

Brushing up on your Prahok

Wondering how to whip up amok, create Khmer curry or tackle tapioca? A day at the **Cambodia Cooking Class** could be for you. By **Liz Ledden**.



Frizz cooking class:
Mastering the mortar

CAMBODIA HAS SURPRISINGLY few cooking schools, unlike neighbouring Thailand and Vietnam, with Cambodia Cooking Class being the first, and at present, the only such school in Phnom Penh – although Friends is planning to introduce one. An offshoot of his popular riverfront restaurant, Frizz, Dutchman Frits Mulder demystifies Khmer cuisine with his unique cooking school of nearly two years.

Regular requests by his patrons for recipes and queries about whether there was a cookery school in town provided the catalysts for the school.

“That was probably the natural thing to do,” Frits explains. “It seems too many people think Khmer cooking is nothing

special, but I very much disagree with that.”

■ THE LESSONS

The class starts with an early morning walk from Frizz to Psar Kandal, led by a Khmer cooking teacher. At the market, a cornucopia of fresh ingredients awaits, from the well-known to the unfamiliar. The teacher briefly explains the ins and outs of the Khmer ingredients for sale, although all the noise of this densely crowded place makes it difficult to hear her words of wisdom, especially wandering around in a group. It’s best just to take in the sights, smells and sounds and to ask her to explain any obscure ingredient you’re interested in.

A tuk tuk ride over the Japanese bridge follows, taking you to the home of Frits himself situated right on the Mekong River. Gas cooking stations are set up in an outdoor area in a semi-circular arrangement with the teacher at the front. There’s room for up to 10 people. If lucky enough to be part of a smaller group, you get your own double burner and can spread out a bit more.

Two different menus are used for alternate days. For our class the selection included num chiao (spring rolls), a ‘from scratch’ curry paste, kari saich moan (Khmer chicken curry), char trob saich moan (grilled aubergine with chicken) and a local dessert, jayk kthih (a coconut, banana and tapioca concoction).

The teacher patiently demonstrates and explains how to prepare the ingredients for each dish, and then how to cook them to perfection. Then comes the chopping, peeling, pounding, boiling and frying.

■ THE LAID-BACK GOURMET

Squeezing the water out of the taro and carrot filling, we learned how to tightly wrap a spring roll without getting holes

and leaking oil. Then we grilled whole eggplants over charcoal to get the strong, smoky flavour required for the char trob saich moan. We also had the opportunity to master the mortar and pestle, pounding highly aromatic herbs and spices to make curry paste.

A relaxed, laid-back and fun vibe is encouraged by Frits.

“The cookery school is as much about learning some of the Khmer cuisine as it is about having a relaxing day,” he says. “For many participants the combination seems to be ideal.”

Between cooking each dish, the group retires to an open-air bungalow on a platform right over the river to reap the rewards of its culinary efforts. By the end it can become a struggle to finish each course.

A cookbook, including the day’s recipes, is presented to each member of the group as a small memento of the day, before a tuk tuk ride takes you back to the riverfront.

Bookings can be made at **Frizz Restaurant**, 335 Sisowath Quay, Tel: 012 524 801 cambodia-cooking-class.com Cost is US\$20 per person 🍽️



Spring rolls on the Mekong