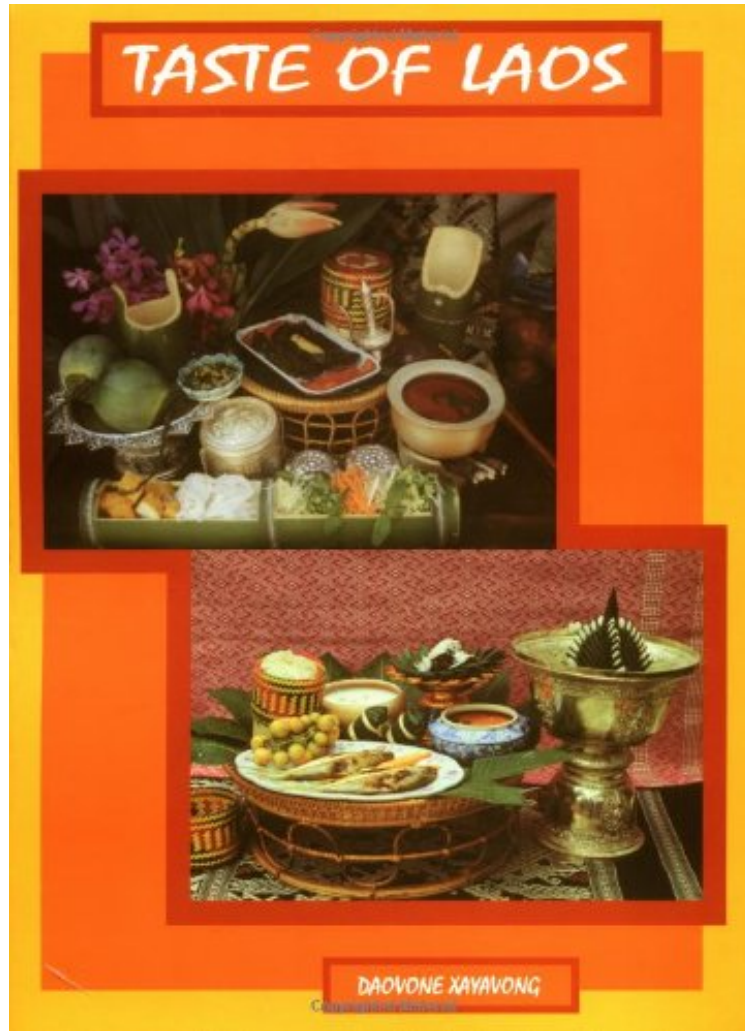


[Download] Taste of Laos: Lao/Thai Recipes from Dara Restaurant

Taste of Laos: Lao/Thai Recipes from Dara Restaurant

Daovone Xayavong, John Bear

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Daovone Xayavong, John Bear : Taste of Laos: Lao/Thai Recipes from Dara Restaurant before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Taste of Laos: Lao/Thai Recipes from Dara Restaurant:

49 of 51 people found the following review helpful. A Review from LAN-XANG.com By Lao It is unfortunate that this book should be subtitled "Lao/Thai Recipes," implying that there is a general commonality between Lao and Thai (Central Thai/Siamese) cuisine, which there is not. To be sure, there are certain individual dishes that can be characterized as Lao/Siamese because they are featured in both cuisines and their origins are obscure--they probably date back many centuries if not millennia. The Siamese Tom Yum Kung for example is none other than a substitution of shrimp for chicken (or catfish) in Lao chicken (or catfish) soup (a recipe appears in Taste of Laos, p. 45), while the

Siamese Ho Mok is simply Lao Mok (a recipe on p. 90) with the addition of coconut milk and curry powder. As for examples of common desserts, both the Lao and Siamese eat mango with sweetened sticky rice (p. 119), custard in a pumpkin (p. 118), and rice and banana steamed in banana leaves (Khao Tom, p. 121). The Siamese, however, eat prepared sweets in greater frequency and quantity than the Lao, who generally prefer fresh fruit. Partly for this reason, the Siamese dessert repertory exceeds that of the Lao in terms of its variety and development. The greater Siamese affinity for sweets is one difference in eating preferences between them and the Lao. There are quite a few. The Siamese have a predilection for heavy spices (namely curries) and herbs (particularly "Thai" basil) and rich dishes--many based on coconut milk/cream, with the result that Siamese dishes are often very fragrant, oily, and liquid. This is incompatible with the Lao palate. In general, the Lao eschew the use of coconut in savory dishes, and the curries so popular in Siam never made an impression on Lao cuisine, despite more than a century (late 18th--late 19th century) of Siamese political domination. Which is also one reason why traditional French food, with its heavy dishes and creamy sauces, based on flour, cream and butter (not to mention its complex batterie de cuisine), never took hold, despite half a century of French rule. The Lao palate is accustomed to grilled or steamed foods--with relatively simple flavorings, and fresh, uncooked vegetables. Lao cuisine, which is very healthful, uses a relatively small variety of herbs and spices, with a particular and distinctive emphasis on garlic and galanga (not ginger, as has been asserted elsewhere). Hence the author's suggestions that the Lao eat curries is nonsense. Having said that the Lao like their food simple and light, lean and green, besides differences in taste, there is a more practical reason that the Lao do not eat Siamese food, despite living next door to the homeland of one of the most popular Asian cuisines in North America. Daovone mentions the Lao preference for sticky rice--which admittedly is an issue of taste, and by now everyone should know (of course they don't) that the Lao are the one people in the entire world who eat sticky rice as a staple. All traditional Lao foods then were developed by people who knew that the dish would be accompanied by sticky rice, which is eaten out of a woven basket, with fingers. Hence to keep the fingers clean and rice out of the various dishes, the dishes could not be wet or oily. Siamese food, because of the ubiquitous coconut milk and oily curries, is too soupy for sticky rice. Though if you're using a spoon, it is perfect for regular white rice, which absorbs the broth and picks up the flavor. Most of the rural Lao population, which is most of the country's population, still eat sticky rice exclusively. The urban population eats both sticky rice and white rice, depending on the dishes they are to accompany. Lao dishes would call for sticky rice, while foreign dishes, such as Chinese-style stir fries (which are popular), or Thai curry dishes (which are not popular) would be accompanied by regular white rice. While the Lao use their fingers to eat sticky rice (the consistency of the rice makes it impossible to do it any other way), they would never use their fingers, as the Siamese and Indians traditionally do, to eat white rice. Neither, however, do they use chopsticks as their Chinese and Vietnamese neighbors (some) do. Chopsticks are reserved for noodles. For white rice, the Lao use spoons. At times, it seems the author can't decide whether she's writing a Lao cookbook or a Siamese one. Why is Tam Mak Hung (Green Papaya Salad) called Som Tum in the Siamese manner? While this offense is one in name only, the author gives a recipe for Phad Thai, but describes it as "Koa Mee[Khua My] or Pad Thai," as though they were one and the same thing. In truth, they are quite different--the most obvious differences being that Khua My generally calls for beef (rather than the shrimp or chicken typically found in Pad Thai), dark soy sauce (rather than fish sauce) and caramelized sugar (rather than sugar added directly to the noodles). Taste of Laos is written by a cook--and proprietor of a Lao/Thai restaurant, not a gastronome or sociologist, and hence everything said about Lao cuisine or culture must be taken with plenty of salt, or padaek, for which unfortunately there is no recipe or discussion, except by food guru and one-time ambassador to Laos Alan Davidson in the book's preface. Neither is there a discussion of Lao cooking methods or equipment. The author's instructions for steaming sticky rice are not likely to lead to good results, because they are very vague and steaming sticky rice requires a little more effort than making white rice. To make the process easier, the Lao invented a special steaming basket and pot, but there is no mention of this apparatus in the cookbook. Nor is there a mention of the deep Lao-style mortar and pestle that is required for a proper Green Papaya Salad (Tam Mak Hung in Lao/ Som Tum in Siamese). The Lao mortar and pestle is indispensable in the Lao kitchen, and can be had for \$10 at most Lao, Thai or Vietnamese grocery stores. Throughout the book, Daovone tries to suggest that Lao and Siamese eat the same food, which is not true. I have already mentioned how much Siamese food the Lao eat. How much Lao food the Siamese eat is another question. Let it suffice to say that there are a lot more Isan (Lao) restaurants in Bangkok than there are Siamese restaurants in Isan (the ethnic Lao region of Thailand), and that "Som Tum" and "Larb" have become standards on Thai menus everywhere. The author's assertion that the Lao have ever been vegetarian ("In the past, most Lao became vegetarians purely for religious reasons.") is ridiculous. Buddhism has rarely exerted a didactic influence on the Lao, and certainly never in this regard. Historical records show that monks themselves in particular consumed all kinds of meats, sweets and delicacies with gusto. Taste of Laos should have more accurately been subtitled, "Lao and Thai Recipes," because it contains both Lao and Thai recipes from the proprietor of the popular Dara Restaurant in Berkeley, which as a disclaimer I have to say that I have never been to. As one of only three cookbooks in the English language devoted to Lao cuisine, it is obviously of great worth. It is, however, far from comprehensive and not representative of what most Lao people eat. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that in Laos, the cuisine of Vietnam is twenty times as popular as that of Siam/Central Thailand.

Light and fresh Southern Vietnamese cuisine, which presumably descended from the people known as Cham, is much more in tune with the Lao palate. Daovone would have done better justice by including those Vietnamese and Vietnamese-inspired dishes that are so popular in Laos. Though since Dara is a Lao/Thai restaurant, I can understand why Vietnamese recipes have been excluded. Nevertheless, I was disappointed to not find even one Khao Poun dish, and even more disappointed that there is no recipe for Lao Sausage (Sai Oua). That Daovone is from Xieng Khouang (famous for its Plain of Jars) contributes to the book's value. Lao cuisine often has many regional variations, and Taste of Laos has recorded permanently the Xieng Khouang variations of certain dishes. Also, though Daovone neglects many classic Lao dishes, she introduces a number of new dishes and new sauces, many of which are her own creation. The Vientiane Mango Fool (p.123), for example, is nothing I have ever even heard of, and the Catfish Salad ("Laap Pa Duk," p. 57) is nothing like your typical Goy/Laap. This book is a keeper. Don't be put off by its ugly cover or the unorthodox Romanization of Lao dish names; get a copy of this cookbook. Who knows when you might find yourself far from a Lao grocery store and having to make your own Sour Pork Sausages (Som Mou, p.30)?

Taste of Laos: Lao/Thai Recipes from Dara Restaurant by Daovone Xayavong (\$15.95) is published by 6 people found the following review helpful. First Laos Cookbook - much that is new
By A Customer
As an voracious eater of Asian food who has also travelled extensively not only in Thailand but also in Laos, I found "Taste of Laos" a delight. The 8 pages of glossary alone are worth the price of the book. The author's vignettes are very engaging and the recipes authentic Lao. I don't know of any Thai cookbooks that include traditional Lao dishes such as ant egg soup or 'Nam Lao, fresh ingredients rolled in translucent rice paper wrappers. Alan Davidson's foreword as well as the Author's "A Word About Lao Food" were very informative. All in all I would say that "Taste of Laos" is a much appreciated addition on my book shelf. I rather doubt the reader from Greenwich Village could have written this book sitting in his (or her) NY kitchen.

7 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Taste of Greenwich Village - nothing new here
By A Customer
As an avid fan of far eastern food and having travelled extensively in Thailand I was keen to get an early copy of this new book. Sadly, I wasted my time and money. A rehash of well known favourites with few new ideas this book could have been written in a library or my kitchen rather than the Dara restaurant. If you are a devotee of eastern food then stay well away, there are far better texts!

This collection of nearly 100 dishes is true to the culinary traditions of Laos, from Young Banana Tree Soup and Catfish Salad to Nam Lao (mixed ingredients in a rice paper wrap). Accompanying the recipes are vignettes about the food and culture of Laos and an extensive glossary.