

One-dish Meals

“Fast Food” Thai-style

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Photos by Dragon Art Media

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When it comes time for lunch, do you head for the familiar comfort of McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken or a coffee shop serving the sort of food you always eat? If you do, hang your head in shame. You came on holiday to experience things that are new, exciting and different, and this should include not going to clones of restaurants you find back home.

The Land of Smiles makes things easy for you by providing a variety of unique one-dish meals that make for fast and delicious lunchtime eating. The 10 dishes described in this article present you with enough information to get started, but you'll have to provide the will and spirit of adventure necessary to break the hold

Ronald McDonald and his numerous pretenders seem to have on international eating habits.

And don't worry about the food being overly spicy. If you're one of those with a low tolerance for the fiery chilli pepper, you can relax at lunchtime. All but one of the dishes described are prepared without a single bit of chilli. The reason for this is simple: not all Thais enjoy spicy food at lunch, so it's typically added at the table by diners according to individual preference.

This leaves little excuse for not breaking the shackles of convention and avoiding the lairs of Ronald and the chubby colonel from Kentucky. Now's the time to spurn your old standbys-try some of the delicious alternatives described in our survey of one dish meals.

Khao man gai — boiled chicken with rice

Boiled chicken with rice is easy to find in Thailand. Look around, and before long you'll spot the trademark pale chicken hanging from a hook in the glass case of a purveyor of khao man gai, one of the country's most popular one-dish meals, with Hainan Chinese origins. Chickens are plucked and cleaned and then immersed head and all in a large vat of boiling water. When they're done, the chickens are removed and set aside for consumption that day. Once several chickens have been cooked, the water becomes a rich broth that the vendor employs to cook rice and make a delicious soup. Lucky customers are treated to both a cup of delicious broth and a plate of rich rice topped with slices of chicken and a few pieces of cucumber. A side dish contains a special sauce comprising soy sauce, soybean paste, minced ginger and, for those who want to add a little zip to the bland chicken, chopped chillies.

been simmered in the broth are common accompaniments. If you don't want any pork fat with your meat, simply smile and say "mai ow maan". Many Westerners find this dish filling, easy on the stomach and reminiscent of flavours from back home.

Khao na pet /khao na mu daeng — duck with rice/roast pork with rice

Slabs of red-coloured roast pork and dark brown ducks hanging in glass cases are a tip-off that someone is selling these two popular dishes. Chinese-style roast pork is a world-wide favourite, so it's familiar to many Thailand visitors. When you ask for *khao na mu*, you receive a plate of rice with sliced pork on top, often accompanied by scallions and sliced cucumbers on the side. If you want, the proprietor will drizzle a delicious red sauce on top of your pork or serve it in a little dish on the side.

The roast duck is served in exactly the same way. Slices of duck are served atop rice drizzled with a little sauce. Unlike the pork, the duck usually contains bits of bone, so be careful when eating it. The bones, however, are a small price to pay for the delicious roast duck, a treat rarely enjoyed in the West. The duck usually comes with a bit of crispy skin. If its high fat content puts you off the skin, you can tell the waiter "mai sai han".

Gai yang and khao niao — barbecued chicken and sticky rice

Everyone seems to love barbecued chicken, and the Thais are no exception. It is particularly popular in the northeastern part of the country (the Isan), and vendors selling Isan-style barbecued chicken can be found on almost every street corner on Phuket. Normally vendors sell a small pack of steamed sticky rice to accompany this treat. Find yourself a seat, pull strips of chicken from the bone, dunk it in the mildly spicy chilli sauce, and pop it into your mouth along with a bit of the sticky rice. Different proprietors have different marinades for their chicken, so be adventurous and sample a variety of places. There's a vendor near the shell museum in Rawai, for example, with a unique marinade based on a recipe from Chiang Rai and chicken that will quickly make anyone forget the plump little colonel from Kentucky.

Khao mok gai — Muslim-style chicken with rice

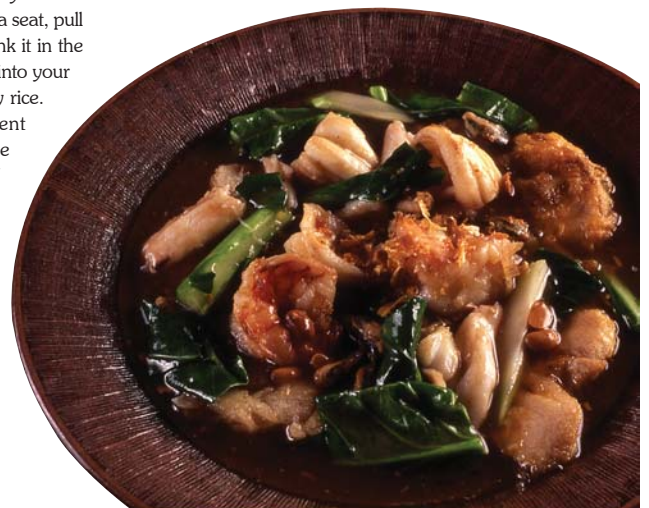
Given the large Muslim population in Phuket, *khao mok gai* is much more prevalent here than it is in most parts of Thailand. This dish is similar to *khao man gai*, but the rice and chicken are flavoured with turmeric and other spices reminiscent of Indian curries.

Customers are served a piece of chicken and a mound of yellow rice topped, in many cases, with a delicious curry sauce. A cup of soup is sometimes included, making this a delightful one dish meal. If you've ever had chicken biryani at an Indian restaurant, you'll find *khao mok gai* similar and equally delicious.

Khao ga mu — stewed leg of pork with kale

One of Thailand's most colourful and most popular one-dish meals is *khao ga mu*, another favourite with its roots in China. In this concoction, hefty legs of pork are simmered in giant pots of red sauce flavoured with Chinese five-spice powder. Pieces of the pork are removed from the bone, cut into pieces and served to customers with rice and kale that's been briefly cooked in the boiling sauce. A dab of pickled greens and a hard-boiled egg that's

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Kwaytiao pat siew — noodles fried with soy sauce

This dish is usually made with rice noodles (*kwaytiao*), but it can also be made with wheat noodles. There are three basic types of rice noodle: *sen mee* (thin and round), *sen lek* (narrow and flat) and *sen yai* (wide and soft). Most people seem to prefer *sen yai* when having this dish, but it's a matter of personal preference. After the chef is sure the noodles are soft, the noodles are fried along with meat or seafood and a few pieces of Chinese broccoli. A healthy dose of soy sauce is added before serving. Pork is a common addition, transforming the dish into *kwaytiao pat siew mu*. In Phuket, where seafood is plentiful and delicious, diners can enjoy *kwaytiao pat siew gung* (shrimp), and *kwaytiao pat siew talay* (a mixture of seafood).

Wheat-flour noodle versions of this dish can also be found, especially on Phuket, given the many descendants of Hokkien Chinese settlers. *Hokkien mee pat siew*, made with wheat-flour noodles reminiscent of spaghetti, is a popular dish on the island. Several shops in Phuket Town specialize in this and other dishes made with Hokkien mee.

noodles fried with a variety of other ingredients including garlic, eggs, dried shrimp, pickled vegetables, tofu, chilli powder and a large supply of bean sprouts. Since the dish rarely includes meat, it's popular with those who don't like this form of protein. Vegans can easily ask that the dried shrimp and eggs not be included, enjoying a dish free of animal products. Since the chef adds the chilli powder to this dish as it cooks, many Westerners might find it unpleasantly spicy. To avoid this possibility, simply smile and say "mai pet". If you're one of those who find that the Thai idea of "not spicy" still knocks your socks off, you can always say "mai sai prik", which means no pepper. If you do this, you can always correct the heat with a little dry chilli yourself from the condiments tray on your table.

Kwaytiao nam and bah mee nam — noodle soup

Although this is a dish with Chinese origins, noodle soup made with either rice (*kwaytiao nam*) or wheat (*bah mee nam*) noodles and a variety of other ingredients is probably the most single-most popular dish in all of Thailand. It's available everywhere, and



On Phuket, however, diners have the option of having *khao pat talay* — fried rice with seafood. The delicious nature of local seafood moves this humble dish from the mundane to an extraordinary treat not easily forgotten. Try *khao pat talay* with a cold beer and a good friend and you'll not only enjoy a delicious lunch, but share an experience that will long remind you of good times on Phuket.

This brings us to the end of our survey of one-dish meals. Add a little adventure to your holiday while discovering delicious new treats that might become part of your standard menu.



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Kwaytiao ratna — noodles with sauce

Noodles with sauce poured over them are a common dish in the West, and a popular one-dish meal in Thailand employs the same technique. With *kwaytiao ratna*, a sauce made from stock and a thickening agent is poured over the noodles. The mild sauce usually contains pieces of pork and slices of Chinese broccoli. Prepared in this way, the dish is called *kwaytiao ratna mu*. On Phuket, where seafood is popular, a mixture of squid and shrimp is often added to create *kwaytiao ratna talay*. As with the fried noodle dishes, wheat-noodle versions of this dish, including those made with Hokkien mee, are also enjoyed by many local people.

Pat thai — Thai-style fried noodles

Of all of the one-dish meals, this preparation varies the most from one cook to another. It's invariably made with thin rice

every Thai has his or her favourite place to eat it, some street stall or shop where the noodles are mounded in a glass case along with the other items to be added to the soup. Pointing is the order of the day here, as several combinations of ingredients are possible. The first decision needed is what style of noodles you want. Vendors usually have all the rice noodles mentioned earlier, and most will also have *bah mee*, the wheat-flour noodle popular throughout Thailand. On Phuket, many also serve balls of minced pork, fish, chicken or beef with the noodles.

Khao pat — fried rice

Of all of the one-dish meals available in Thailand, fried rice is perhaps the most popular with foreigners. This is probably because most people have had a similar dish in Chinese restaurants. The version served in Thailand is exactly the same except for the spicy condiments frequently added at the table by Thai diners.



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