

Where to Eat

THE ONLY BANGKOK RESTAURANT GUIDE
TO TELL IT HOW IT REALLY IS

IMAGE asia

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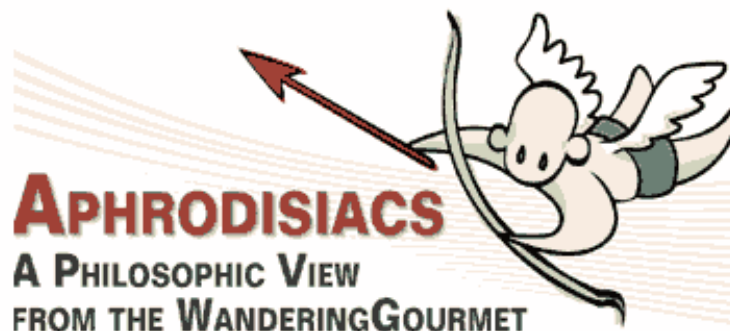
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Greed is a hallmark of our species. As soon as we discover something unique and special, we work overtime attempting to make it ordinary and commonplace. Sex is a salient example. Few stones have remained unturned in our efforts to insure repeat performances, turn sprints into marathons and make nerve endings more sensitive to friction. Had a similar effort been spent on social problems, war, pestilence and starvation would be things of the past.

Sildenafil Citrate, better known as Viagra, is an example of what I'm talking about. Initially targeted for those who can't, it has become an obsession with those who can, but want more. And since there are indications it actually works, its inventors are insured of fame, fortune, and perhaps a Nobel prize or two.



Nonetheless, in spite of its notoriety, there is a major problem Viagra can't solve. Sex, like the famous Latin dance, requires two to tango. Yes, I know, solo performances are possible, but they are generally considered less satisfying than a joint effort. Finding a sex partner(s) is one of life's great problems, an issue everyone must ultimately mount and conquer.

Proposals for solving this horny dilemma are endless, but since this is a magazine about food written in Thailand, I'll only examine culinary solutions fancied by Thais. Aphrodisiacs are serious business in Thailand and the Thais have a lot of them so my exposition will by necessity be cursory. But this matters not as I am more interested in making a philosophic point than in providing a compendium.

At the outset it must be noted Thais reject one of the standard items in cupid's repertoire in the West: the fancy box of chocolates. Godiva, and its imitators, have few champions in Thailand. It is simply too sweet for Thai tastes to be effective.

This isn't to say the Thais don't recognize the value of a romantic evening with red roses and a little libation as a means of loosening the inhibitions and weakening the ramparts. Indeed, Thai nightclubs and other drinking establishments have their fair share of wily pursuers stalking their prey with alcoholic beverages. Perhaps this is the



*Fancy chocolates
- a gift to inspire
romance*

reason so many Thai women shun alcohol in favour of less potent drinks.

The old devil booze, however, has its drawbacks and is ultimately self defeating – for the male at least. Shakespeare put it eloquently in Macbeth when Porter says, “It provokes the desire but it takes away the performance.” The Thais have long recognized alcohol’s inherent deficiencies and have craftily attempted to overcome them with the aid of additives. There is controversy over the effectiveness of these supplements, but no doubt about the economic benefits to those selling them.



Once considered nasty, the supposed effluence of the gecko has come to the aid of an ailing economy

A gecko, called a took kae, is found throughout Southeast Asia and is especially common in Isaan. Although the took kae eats insects, it can be a nasty little bugger and will bite when annoyed. At one time Khon Kaen, a city in the middle of Isaan, had prodigious numbers of these little beasts, and they seemed to be accomplishing nothing other than to clamp their vice-like jaws on the fingers of screaming children.

What to do? The answer was actually quite simple: declare them an aphrodisiac. Today Khon Kaen’s geckos are no longer considered pests; they’re respected members of the community and a source of badly needed income for the local population. When roasted and dried, they are submerged in alcoholic beverages where their libidinous chemicals seep into the surrounding liquid. The Japanese seem to be especially responsive to the effluence of the gecko and buy them in prodigious quantities, doing good things for Khon Kaen’s ailing economy.

The Thais have a variety of other items they place in alcohol to deal with issues of a sexual nature, but their precise composition is often a proprietary secret. Lao khao, the country’s indigenous rice whiskey, is frequently spiced up and transformed into lao yadong with ingredients that have been tied in cheesecloth. Since bar owners aren’t protected by patents like the makers of Viagra, they use secrecy to protect themselves. If you are experiencing a personal problem of some sort – sexual or otherwise – head for a watering hole serving lao yadong. The barkeep is guaranteed to have something tailored to deal with your specific problem. And even if he or she doesn’t, after a few shots of the stuff you will forget about what was bothering you anyway.

For some reason – and I’m sure this hasn’t gone unnoticed by psychologists – many aphrodisiacs are derived from creatures that are inherently dangerous. The Japanese, for example, believe the flesh near the poisonous liver of the fugu, a deadly blowfish, stimulates the libido. The Chinese, and most cultures in Southeast Asia including the Thais – have a thing about poisonous snakes and some of the world’s dangerous, but endangered species.



The Fugu - a libido stimulate for the Japanese?

Where to Eat in Bangkok condemns the slaughter in the wild of endangered species for any reason. Hence we won’t talk about things like consuming rhino horns, tiger penises, or the antlers of the Tibetan Red Deer as a means of stimulating flagging sex drives. These disgusting practices are reprehensible. But swilling a little snake blood – that’s another matter.

The blood of poisonous snakes is considered the supreme aphrodisiac in many parts of eastern Asia, including Thailand.

Apparently any poisonous snake will do, but cobra blood is definitely the crème de la crème of snake bloods. This has

elevated snake farming, particularly that of cobras, to both an art and a profitable business for enterprising farmers.

As with virtually all foods, a fresh product is considered best. If you feel your sexual batteries need charging, a shot of cobra blood may be what the doctor ordered. If you choose this aperitif be forewarned: unscrupulous proprietors have been known to substitute other substances for snake blood. It is probably best insisting the blood be extracted while you watch. This can be done at Klong Toey market on the corner of Ratchada and Rama IV. An enterprising proprietor will let you observe as he extracts the blood for your drink. Some people simply gulp down a shot of the stuff, but this is a bit crass. A more civilized practice is to drink blood that has been mixed with alcohol – sort of a Bloody Mary made with real blood.



*The blood of a cobra
- the supreme
aphrodisiac*



*Wine and oysters
- ease into a
romantic evening*

Other foodstuffs considered aphrodisiacs by Thais are almost too numerous to mention. Like Westerners some Thais swear by raw oysters, but I don't really subscribe to this view. They are low in fat and contain numerous minerals, including phosphorous, iodine and zinc. But countless research projects have failed to show that they make anyone horny. Garlic is championed by many, but even if it did work, its use is probably counterproductive. Who wants to get near someone reeking of garlic?

This brings me to the end of my brief tale about aphrodisiacs, making it time to provide the previously promised philosophic comment. Why is it, when something is good or pleasurable, we insist on getting more of it? We should realize that beauty, pleasure and sensuality stem from the extraordinary, not the commonplace.

It will be a sad day for humankind if we succeed in finding an aphrodisiac that actually works. It will signal the end of the pleasure emanating from a very special event, and saddest of all, it will eliminate the most wondrous and sensual of all human emotions: anticipation.



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