



# A West Sumatra Rice Specialty Is Hard to Beat

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thumbs up from an American chef on TV has catapulted the delicious rendang dish *nasi Kapau rang Agam* into the public eye.

Anthony Bourdain showered praise on the popular street food rice dish, which can be traced in origin to Kapau, a small town in the Agam region of West Sumatra, during the World Street Food Congress in Singapore earlier this year.

"I have tried many rendang, from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore — you name it. But this one right here [nasi Kapau rang Agam], is the best rendang I have ever tasted in my life," Bourdain said after trying the dish.

A full dish of nasi Kapau rang Agam consists of steamed white rice, *dendeng balado* (beef jerky in red sambal), vegetables, green chili and the famous rendang, a spicy meat dish. But nasi Kapau can come in many variations, and these days

one need not travel to Sumatra for a taste of it, as the dish has spread across the archipelago.

In the capital, fans of nasi Kapau usually gather at Jalan Kramat Raya in Senen, Central Jakarta, where several vendors offering the dish at their stalls have been in the area since the 1980s.

During Ramadan, the stalls are especially popular during evening *iftar* when Muslims break their fast. The food stalls feature long tables and benches where diners can sit after choosing from a variety of dishes arranged on open shelves. Vendors offer up to 40 different dishes, among them rendang, *dendeng*, and *gulai* (Indonesian curry).

But there are also very specific dishes hard to find elsewhere: *tidak cabe hijau* (duck cooked with green chili) and *tambusu* (gulai of intestine filled with eggs).

"We cook all dishes at our kitchen at home [and bring them here]," said Aldo, who owns one of the nasi Kapau food stalls. He comes from Bukittinggi in West

Sumatra, near Kapau.

"Most nasi Kapau vendors here are family businesses."

Most dishes are made of beef, chicken and fish meat, including *inards*, cooked with coconut milk. Vegetables are rare in the dishes.

Diner Novla, also from Bukittinggi and in Jakarta for business, said that when she travels she looks for food from Padang and Kapau. While she happily munched on the dishes served in Senen, she insisted they tasted different back home.

"Nasi Kapau is more delicious in my hometown," she said. "Probably it's because we use different rice."

But the many happy diners in Jakarta suggests locals are content with the variety on offer.

Prices per dish range from Rp 18,000 to Rp 50,000 (\$1.75 to \$4.90). West Sumatra snacks *lemang* (sticky rice mixed with coconut milk), *tape* (fermented black sticky rice), and *keripik santai* (Cassava mixed with chili sauce) are also available.

Many food stalls along Jalan Kramat Raya in Senen, Central Jakarta, sell nasi Kapau rang Agam, a dish originating in a small town in West Sumatra. JG Photos/Wahyuni Kamah