

# THAI FOOD MADE SIMPLE

The latest book by Los Angeles-based chef, author and photographer Robert Danhi, is titled *Easy Thai Cooking*. Robert has 20 years' experience of cooking Southeast Asian food, and is well-known for his award winning book, *Southeast Asian Flavors*, published in 2008. He took some time out from his busy schedule to talk to *The Phuket News* about the new book, available for B450 at Asia Books and Bookazine stores from November 1.

## What qualifies you to write about Thai cooking?

My Malaysian wife brought me to Southeast Asia 23 years ago, then I began exploring nearby countries. My first introduction to Thailand was more than two decades ago. Since then I've visited more than 25 times; eating, cooking and exploring the street carts, homes and restaurants, from Haad Yai to Roi Et.

I've climbed palm trees to make palm sugar in Chumphon, cooked with former students and family in Lopburi, and spent time learning from my *ajarn* (teachers), such as the lovely mother-and-daughter team, Khun Kobkeaw and Khun Ning of Khao Cooking School. I also worked with David Thompson on his *Thai Street Food* book.

I have been cooking professionally for 26 years – beginning in restaurants, moving into teaching for the Culinary Institute of America, then into food manufacturing – I'm now a full-time food consultant.

## What makes your cookbook different from others?

I wanted to write a book that home cooks and chefs alike would use often, with simple recipes that produce authentic flavours. Not necessarily traditional recipes, but when you prepare a recipe... it will taste Thai. Here is an excerpt from *Easy Thai Cooking* that explains it well:

"*Easy Thai Cooking* was created after numerous requests for me to write a book with simpler recipes than *Southeast Asian Flavors*. Frankly, at first I was hesitant to write an 'easy Thai cookbook.' Fearful that I would over simplify recipes that had taken centuries to create.

I have too much respect for Thai people and their food culture. Then I started to think about all the food I had eaten in Thailand that were not the iconic dishes that food writers have memorialised in thousands of Thai books, like the *tom yum goong* (hot and



American chef Robert Danhi savours the fresh ingredients of Thai cuisine.

sour shrimp soup) and papaya salad (*som tam*), and saw that food evolves and that Thais cook just like us.

Not all my meals at home are American classics. People across the US cook from a similar pantry. So I began to lighten up a bit and think of ways I could create a book with recipes that taste Thai but may not be the traditional versions I have come to love.

Rather, the food I eat when visiting a friend's home in Koh Samui, attending a party in Chiang Mai, or walking down the street late one night in Bangkok discovering a vendor selling their version of fried ramen noodles. I spent countless hours recalling the food I cooked in my home; the recipes I created in my test kitchen."

## What is your favourite recipe in the book and why?

One of my favourites is the coconut-crust peanuts inspired by the street snack of *tom yum krob*. They are so simple to prepare and you can keep them on hand to snack



on, or make a big batch for a party. They are cravable, once you start they are hard to stop eating them. [See recipe.]

## Do you have any Thai cooking tips for our readers?

Stock your pantry with some basic items and you can whip up Thai food at a moments notice. Some of my favourite and most versatile are *nahm prik pow* (Thai chilli jam, usually labelled as chilli paste in oil). *Easy*

*Thai Cooking* has the recipe and if you don't want to, you can buy it – the book tells you how to buy the best brand. Make sure to have some high quality oyster sauce, a few coloured curry pastes, some dried noodles and of course fish sauce. Then buy what's at the market and get in the kitchen!

■ *Easy Thai Cooking* by Chef Robert Danhi is published by Tuttle: 120pp, B450.



These coconut peanuts make a wonderful snack.

## Coconut-crust Peanuts

"Thais love to snack. When I am there, the one snack that I am always on the look out for are oven-roasted fried peanuts, dried chillies, and kaffir lime leaves tossed in a tamarind glaze. The result is a sweet-sour-spicy flavour that never gets old. This recipe is inspired by this wonderful snack.

"Quality peanuts are essential, I prefer to buy raw peanuts and slowly roast them in a pan over low heat, tossing often – this takes about 15 minutes and the resulting semi-charred peanuts are fabulously flavoured, or deep-fry them for a few minutes for a deep-roasted flavour. However, you may opt to buy dry roasted peanuts instead or even substitute cashews."

**Serves:** 4-6

**Preparation time:** 5 mins

**Cooking time:** 15 mins

### Ingredients

- 1½ cups (250 g) roasted peanuts
- 2 tablespoons Thai sweet chilli sauce
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon sea salt or kosher salt
- 1 stalk lemongrass, tender inner part of bottom third only, finely minced

- 1 teaspoon minced kaffir lime leaves (substitute 2 teaspoon lime zest)
- ½ teaspoon dried red chilli flakes or ground dried red finger length chillies
- ½ cup (40 g) dried unsweetened shredded or grated coconut

1. Toss the peanuts in a bowl with the chilli sauce, sugar, salt, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, and chillies until coated evenly. Then add the coconut and toss again until it is evenly coated.
2. Spread them out on a non-stick baking mat or oiled baking sheet.
3. Bake in an oven preheated to 350°F (175°C) for 10-15 minutes or until the coconut is a golden brown.
4. Remove from the oven and let them cool before removing from the pan.
5. Keep the pan tightly covered until you're ready to serve – the peanuts tend to absorb humidity in the air. They last for a few weeks, the few days after they are made they are at their peak of flavour, the flavours have blended well yet they are still very crunchy.

## Brunch is back at Indigo Pearl Phuket

Nai Yang resort Indigo Pearl Phuket relaunches their famous Sunday Brunch this weekend (October 23) in time for the high season.

The brunch is held every Sunday from midday to 3pm with free flow of house wine, sparkling wine, draft beer, and Bloody Marys.

The brunch is priced at B1890++, or B1690++ for soft drink and juices. Children age 5-12 receive 50 per cent off, and children under four dine free.

■ **Indigo Pearl Phuket, Nai Yang Beach and National Park, 076 327 006, info@indigo-pearl.com, www.indigo-pearl.com**



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