



INTRODUCTION

The key to creating outstanding Thai food can be summed up in one word: balance.

Whether it's a creamy green curry, steaming *soup neua* or zingy *som tam*, all Thai dishes strive for that perfect balance of hot, sweet, sour and salty flavours, each one punchy without overpowering the others.

But while this delicate interplay runs through the expansive range of the nation's dishes, Thailand's culinary heritage is remarkably localised. Head north to the ancient cities of Lampang and Chiang Mai and the dishes you'll encounter bear witness to the region's relatively cool climate, with its mild seasonal food rich with bitter flavours. Further east, nearby Laos flaunts its culinary influence and, direct from the banks of the Mekong, freshwater fish dominates Isaan menus. Head for the beaches of the south and, unsurprisingly, seafood reigns supreme, while the chilli wields its might most heavily

here too. And in Bangkok, the geography of the central plains, influences of the country's predominate minorities and the wealth of the royal palace have all served to shape the local cuisine.

But what doesn't vary, no matter which region you find yourself in, is the Thai people's emotional connection to food. Wherever they're found, these dishes signify history and heritage: a family recipe, created in the same way for generations, or a regional tradition, evolving with the twists and turns of geography and social history. The cult of food is an incredibly powerful theme to the Thai, for this is no fast-food cuisine: rich stocks bubble and simmer, patiently, for hours, while spices are pounded vigorously by hand, over and over, the better to draw out their complex flavours. And, come mealtimes, eating in Thailand is a communal affair, the food shared around the family table as the day's tales unfold.

Make no mistake: in Thailand, it's not just food: it's a labour of love.









COOK'S NOTES

This book aims to deliver Thailand's best local dishes – direct from the kitchens where they've been perfected and practised for decades or generations. Authenticity is at the heart of every dish we feature.

That means that some ingredients may be difficult to find in general stores. Most should be available in Asian supermarkets or online but, where possible, we have suggested possible substitutes too. The glossary on pages 268–9 will help to identify unfamiliar ingredients.

It will come as no great surprise that authentic Thai food is incredibly spicy, especially to palates not accustomed to such fiery heat. Should you prefer a milder flavour, feel free to adjust the levels of chilli you find in the recipes. You may prefer, too, to deseed your chillies before cooking with them to remove a little of the kick from the chillies' heat.

In the spirit of authenticity, we have retained the chefs' original methods in these recipes. To make a paste, for example, you'll find instructions to pound the ingredients using a mortar and pestle, as the cooks themselves do. If you're short on time (or energy) though, you can use a food processor or stick blender instead.

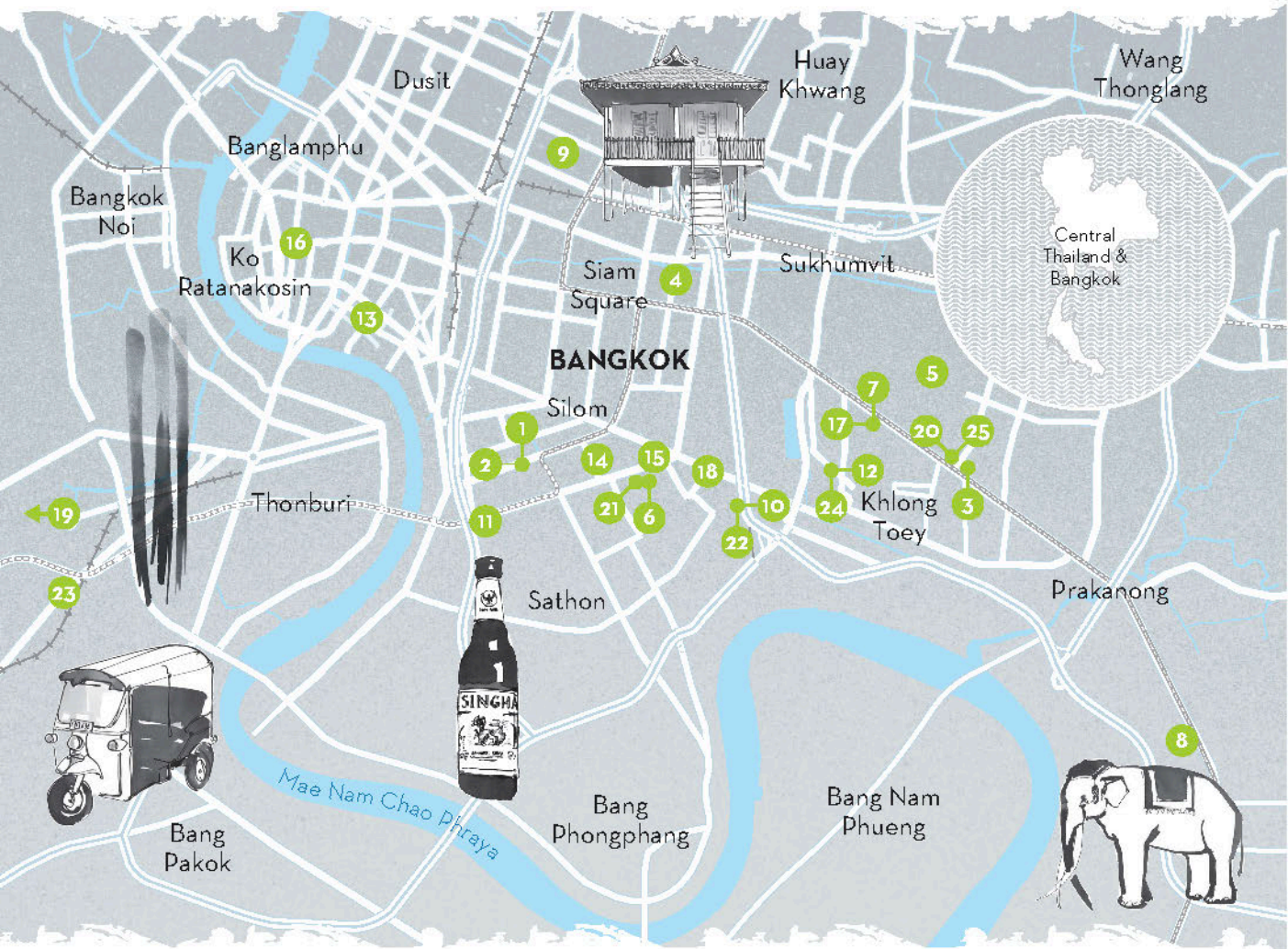
The recipes in this book are designed to work in the context of a Thai meal, in which a number of dishes are served in the centre of the table for all to share. For a complete Thai meal with rice, four dishes – a relish with a few of its accompaniments, a soup, a curry (perhaps with a side dish) and a salad – will serve four hungry people. Some recipes are one-dish meals, such as minced pork and holy basil stir-fry (pages 67–9); the serving size on each page will reflect this.

For basic recipes for rices and other common dish additions, see page 264.



CENTRAL THAILAND & BANGKOK

Sophisticated, cosmopolitan food with royal, Chinese and Muslim influences



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THAI-MUSLIM
STYLE SALAD WITH
POTATO AND TOFU
Salat khaek

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SATAY
CHICKEN
SKEWERS
Sate kai

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GRILLED
AUBERGINE
SALAD
Yam makheua yao

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4

GRILLED
BEEF
SALAD
Yam neua yaang

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DEEP-FRIED
CATFISH & GREEN
MANGO SALAD
Yam plaa duk fuu

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