



Same, Same but Different

FACT FILE

Our Southeast Asia specialists would be delighted to recommend some of their favourite restaurants, for further details please call them on 01869 276 200.

The Philippines grows 14 million tonnes of coconuts a year.



Trade routes, historic connections, colonialism and common sources of ingredients have left many strong links between the dishes found throughout Southeast Asia. Despite this, very distinct national variations have evolved.

When people think of Thailand the spicy red and green curries flavoured with coconut and coriander spring to mind. The further south one heads in Thailand the spicier the food becomes. If you really want to try (or avoid) something distinctive and spicy look for a kaeng tai pla which contains, as one of its more interesting ingredients, fish innards. In the north of Thailand dishes are closely related to those of across the border in Laos and are nearly always served with *khâo niaw* (sticky rice). The traditional way to eat this rice is to pick up a small handful in your right hand and roll it into a ball, which you then dip into various sauces. Another dish that is common to both northern Thailand and Laos is the delicious spicy green papaya salad which is probably one of the most common street market foods in Laos.

One of the staple dishes of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia is pho (in Vietnamese), a clear rice noodle soup which can be eaten for breakfast, lunch or supper. If you are in Vietnam it won't be long before you try a spring roll, either the crispy variety or try rolling your own with a translucent rice crepe. Cambodian food is nearly always served with *samla* (soup), the most popular being a sour

fish soup (similar to the hot and sour soups of Thailand). One of the most common and tasty Cambodian dishes is *khao phoune* which is a fine rice noodle dish served with a rich coconut-based sauce.

Nasi and mie (rice and noodles) are staple ingredients in Malaysia, these can be fried, steamed, and boiled into sweet and savoury dishes usually accompanied by *ikan* (fresh fish). The complex flavours of Malay food differentiate it from similar dishes in Indonesia, which are more simple but equally tasty. Many dishes such as *sate* (skewered meat) and *gado-gado* (steamed vegetables) are served with peanut sauce. Indonesia is a huge country with great diversity and food here has been greatly influenced by travellers from all over the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in Sumatra whose spicy Padang curries are based on those from India, Persia and Arabia.

Wherever you travel in Southeast Asia, do be adventurous and try 'pot luck' with a few dishes, the waiter is sure to use the ubiquitous phrase "same, same but different" when describing your choices.

Jennifer Perrier

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- 1 Chilli stall, Indonesia.
- 2 Floating Market, Mekong Delta.
- 3 Thai dishes.