon juice and egg whites with a garnish of orange peel, the sophisticated cocktail delivers notes of burnt toffee and citrus in perfect harmony with the

Cocktail lovers can also discover the pleasures of the Thai-inspired Vada Gimlet, an evocative meeting of east and west that breathes new life into a classic cocktail. The citrus notes of gin are lifted by Thai chilli and lemongrass-infused agave, fresh lime juice and a garnish of basil.

Check it out at (02) 649 8641.

#### Amazing abalone

The Garden Court at the Chaophya Park Hotel, Bangkok, invites diners explore its classic Cantonese dishes using abalone as the main ingredient. Until Wednesday, you can sample braised abalone with oyster sauce, baked abalone with garlic and stir fried abalone fun-Reserve a table at (02) 290

0125.



### A question of 'Taste'



Source: Hypertrade Consulting

Chef Joachim Kreisel of Taste at the Westin Grande Sukhumvit offers special evening buffet on Fridays and Saturdays. The menu include chilli and garlic prawns served at the table, freshly shucked oysters, king crab legs and king prawns, lobster and fennel bisque, risotto, ravioli and grilled snow fish.

Wood fired pizzas, various pastas and spicy Thai salads are among the highlights served from Sunday to

Thursday at Bt1,413 net. The Friday to Saturday buffet cost Bt1,890 net. Add Bt590 for free flow

#### wine, beer and soft drinks For reservation, call (02) 207 8000 or e-mail fb.bangkok@westin.com.

#### **HYPER DEALS** Big C Promo Items Tesco-Lotus Period (baht) (baht) (Feb) Hoi-Lord Fish sauce 18 22 - 28 1 btl 700 ml Nautilus Lite Can tuna in oil 30.50 22 - 28 1 can 185 gm Vitamilk UHT soy milk vegetarian 81 17 - 27 2 pack 6 brick 250 ml Omo Handwash detergent powder ultra 1 bag 1000 gm Nescafe Red Cup Instant coffee 1 box 400 gm

# The spice of Indonesian life

A new cookbook will have you serving up everything from nasi goreng to masakan jawa

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When you think of Indonesian food, the chances are what comes to mind are beef satay, nasi goreng and laksa. "Indonesian Cooking" by Dina Yuen shows that Indonesia's culinary culture is as vast and complex as its archipelago. What's Indonesian food like?

It's somewhere between Thai and Indian food, says the author, who lived in Indonesia before moving to the US in her late teens. It's like Thai food because the Indonesians love their food spicy and a little salty. Indeed, as Yuen's recipes show, the locals love rich curries, but probably rely on more spices than the Thais.

With 17,000 islands forming the Indonesian archipelago, the country boasts a vast array of indigenous culinary cultures that remain largely unexplored. Each of the islands offers dishes that vary in spiciness and flavour. In eastern Java, people love the spicy salads known as Masakan Jawa and can't live without old fashioned mocha cakes. In Bali, a meal isn't complete without sweet and mildly





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Coconut noodle soup

some of the greatest appetisers and snacks such as pan-friend soybean cakes, chicken satay, fresh spring rolls, spinach tempura and fish cakes. You find a lot of curries using poultry and meat, which tastes sweet and spicy. Nothing beats golden-fried fish and fried seafood. Highlights include crispy fish with chilli sauce, grilled swordfish with fragrant yellow rice and spicy sautéed calamari. There's a recipe for classic nasi goreng as well as the techniques for cooking great

dishes like garlic rice stew and coconut

rice and noodle section.

noodle soups, among other dishes, in the

For desserts, the Indonesians prefer natural ingredients to processed products, and Yuen illustrates her point through such famous delights as Dutch-Indo crepes with palm sugar, sweet potatoes in coconut milk and iced sweet young coconut.

Don't just sit there and enjoy the photos of the delicious looking dishes. Gather up the ingredients and explore the Indonesian