

Learning to cook, Balinese-style

by Wahyuni Kamah

US\$1 equals 8,500 Indonesian rupiah

Not many people are aware of the uniqueness of Balinese food, and even fewer know the fun of making the dishes or learning about the ingredients. The first cookery school of its kind on the island of Bali is run from the Bumbu Bali, a restaurant in Nusa Dua (overlooking the scenic Bay of Benoa, 10 miles from the capital, Denpasar). The restaurant offers both full- and half-day cooking programs for authentic Balinese dishes, limited to 10 students per class.

A fresh start to the day

You begin your half-day course by going on a trip to the local markets at 6 a.m., accompanied by the head chef and restaurant owner, Heinz von Holzen. After two hours at the market, it's time for breakfast, and the Bumbu Bali lays on a sumptuous feast of local foods set out as a *Rijsttafel* (Dutch for "rice table")—that is, the Balinese food is laid out in small portions across the table.

“Breakfast consisted of a selection of Balinese cakes, black rice pudding, boiled sticky rice balls in coconut sauce, sticky rice covered in banana leaf, sticky rice cake in brown sugar sauce, and sliced Balinese fruits.”

Breakfast consists of *bubur kacang hijau* (green pea porridge), *lukis* (steamed sticky rice covered in banana leaf), *jaja batun bedil* (sticky rice cake in brown sugar sauce), colorful *kue bolu* (traditional cake), and sliced Balinese fruits including jackfruit, *markisa* (passion fruit), banana, guava, mangosteen, *salak* (snake fruit), and Balinese grapes. As you eat, Austrian von Holzen explains the fundamental principles of Balinese cooking.

What's on the menu

While preparation varies, the basic seasonings in Balinese foods are finely chopped or sliced or pounded to a fine paste. Some spice pastes are made from raw ingredients, while for others the ingredients are either steamed or roasted before pounding. It's a busy day with 23 recipes to be learned. You're shown how to prepare spice paste, peanut sauce, chicken stock, shredded chicken in chili and lime, and braised beef in coconut milk.

The cooking starts after breakfast, at 9 a.m., beginning with tips on how to slice turmeric and galangal roots (a hot ginger-tasting root, used for seasoning), how to tear lime leaves, how to crush coriander seeds, and how to break nutmeg shells—all techniques intended to introduce you to the ingredients' unique smells.

You then get to try your hand at more advanced recipes, including pork in sweet soya sauce and *sambal tomat* (tomato sauce). No, you're not using common



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Photo: Courtesy of the Bumbu Bali Restaurant

ingredients, but one student in my class, Patricia from Seattle, suggested that she could find many of these ingredients at her local Oriental food shop.

“The cook also imparted a few secrets of Balinese cooking to the class:

“Tear the lime leaves before you use them...lightly bruise the lemon grass to release the flavor...and when wrapping the ingredients on the leaf, don't forget the salam leaf!”

Also on the menu is *sate lilit* (minced seafood sate), made by molding the mixture over trimmed stalks of lemon grass. And as every dish is completed, you get to taste your work.

We learned a few secrets of Balinese cooking from our tutor:

- Tear the lime leaves before you use them.
- Lightly bruise the lemon grass to release the flavor.
- Do not substitute cooking oil with olive oil.
- When wrapping the ingredients on the leaf, don't forget the salam leaf.

By 1:30 p.m., your dishes are complete...and your appetite serious. Then comes the best part. You get to eat your own creations, served with a plate of the ubiquitous *nasi goreng* (fried rice). **IS**

Program details:

A full one-day course with the Bumbu Bali costs \$85 for two people, while the half-day class, with a market visit, costs \$65. Reserve your place at least 48 hours before the course starts. The half-day course finishes at 1:30 p.m. Class members receive gratis all food, non-alcoholic drinks, a class certificate, the course guidebook, the *Rijsttafel* breakfast, and transport in Nusa Dua, Tanjung, and Jimbaran.

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