



...Seafood and spice define cuisine from this sunny part of the world...

Stellar Southern Thailand

by ELYSE GLICKMAN



WHERE ON EARTH



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM
LEFT Southern Thailand views;
 Finger foods for sale at Koh Phangan's Saturday Walking Street Market; A vendor at Koh Samui's Fisherman's Village; TAKOLA's twist on the classic mint julep; Chicken Rice served at La Vita Sana, Khao Lak; TAKOLA's amuse bouche bites and Devasom Sunset cocktail.



THERE'S A NEW food connoisseur's trail blazing across Thailand. With a good number of Michelin honours awarded to hidden gems and statement-making destination restaurants, the trail is perhaps best described as a constellation rather than an "all-star lineup." Travellers have been drawn to Thailand in part because of its affordable comfort food. The nation's inventive chefs, meanwhile, have drawn international attention with their elevated recipes.»



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
 Chanteramas' infinity pool and beachfront; Chanteramas' signature cocktail; Nai Muang Khao Lak's fun, funky interiors; Honey Rose's Miang Maitri, a multi-vitamin leaf wrap salad; TAKOLA's fresh-baked naan and chicken curry; Baan Suan Lung Khai's Michelin Bib Gourmand seafood.



«THE INTRODUCTION OF the Michelin Guide to Thailand in 2018, the second country in Southeast Asia to open its doors to the institution, is living proof that its regional cuisine and national staples continue to evolve and excite gourmands worldwide. The “Bib Gourmand” honours (named for the Michelin mascot Bibendum, The Michelin Man), focuses on affordable food vendors and casual restaurants around Asia that achieved — and continue to achieve — a level of excellence and originality making them a must-visit for locals and travellers who take their food seriously.

While the first Guide focused on Bangkok, later editions expanded to include restaurants elsewhere in Thailand. As of this year, there are an impressive number of restaurants dotting Southern Thailand's islands and destinations along the coasts of the Andaman Sea. There are 25 in Phuket, 11 in the Phang-nga

region (including Khao Lak), and eight in Surat Thani province where Koh Samui and Koh Phangan are located.

In the process of travelling through (and eating our way around) Southern Thailand this past summer, my travel companion and I also checked out several stellar places when a need arose to take a break from strictly Thai recipes. There were also interesting farm attractions tracing the roots of Thailand's distinctive flavours, and laid-back and homely weekend food markets. The lure of the markets' freshly picked produce, interesting home-spun pastries made with East-meets-West techniques, and fun spins on Indian samosas were irresistible.

While Northern and Northeastern Thai cooking has its fans for its prevalence of chili-heavy recipes, those familiar with Southern Thailand fare describe it as “coast-to-jungle cuisine” rich in fresh



coconut milk, fish and seafood from the Andaman Sea, fermented elements (especially shrimp), and herbs that amp up or cool down the palate depending how they are used.

Tam Chudaree Debhakam, head chef and owner of Bangkok's two Michelin Star-rated Baan Tepa, brings a chef's perspective to the allure of Thailand's bounty. "When deciding on where to travel for my next vacation, the key deciding factor is the food that I will experience when I'm there," she said. "Quite often, I plan my trips around my meals, and honestly, I really have no shame in this. So what are some of my favourites? The barbecue skewers, the *bing* or papaya salads, the *song fang*, stir-fried dishes, hot cacao, and Pad Thai. Whether it's restaurants or street food stalls that stay open late at night, the culinary scene here has made Thailand one of the top food destinations in Southeast Asia."

An intimate dinner at three-time Bib Gourmand recipient TAKOLA, inside the boutique five-star Divasom Resort, had my friends and I wondering why it has not yet earned its stars. Although the everyday menu at this restaurant named for the former major spice trading port (present-day Takua Pa City) fits the Bib Gourmand criteria, a nighttime feast and some inspired cocktails successfully balance white tablecloth refinement, respect for regional cooking traditions, and a bit of whimsy evidenced with its signature Sakuna Chom Suan (fried shrimp presented as adorable chicks), Nuea Nam Tok with



SERVES 2

Steamed Fish with Spicy Sauce

Bplah Moung Ma Naw

BPLAH MEANS FISH in Thai. For this recipe from the Riverside Cooking School you can use any whole white fish. In Thailand it is often made with snapper.

Fresh Fish 700-800 g

Fish Sauce 4 Tbs

Lime Juice 4 Tbs

Palm Sugar 1 Tbs

Coriander Roots 4

Coriander Leaves
a handful

Fish Stock 1 tsp

Chilis 7-10, chopped

Garlic 10 cloves

Chinese Cabbage Leaves 2

Long Coriander Leaf
1, roughly torn

Limes 2-3

1 MIX the fish sauce, lime juice, coriander root, chilis, palm sugar, stock and garlic in a blender.

2 STUFF the fish with half the mixture and steam for 30-35 minutes.

3 WHEN the fish is cooked place it on a plate lined with the cabbage leaves and top with the remaining mixture, coriander leaves and long coriander.

4 SERVE with lime wedges or slices and bowls of Jasmine rice.

Grilled Beef (spicy grilled Australian angus beef salad with roasted ground rice), Gaeng Pu Bai Cha-Phlu with Crabmeat (crab meat in curry with wild betel leaves with a rice vermicelli side), Gaeng Massamun with Chicken and Roti (chicken in Massaman peanut curry and coconut milk), and a Thai Omelet with Crabmeat.

We enjoyed casual lunches at some of Khao Lak's breakout stars. Nai Muang Khao Lak, an indoor-outdoor establishment in a festive boho-chic patio setting, called special attention to its Michelin Guide Plates on the menu.»



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
 Nai Muang Khao Lak's Michelin-acclaimed dishes; Chanteramas' restaurant and deck at breakfast hour; Khun Sao, owner of Raitiaviset Organic Farm, leads a tour; Raitiaviset Organic Farm tea and vegan brownies; A sampling of Baan Khaolak Seafood's hearty menu; Coconut Ice Cream at Koh Phangan's Saturday Walking Street Market; Chanteramas' Burmese Salad with Tea Leaves; Soaps and lotions for sale at the Saturday Walking Street; Tea ceremony at La Vita Sana.



«This meant that the Fried Seafood Spicy Salad was a must, as was the Yellow Curry with Crab and Betel Leaves. Even with other delicious options, it was hard to resist these indulgent dishes. Decadent dishes with a blast of chilies and other spices abounded at Baan Khaolak Seafood, where we opted for the Deep-Fried Mullet Fish with Turmeric, Spicy Shrimp Salad, Coconut Milk Soup with Miang Vegetables, and sharable fish and seafood finger foods bathed or marinated in a variety of condiments. Cooking classes are available at Riverside Thai Cooking and La Vita Sana, which will allow home cooks to recreate some of their favorite finds at home.

Getting from Khao Lak to Ko Phangan and Koh Samui via ferry not only provides an appreciation for the region's maritime culture — and the delicious seafood harvested — but also reflects how the culture expresses itself differently from island to island. Sometimes it's helpful to use Hawaii to put key destinations of Southern Thailand into context. If Phuket is a sort of equivalent to Waikiki, then Khao Lak would line up with Northern Oahu, and Koh Samui could be the region's answer to Maui with its mix of luxury and approachable attractions. Koh Phangan, which is more down-to-earth than Koh Samui, would remind some of the more laid-back Kauai. While hotels and restaurants run a little less fancy here, there are plenty of beautiful places to bask in the sun, appreciate the tropical vegetation, and enjoy Thai fare.»





SERVES 2

Fried Fish in Turmeric

Bplah Tod Kamin

THIS RECIPE from the Riverside Cooking School is very versatile as any type of fish can be used.

Fish 2 x 200 g pieces

Lemongrass
1 stalk, finely sliced

Coriander Root
1, sliced

Garlic 6 cloves, chopped

Turmeric
thumb-size piece, sliced

Fish Sauce
1 Tbs

Chicken Stock
1 tsp

Tempura Flour
1 tsp

Oil 4 Tbs

- 1 **SMASH** the coriander, lemongrass, garlic, turmeric and stock in a mortar and pestle until a rough paste is formed.
- 2 **ADD** the tempura flour, mix well and then use this mixture to coat the fish.
- 3 **LEAVE** the fish in the fridge for an hour.
- 4 **HEAT** the oil in a small frying pan and fry the fish on a medium heat until both sides are golden.
- 5 **SERVE** with Jasmine rice and some sliced tomatoes and sliced cucumber.

bins around the property to keep its trees and plants well nourished. There are message boards documenting eco-focused activities at the resort and around the island.

The resort also offers a shuttle to take guests into main town Thong Sala twice a day. It's put to good use during the weekly Saturday Walking Street Market from 4:00-10:00 pm on Thong Sala's "Chinese Street" near the pier where the interisland ferry docks. Food vendors run the gamut from local eateries specialized in one or two specific dishes to produce stands and those selling pastries mixing unexpected flavours and ingredients from the East and the West. Everything runs at a slower pace than night markets in major Asian cities so one can really take in the sights, aromas, and a beautiful sunset.

Chanteramas' Moon Deck Restaurant by night is as romantic as any beachside dining amenity at a five-star property, down to its fanciful lighting and the natural attributes of the shoreline. What sets it apart, however, is the added influence of Burmese cuisine based on the owners' family roots. The kitchen is particularly proud of its Burmese Salad with Tea Leaves, which in June was followed by Chicken Curry with Jackfruit Seed, Deep Fried Fish with Three-Flavour Sauce, Stir-fried Squid, and brown rice. The Emerald of Phangan, its signature cocktail, is the ultimate gin-based beach cocktail alive with fresh ginger, lime, lemongrass, and house-made green apple sorbet. The staff will also remind you with a smile that the herbs and organic vegetables used for the dinner and daytime cooking classes come from the resort's own organic herb farm.

While Nang View has not (yet) received a Bib Gourmand, Chanteramas' staff and yoga instructor refer to it as one of their hangouts of choice. Though some visitors weighing in on travel review sites had issues with the slow service, taking the time to observe the owner in action communicates that whatever you order would be the kinds of things your Thai grandmother would make. Of course, this grandmother »



While Chantaramas Beach Resort is affordable, there is stylish decor in the rooms and around the property, warm hospitality to spare (including the owners' family of beagles greeting every new guest), and some compelling extras. It would probably earn the equivalent of a Bib Gourmand if such a thing existed for hotels and resorts. It is not only designed with heart by a woman carrying on her family's hospitality business legacy, but also with a lot of intention through its "Zero Waste" management. Kitchen staff and guests are encouraged to place food leftovers into compost

Island Treasures Of The Andaman

A day of wellness at La Vita Sana in Khao Lak always revolves around its beautifully landscaped herb and vegetable garden. A cooking class or a multi-course lunch at its restaurant running around \$30 (990 baht) with ingredients sourced from it proves that modern updates on Thai classics can easily fit in with a more health and fitness conscious lifestyle. A visit to the clinic, meanwhile, can not only encompass a blissful reinvention of a Thai massage but additional workshop elements including a tea ceremony with handy pointers on correct preparation and serving of tea as well as those addressing different health concerns. You not only emerge relaxed but also better informed about Thailand's medicinal plants that can remedy a variety of maladies.

If you want to become more invested in the most restorative and revitalizing elements of the Thai diet, it is worth your time to plan a visit to farm attractions on Koh Samui and Koh Phangan offering in-depth jungle garden tours. You not only learn about both familiar and unfamiliar plants, but a variety of ways they can elevate your muscular and digestive health, hair and skin, home life (they can be used to make dish and laundry soap!), and overall sense of wellbeing. If you come away with anything, it's that Thais have been ahead of the west in terms of sustainable living by generations.

Residents of Koh Phangan living near Raitiaviset Organic Farm regularly visit the Khun Sao's farmstand to stock up on vegetables, eggs, herbs, honey and other staples. However, those interested in a full-day immersion into a fully sustainable lifestyle or a longer homestay will find the trails crossing the lush property a real path to enlightenment. While Sao will have you sample fruit and herbs right from the garden, she will also show you how natural mosquito repellent (citronella) is cultivated, how plant-based dishwashing and laundry soap are made, how coconut shells can be repurposed for a variety of uses, how her fish farm functions, her chicken and duck farms, and other behind-the-scenes happenings. Not surprisingly, the farm is



Mother Earth: Honey Rose works with ginger and other produce from her garden.

a teaching and skills centre for students from Chulalongkorn University, though any amount of time spent with Sao is sure to shift a paradigm or two.

The Honey Rose Herb Garden and Art on Koh Samui was fashioned by its founder, Honey Rose, as an enchanted forest punctuated with her murals, decorative home accents, and a myriad of plants. Koh Samui residents know it as a place where one can take in a meal or snack (such as Miang Maitri, which could be described as a multi-vitamin leaf wrap salad) and stock up on hand-crafted coconut-based skincare. There are also craft classes where visitors can learn how to make home accents and home-spa necessities on their own.

Everything is made from ingredients grown on site, and Honey or another member of her team will make sure you get chapter and verse about how the lines can blur between food and medicine. One of

the easiest ways to bring her philosophy on holistic Thai health home is through her primer on easy-to-make herbal beverages that can be enjoyed hot or cold as many Asian, organic, and specialty markets across North America and Europe carry these ingredients:

Lemongrass Drink

- Relieves appetite loss, treats urinary tract infections and kidney stones

Pandan Leaf Drink

- Remedies dehydration.
- Improves heart health and function

Ginger Water

- Nourishes with built in minerals
- Relieves bloating and indigestion, relieves nausea, and aids digestion

Aloe Vera Drink

- Reduces blood sugar
- Relieves acid reflux

Fingerroot Juice and Honey Limeade

- Strengthens the immune system. 



SERVES 1

Devasom Sunset

THIS GORGEOUSLY hued cocktail served at TAKOLA at Devasom Resort is made with Similan 23 year-old Thai Whiskey. Maker's Mark is a good alternative if Similan is not sold in your market.

Similan Thai Whiskey 45 ml

Orange Curacao
20 ml

Orgeat 15 ml

Fresh Lime Juice 20 ml

Angostura Bitters
2-3 drops

Soda a splash

Blood Orange or Orange Wheel
for garnish

- 1 **ADD** ice to a rounded cocktail glass.
- 2 **SHAKE** the whiskey, curacao, orgeat, and lime juice in a shaker.
- 3 **POUR** into the glass and add the bitters.
- 4 **TOP** with small splash of soda and float the orange wheel on top.

«would insist spice and fermentation are good for you, based on the many sour and hot curries, hearty salad, and fried seafood options listed on the menu. A ten-minute drive from Chanteramas, the stylish Sand & Tan at the Bayshore Resort serves up the perfect antidote to a late afternoon Nang View feast (as well as the rollicking Moon Parties the islands are famous for) with its excellent fresh-fruit cocktails and mocktails, light bites, and smooth jazz.

As one of the most popular island destinations in Southeast Asia, Koh Samui has an impressive number of luxury properties (including The Four Seasons Koh Samui, which will figure heavily in the third season of HBO's "White Lotus") as well as a wide selection of eateries along the boutique- and bar-lined streets of Bophut and Chaweng. Shortly after arrival and some distance from the fancy boutiques, my travel companion thought we should opt for a local favourite, Umi Yaki Buffet which is modest in décor but constantly busy. The menu offers an imaginative hybrid of Thai, Korean, and Japanese foods and flavours. After submitting a selection form (or two) to the server, the "buffet" of choice (there are four options, ranging from vegan to full-on carnivore) is brought to the guests' table, which is fitted with a grill and sukiyaki stove. The condiments, choice of soup bases (there are Thai, Japanese, and Korean broths available), and the extraordinary quality of the wagyu beef and seafoods match the caliber of elaborately decorated big city counterparts that run three times the price.

Our last big meal before heading to Bangkok and, two days later, to the States, was at Baan Suan Lung Khai (Uncle Khai's Garden House). Rumored to be one of the best-known Michelin Bib Gourmand eateries in Southern Thailand, it is regularly booked solid because of the ambiance and the kitchen's transformation of freshly caught fish and seafood, rich coconut curries, and fresh vegetables into elevated expressions of Southern Thai staples. The chef-owner's home with wooden-decked veranda and jungle foliage perfectly frames the clean flavours of aromatic fresh oysters, grilled seafood, and sides served under netting to keep insects at bay. This chef has attained legendary status for his deep relationships with local farmers, fishermen and other purveyors.

Large portions, fresh ingredients, community based, and welcoming owners make up the thread running through these mainland and island restaurants. Bib Gourmand-rated or otherwise, they certainly prove that "Southern Hospitality" is not limited to the United States. T&T



ELYSE GLICKMAN is a freelance writer and regular contributor to **TASTE & TRAVEL** based in Los Angeles.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE
 FROM TOP The table is set for romance at Chanteramas; La Vita Sana's Andaman Sea fish entrée; A small cross section of Raitiaviset Organic Farm's bounty... and Honey Rose Farm's; Nong View's spicy spread; Nai Muang Khao Lak's beautiful patio seating.



Khao Lak

Devasom Beach Resort/

TAKOLA

www.devasom.com/khaolak



Baan Khaolak Seafood

Phetkasem Road Lam Kaen Subdistrict,
 Thai Mueang 82210

Nai Muang Khao Lak

www.facebook.com/Naimuang.Khaolak

Riverside Thai Cooking

www.riversidethacooking.com

La Vita Sana Khao Lak

www.lavitasanakhaolak.com

Ko Phangan

Chantaramas Beach Resort

www.chantaramasbeachresort.com

Nong View

Ban Tai Subdistrict, Ko Pha-Ngan 84280

Sand & Tan

www.phanganbayshore.com

Raitiaviset Organic Farm & Organic Products

101/27 Moo 1, Koh Phangan

Koh Samui

Melati Resort & Spa/Kan Sak Thong Restaurant

www.melatiressort.com

Baan Suan Lung Khai

4170, Taling Ngam, Ko Samui, 84140

Umi Yaki Buffet

Tambon Bo Put, Ko Samui District, Surat Thani 84320

Honey Rose Herb Garden & Art

23 Moo2 Aungthong, Ko Samui