



Cambodia Cuisine

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I. The history of Cambodia cuisine

1. The origin¹

Khmer cuisine has many similarities with that of the neighboring country - Thailand, though, Khmer dishes have less chili, sugar and coconut cream. Besides, Vietnam and Cambodia were once colonies of French colonialists in the past, so partly influenced by Western cuisine. Portuguese and Spanish also had a significant influence on Cambodian cuisine in the 16th century, bringing chili and peanuts to Asian markets. However, chili never has its position or prominence as a typical ingredient in Thai, Lao and Malaysian cuisines. Even today very few Cambodian recipes contain chili. A French heritage - baguette bread called "nom pang" in the Khmer language is present everywhere in Cambodia. Cambodians often eat bread with pâté, canned sardines or eggs. This western type of bread, paired with strong coffee, sweetened with condensed milk, is an example of a popular breakfast in Cambodia. Fresh butter bread can be made into sandwiches and can be stuffed with slices of ham or barbecue, with Kampot pepper, similar to Vietnamese bread. The French also introduced beer, butter, pate, coffee, chocolate, onions, carrots, broccoli, potatoes, and many other Western products in Southeast Asia.

However, Cambodia is still deeply affected by Chinese and Indian cuisine. The curry dishes, called Kari (in the Khmer language) show a profound influence from Indian culture. Many variations of rice noodles show the influences of Chinese cuisine.

2. The national diet of Cambodia people²

The most vital dish in Cambodia is rice - because of the long-history agricultural tradition. A meal without rice is just a snack. Other types of crucial starches in Cambodia is cassava, taro, and sweet potatoes.

Fish and seafood are the top types of protein in Cambodia that provide the abundant nutrition source for the people. Beef, pork, chicken, duck and other poultry are also

¹ Refer to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambodian_cuisine#History_and_influences

² Refer to <https://www.insightguides.com/destinations/asia-pacific/cambodia/cultural-features/cambodian-food>



popular and available everywhere in the country, but they are more expensive than seafood. Other types of protein include locusts, water insects, snakes, and land crabs.

In Cambodia, although the people have Buddhist beliefs, they are not too serious in vegetarianism. People often combine vegetarian dishes with fish sauce or animal fat or broth.

3. National dish

Amok is the most famous traditional food in Cambodia. This is a steamed fish curry in banana leaves. Curry sauce (kroeung) is steamed until thick, but smooth and moist. The main ingredients to create this special dish are freshwater fish, lemongrass, chili, turmeric and coconut milk. It is placed in a banana leaf, served with rice and sometimes fried eggs.

Other variations currently are beef, chicken or vegetarian (with tofu), and are served as a creamy soup.

4. National drink

The national drink of Cambodia is Angkor beer - named after the world-famous wonder and this is also the most widely consumed beer in Cambodia.

Traditionally, it is brewed at the Cambrew Brewery in Sihanoukville (southwestern part of the country). It costs around the US \$ 2 to the US \$ 3 for a 660mL bottle in most restaurants and bars.

5. Eating and drinking custom³

The dishes are arranged in the normal way, that is put the dishes on the table and people will eat together. Sitting at the table with your own bowl that is put above plate, chopsticks or spoon. Cambodian tend to use chopsticks more than a spoon or fork.

³ Refer to <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/cambodia/in-location/eating/a/nar/675f15ef-ce3a-4f68-8b00-27fde6007ed5/355852>

When eating, never touch your personal belongings on joint dishes such as soup, curries,... to avoid creating uncomfortable feelings for those around you. Therefore, Cambodians often prepare large or separate spoons placed next to those dishes.

Some compulsory information that you need to remember:

- Waiting for the host to sit down first.
- Do not refuse the food which placed in your bowl by the host
- Do not drink during the meal if someone calls a toast
- When using a fork or spoon, taking the food on the spoon by the fork, putting the fork into the mouth is rude.
- Do not stick straightly the chopsticks into the bowl as this is a sign of bad luck
- Should not eat all the food in your bowl.
- Commonly, the eldest will eat at first, the cooker will eat lastly, do not mention anything about business or dispute during the meal.

II. Typical food and drink in Cambodia

1. Typical food⁴⁵⁶

a. Noodle

Cambodia noodles were inspired by China and Vietnam, however, today Cambodia has created a lot of different types of noodles. Some distinctive noodles in Cambodia such as Prahok, it is rice noodle that is used in mee katang - a variation of Cambodia in combining noodle with hǎo fěn and gravy. It's different from Chinese noodle when fry noodle with beef and vegetable, and egg is covered above. Mee Kola is a type of noodle which is made from rice noodle, steamed with soy sauce and garlic chives. Mi Cha is stir-fried egg noodles.

⁴ Refer to <https://www.insightguides.com/destinations/asia-pacific/cambodia/cultural-features/cambodian-food>

⁵ Refer to <https://nomadicboys.com/best-traditional-food-cambodia/>

⁶ Refer to <http://travel.cnn.com/cambodia-best-dishes-cambodia-food-401118/>



b. Salad

Salad in Cambodia is quite similar to salad in Vietnam and Thailand. It is a mix of meat, vegetables, herbs and other fruits like banana flowers, green mango or papaya, combining with a sauce bowl. Salad is commonly the first dish or appetizer in a meal

c. Soup

Soup is used in the meals as an accompaniment to almost the main dishes. There are some popular types of soup that you should eat when coming to Cambodia:

- samlor machou: a mix of shrimp, tomatoes, fried garlic, and fresh mint
- sour fish soup
- sour and spicy prawn soup
- pork soup with ginger
- b'aw moan: chicken, coriander, bean sprouts and fried garlic

d. Khmer red curry

Curries in Cambodia are quite similar to Thai curries, both using coconut milk to increase sweetness, but Cambodian use less chili than Thai.

The main components of this dish are beef (chicken or fish), eggplant, green beans, potatoes, fresh coconut milk, lemongrass, and kroeung. Bread is served along with Khmer red curry.

This dish is usually eaten on special occasions such as weddings, anniversaries, family gatherings or holidays to express happiness.

e. Beef Lok Lak

Beef Lok Lak includes thin slices of beef, stir-fried with onions, cucumbers, and tomatoes. It is eaten along with rice or fried egg.

f. Fried crab

Fried crab is the most well-known dish in Kep seaside town, Cambodia. This dish is made from fresh crab and green pepper which is grown in the local. Although pepper appears a lot in the world, you just can enjoy green immature peppercorn taste in Cambodia. Fresh crabs caught at sea combined with fragrant garlic, pepper, scallions, and herbs will surely bring great taste to visitors.



g. Fried red tree ants with beef and holy basil

One of the delicious dishes that will definitely appeal to Western tourists is stir-fried red tree ants with beef and holy basil. The ants with various sizes will be fried with thinly sliced beef, ginger, lemongrass, garlic, and shallots. Especially, the sour taste from ants into beef will create a fantastic feeling for users. This dish will be served with rice.

2. Typical drink

No	Drink type	Description
1	Green tea	A local tea of Cambodia that is commonly served in restaurants in a hot or cold way
2	Coffee	A popular beverage that is often served Iced or hot. It may be served black and strong, adding condensed milk, it is sweeter than coffee in Laos or Vietnam Coffee Teuk Doh Ko/Kafe Blanc: Coffee with Milk Coffee Khmao: Black strong coffee
3	Teuk Ampau	Sugar cane juice extracted from squeezing sugar cane plant
4	Smoothie	A mixture of fruits combined with coconut milk, sugar syrup, condensed milk, and shaved ice
5	White wine	It is a type of wine made from rice and popular to consume in festivals. It is considered as a traditional medicine in Cambodia.
6	Sugar palm wine	A type of traditional wine in Cambodia made from palm

3. Fruits

Cambodia has numerous types of tropical fruit, most of them are very popular throughout Southeast Asia. Some famous fruits in Cambodia are bananas, mangoes, papaya, coconuts, and pineapple. Some special fruits are durian, jackfruit, milk fruit, rambutan, mangosteen.



III. **Where to eat in Cambodia**

In Cambodia, visitors can find the cheapest dishes on the street-side or markets. The people sometimes gather at noodle stores. The visitors also can order food at local restaurants. The market is a wonderful place to buy ingredients for lunch or dinner. If visitors want to enjoy delicious dishes in Cambodia, they can go to famous restaurants in Phnom Penh.

IV. **Ingredients**

1. **Fermented sauce**

The fermented sauce is the most typical feature in Cambodia cuisine. It is fermented fish or meat under a specific technic. This sauce needs at least one year to reach the potential of taste, quality, like fish sauce. The fermented sauce is usually eaten along with high protein-based dishes or raw vegetables.

Some popular types of fermented sauce are fermented seafood, fermented snakehead fish, fermented shrimp, soy sauce, oyster sauce, tamarind sauce.

2. **Spices**

In Cambodia, pepper is quite popular and people often add pepper when they want to increase the heat in the dishes. It is usually used in stir-fries, soups, marinades for grilled meats, and dipping sauces. Today, pepper in Cambodia is extremely famous and receive the favorite from many people across the world.

Turmeric is grown in Battambang and it is an indispensable ingredient in curries, soups, and rice dishes. Saffron and cardamon are not only used as a component in dishes but also used in treating disease. Turmeric, galangal, ginger, lemongrass, and kaffir lime leaves are important ingredients in cooking, especially in curries or stews.

Palm sugar is one of the major ingredients in Cambodian dessert and soup. It is made from the sap of the palm sugar tree. It is well-known for its taste and unique brown



3. Vegetables

Kinds of vegetable in Cambodia:

Bitter melon, Cabbage, Carrot, Ceylon spinach, Tapioca flour, Thai basil, Winter melon, Bean sprouts, Water spinach.

4. Fish and meat

Freshwater fish is the kind of ingredient that is very popular in the Cambodia diet. Fish accounts for 60% of the protein content of Cambodian. Many types of fish in Cambodia come from Tonlé Sap or the Mekong. Dried salted fish is known as trei ngeat, eating along with rice porridge. The smaller fish called Trey Dang Dau is quite popular and usually deep-fried.

Pork and chicken are also important in the daily menu of Cambodians. Pork is quite popular in making sweet Khmer sausages. Pork and chicken are usually fried or stewed. Other types of meat are turtle, frog, and arthropods.



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