

# Sawaddi

Asian Arts & Culture by the American Women's Club of Thailand

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*Lotus pods reveal tasty seeds that are eaten as finger food.*



# Thai Culinary Delights

Text and  
Photographs by  
Jane Iverson

*Dried peppers are pounded into pastes and used frequently as a spicy dipping sauce.*





*Baskets of chili peppers make their way to the marketplace.*

## **An Exotic Blend of Flavors**

**T**hai cooking has become hot, hot and hotter in the international community. Because of its unique blend of flavors, Thai cuisine started as a vogue in many trendy cities, but soon the appealing food moved into the culinary mainstream where it continues to delight food lovers who enjoy the exotic tastes of Asia.

Located along the once-infamous Asian spice route, the Kingdom of Siam enjoyed flourishing trade with countries from around

the world. Many of the trading countries influenced the exotic blend known today as Thai cuisine. The Chinese introduced the fried foods, the Indians the curries and the Portuguese the fiery taste of chilies. The Thais were quick at adapting the different cooking techniques and started blending the new flavors into their own cooking styles using locally grown herbs, spices and vegetables. The heart of many Thai dishes is the curry pastes which



*The distinctive look and exotic flavor of jackfruit enhances this vendor's display.*



*Vendor's grills are often an active work of art as meat and fish balls sizzle their way to perfection.*



*Fish grilled with a heavy coating of salt, originally a dish from Northeast Thailand, has become a gourmet staple in many trendy restaurants.*



*Young and tender golden bamboo shoots are a seasonal treat for the gourmet cook.*

are hand-pounded daily using stone mortars and pestles. The pastes are a combination of fresh herbs, spices and vegetables. The red, green and yellow pastes are mixed with additional ingredients to create flavorful soups, spicy sauces for meats and the famous Thai curries made with coconut milk.

The spirit of Thai food comes from the country's bustling wet and dry markets crowded with the sizzling woks of vendors busy at work and multiple booths filled with baskets of colorful chili peppers, pastes, noodles and eye-catching displays of abundant choices of vegetables, herbs and fruits. Before living in Thailand, I had no comprehension of the



*Food vendors often carry their market goods directly to the consumer by balancing large baskets over their shoulders.*

variety, sizes, shapes and colors of many vegetables and fruits. And who would believe the multiple choices of mangoes, all the wonderful tropical fruits and the mouthwatering salads made from green papaya, pomelo and banana flowers? Probably one of the biggest challenges for Thai restaurants abroad is the lack of access to the fresh local herbs, spices and the abundant choices of vegetables and fruit.

Enjoying the authentic taste of Thai dishes while living in Thailand has made it interesting to compare Thai restaurants when traveling abroad. A trip to the nearest Thai restaurant is a great way to introduce your hosts, friends and family to the Thai culture by letting them



*A variety of noodles are found in many delicious Thai dishes.*

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