



tggtgNewsletter 1st Qtr Jan. '06 + 4th qtr '05

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Three lunar calendar holidays coincided in October and early November this year: Globetrotting through Southeast Asia, Robert and Morrison celebrated Ramadan in Singapore, Deepavali in Thailand, and finally Buddhist lent in Laos. During the month of Ramadan, Moslems fast between dawn to dusk, but the evening ends with sumptuous feasting. We chanced on Hjh Maimunah restaurant, under the shadow of the city's Sultan Mosque, and savored home-style Malay dishes like grilled chicken in coconut, barbequed fish, and Lemak snails. The restaurant is simple -- more like a down-market cafeteria, really -- but has hosted luminaries from Malaysia's agong or sultan, to Singapore's president. We called in just in time to hear the muezzin's call to eventide prayer from a nearby minaret.

In Bangkok, the wide boulevard in front of our hotel was blocked for the Hindu procession of the revered Phra Mae U-matewi near the Sri Maha Mariamman temple on Silom Rd. Devotees chanted, burned incense, and ported huge trays of fruits and large bowls garlanded with flowers along the street in bone crunching density. Then, we were off to Northeastern Thailand and land-locked Laos, to celebrate the end of Buddhist Lent, or Awk Phansaa. Lent here coincides with the rainy season, and these final celebrations mark the end of a three-month imposed isolation when monks are forbidden to leave their monasteries, except for food. And like Mardi Gras, it ends with merriment and ribaldry

At Thailand's boarder town of Nong Khai, locals celebrate an annual "miracle" of fireballs emerging mysteriously from the Mekong river on the full moon. (A Thai Movie entitled "Mekhong Full Moon Party" or "Sip-ha Dam Du-an Sip-et" pokes mischievous fun at the subject -- well recommended, and available on CD with English subtitles at any Scorpion Video in Bangkok.) Instead, we took our Globetrotting Gourmet food tour group to Nakhorn Phanom, about 5 hours drive to the south, where huge billboard-sized floats illuminated with paraffin candles are set adrift down the Mekong. In Laos' former royal capital of Luang Prabang, a smaller fireboat procession is held, and here the floats are paraded down the streets prior to launching. But the largest event of all is in Vientiane, where teams from across the country compete in long boats. City banks are turned into a local "county fair" and both beer and boating are indulged with abandon, while rock groups compete for attention.

Mark next New Year's Eve in your calendar. Globetrotting Gourmet is organizing a holiday food tour 29 Dec. '06 to 12 Jan '07 to Myanmar/Burma, including a gala dinner in Rangoon. We're also offering special pre and post tour Bangkok stopovers, allowing you to still spend Christmas at home, then jump onto a plane the following days to meet us either in Bangkok or Rangoon/Yangoon. We last visited this magical country in April, and the experience is spectacular. Chew beetle nut, dress in sarongs, cook in a local roadside restaurant, shop for vegetables in country towns, and sample some of the most delicious tamarind flake candies we've eaten anywhere. (We'll even take you to the factory!) Final details and cost are still to be confirmed, but [CLICK HERE](#) and we'll keep you up to posted on details.

Asian vegetables. A world first in standardizing Asian vegetable names has come from Australian bureaucrats. It's about time for some common sense here, where one country's Chinese broccoli is another's pak choy or choi sum. Unfortunately, this attempt ignores emerging consensus of names already established throughout the English speaking world, especially those used in international cookbooks. Bok choy, for example, is arbitrarily renamed Bukchoy, and Chinese or Napa cabbage now wombok. Various long green melons and loofah are chi qua, senq qua and sin qua. It will take a native Cantonese speaker to master this list! Amaranth leaf is now en choy -- but didn't anybody bother to check that this vegetable is South American, and well known in European cooking? "Water spinach" -- which we must admit is confusingly called "morning glory" in some Asian-origin English language books -- is now Kang Kong. (Film director Peter Jackson will be happy!) Nor is there any mention that there are two varieties: thick stemmed and thin. Conversely, Japanese "daikon" -- a name long been used in English -- is simply renamed "white radish." No mention that this is a "giant" white radish, nor that small white radishes exist in Europe. ("1 white radish," called for in a recipe, can be rendered inedible by using the wrong variety because of the difference in size! -- which, presumably, was the whole purpose behind standardizing names.) In Australia the mass migration of the past 30 years has been largely from Southeast Asia, not China. But Chinese names were preferred, we've been told, because Sydney's original market- or truck- farmers were Chinese. Only problem here is Chinese dialect. These names are Cantonese, not standardized Mandarin. So we suspect this attempt will fail -- not only from consumer resistance requiring them to master another tongue, but also from non-Cantonese Asian migrants. Let's try again in another 30 years time.

<http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/veg-general/asian-vegetable-names.pdf?MlvalObj=26476&doctype=document&MltypeObj=application/pdf&name=/asian-vegetable-names.pdf>

Very Koi. Latest to join the international brigade of trendy new Bangkok eateries is Koi. With branches in Los Angeles and New York, this is the company's first foray into Asia. And the interior design is stunning. It also boasts some of the freshest sushi and sashimi we've eaten outside of Japan itself. Executive chef Vittorio Bertini's latest move has us drooling over what he'll do next. We also met LA head chef Rob Lucas there while visiting his new venue. Sadly, we missed the midnight visit of Miss World, although the restaurant's trendy bar was full of beau monde models and mannequins pretending to eat.

26 Sukhumvit Soi 20

Klong Toey

Bia Lao. This is your last chance to quaff Asia's best suds before a new brewery is built. Beer Lao, proclaimed Asia's finest in "The Best of Time" magazine last year, will increase production from 85 million litres to 120 million in 2006, after signing a joint agreement with the Danish company Danbrew. Even at 120 million litres, Beer Lao will be hard pressed to meet increasing consumer demands for more. We can't decide what makes Beer Lao so good – its Mekong water (which to look at it is decidedly brown) or minimal hops. Too many other Asian brews, particularly Thailand's Singha, are potently bitter. http://www.visit-laos.com/food/lao_brewery/index.htm

"The best restaurant in Cambodia" is the buzz about Siem Reap. This former "village," on the outskirts of the ancient Angkor temples, now boasts a new international airport wing, and some 17 five-star properties. The latest, Hotel de la Paix, is arguably the best, if not hippest, of the lot. Not surprisingly, its Antipodean chef Paul Hutt was "discovered" two years ago by Gourmet magazine, which proclaimed his former restaurant at Shinta Mani as "one of the world's best hotel tables." Not bad for a not-for-profit training school with only 18 rooms. Paul has once again captured the public's imagination at de la Paix with a blend of Mod Oz-influenced dishes (a term now eschewed in Australia itself) plus some of the best Khmer dishes anywhere. The local specialities are the work of executive sous chef Joannes Riviere, who formerly taught at another non-profit training school. Riviere continues his passion for both street foods and royal Khmer dishes alike. (He's also set to publish a Khmer cookbook.) The specialty at the hotel's signature Merc restaurant is a multi-course Khmer Set at \$25. But we were particularly won over by something much more humble: Om Bok. Served at the hotel's breakfast buffet, these crushed and flattened young rice kernels make a great foil to muesli. We traveled several kilometres out of town to watch a family painstakingly make the flakes: first toasting the rice until barely golden, then immediately pounding in a mortar with 5-foot long pestles -- two used concurrently in an alternating motion, while scraping quickly to release the flakes in between the pounding. It's hard and heavy work. Om bok is seasonal, made at harvest time from young rice, while it is still moist and pliable enough to pound without cracking. Khmers mix it with coconut water and copious sugar, plus sliced bananas, to make a fat-free breakfast-like cereal eaten throughout the day.

And more about Cambodia: Globetrotting Gourmet is organizing a quick 3-night 4-day trip to the ancient temples of glorious Angkor in May '06. Includes 4-star boutique hotel, private guides, temple passes, daily breakfast, two lunches and tour of the Paul Dubrule hospitality training school, and dinner theatre. May 2-5, 2006. For more information [CLICK HERE](#). We are pleased to be principal benefactors this year to the Paul Dubrule hotel training school, offering them a one year scholarship to a disadvantaged Khmer youth. For more information on their important work, [CLICK HERE](#).

Although we're a big fan of San Francisco, its Chinatown doesn't hold a candle to Singapore's own Chinese quarter. In this cosmopolitan city of some 80 percent ethnic Chinese, descendants of the Middle Kingdom have their own historic community on the island. Colonial British administration separated the various ethnic groups – Hokkien, Hakka, Teochiu, Hainanese, Cantonese and the like -- into separate neighbourhoods. While in the past this led to friction and even bloodshed, the

Chinese today rally under the greater Han banner. No where is this more vibrant than in Chinatown and Tanjong Pagar. It is our personal favourite neighbourhood, so not surprisingly, we stay at hotels here, rather than near the shopping Mecca of Orchard Road. As an added plus, the hotels and massage, and restaurants are cheaper here as well! Consequently, we readily included this city as our hub for our April/May '06 food tour for the American Dietetic Association. The Food and Culinary Professionals dietary practice group of this venerable organization commissioned us to organize a tour exclusively for them to both Singapore during the World Gourmet Summit in late April, then on to Thailand's tropical island of Koh Samui, followed by bustling Bangkok. We'll be studying traditional medical and dietary practices, in addition to sumptuous cooking classes, banquets, and market tours. (Not to mention the great shopping, and exquisite hotels!) There's still space available, so if you are an ADA member, or wish to accompany a friend in this organization, [CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS](#). Or email the FCP office directly to register: fcf@quidnunc.net

Post tour, we've also confirmed a 4-night 5-day extension to Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand, plus Siam's ancient imperial capital of Sukhothai, May 2-6, 2006. Includes market tours, cooking classes, and personally hosted by Robert and Morrison. This tour is open to the general public, as well as ADA members. [CLICK HERE](#)

A new up-market trend is the one-room hotel. Consequently, when visiting Cambodia's temples, investigate Martin Dishman's lodgings across from his popular Linga Bar in downtown Siem Reap. Martin has nearly two decades experience in the industry, and we first met him while he was general manager of Shinta Mani, a luxury training hotel that we still use for our groups visiting Siem Reap. Linga Bar featured in a recent New York Times travel piece, and now he's expanding into the small luxury hotel category. "I had my eye on the building next to it thinking that it could be a cool small (2-3 room) city center hotel," he told us. "But I found that it was too small for two or three

rooms so I thought. "What the heck, I will do a one room hotel!" What I like about it is that with just one room it will allow me to really unleash the imagination from design to service at make it a truly unique and compelling entity," he tells us. He also plans large flat screen TV, iPod stereo, laptop with wireless internet, mobile phone for guest use during stay, ultra premium bed linens and bath amenities. Plus there's a private roof deck for sun worshippers. So it sounds like the perfect package! Details at www.lingabar.com

ON the Press Front: ***The International Herald Tribune** featured Globetrotting Gourmet in their headline piece on food tourism to Asia, in an article by Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop. For the complete article [CLICK HERE](#). The piece, extensively quoting Robert, was re-run in the New York Times.

*November **Sayo Laos**, *Business Travel and Lifestyle Magazine* features Morrison on their Contributor page. His photos of Vientiane nightlife at Halloween still has the local tongues wagging. [CLICK HERE](#)

*Robert Carmack contributed recipes in two new books: *Stir Fries* (Lansdowne) and *Asian Cooking Companion* (New Holland). (note: this book has no connection with the similarly named *The Complete Asian Cooking Companion* by Liley.)

*Globetrotting Gourmet's vertical peppercorn tasting with Ian Hemphill, which included rare merc from Kampot in Cambodia and fiery Ecuadorian Talamanca, was featured in the daily etravel blackboard newsletter, by Daisy Melwani. [CLICK HERE](#).

Our group of journalists sampled some 20 different varieties from around the world, including some, such as long pepper and cubeb pepper, little used in the West since the Middle Ages. We'll be writing more about peppercorns in our next issue.

Transitions: Due to travel commitments, our 4th qtr '05 tgtnNewsletter was delayed, and now combined with this double holiday edition. Our proposed March tour to Burma/Myanmar in March/April has been rescheduled to New Year's Eve '06-07.

AOL Off-line: If your internet server is America On Line we can no longer send to your email address. We apologize if this causes any inconvenience. If you have any complaints, direct them to your internet server directly. Please supply us with an alternative email address, [BY CLICKING HERE](#), and we will amend our records accordingly. Otherwise, you can continue to access our quarterly newsletters by going directly to the www.globetrottinggourmet.com homepage and clicking at the top right hand corner.

Join us in Asia 2006!

23 April - 2 May, Singapore & Thailand Epicurean Adventure

May 2-6 Northern Thailand: Chiang Mai & Sukhothai

May 2-5 Cambodia's Angkor Wat

Dec. 27-29 Bangkok Breakaway

Dec. 29-Jan. 12 '07 New Years Eve in Rangoon

Cheers,
Robert & Morrison