

The allure of spices

It's all about spices on this Subic restaurant's menu

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The beauty of any cuisine lies in the freshness of ingredients, the faithful or sometimes spur-of-the-moment culinary techniques executed by the chef, and the love and passion s/he puts into the mix. It's also about choosing the right kind of ingredients and their accurate proportions. But, perhaps, the heart of a dish remains in the spices and herbs that add zing to an already flavorful meal.

A satisfying gastronomic experience is also about spices: a dash of cinnamon in a cup of chocolate, a pinch of pepper in warm soup, a spoonful of curry powder for a meat dish, a splash of nutmeg in eggnog, and herbs to create appetizing seafood dishes.

Spices and herbs are entangled with human history. They are so significant that these bits and pieces of aromatics have inspired exploration, fueled war, began trade between countries, and even urged poets and playwrights to write stories centered on them.

In the 5th century when Alaric Visigoth held Rome captive, the ransom was paid using 3,000 pounds of peppercorns while the Pharisees in Judea used cumin to pay their tithes. In Germany during the 14th century, a pound of nutmeg was equivalent to seven oxen.

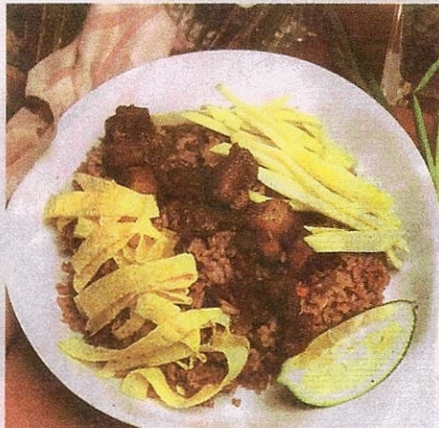
More than its flavor-enhancing and currency functions; spices are also utilized as embalming agents and became associated with different gods and goddesses of olden times.

Nobody knows this better than siblings David Baldeo and Genevieve Baldeo-Siy who manage an Asian-inspired restaurant tucked in Subic Freeport Zone. Acknowledging the importance of spices in Asian fare, the Baldeos named their bistro Asian Spices—straightforward, fuss-free, and right on target.

Last June 2008, Global Leisure Property, a family-owned business managed by Baldeo and Siy, established a villa resort, named Segara Villas. Since the resort sported Balinese-inspired interiors, the siblings decided to put up a restaurant that serves food which complements the resort's character. With a 100-seating capacity, the restaurant serves Asian fusion food and has Thai cuisine as their specialty.

Your starter dish could be the *tom yam gung*, a Thai hot and sour soup with meat morsels. Since it is essentially Thai, the soup balances fundamental flavors such as sour, sweet and salty. Infused with herbs and spices such as lemongrass, seasoned with *nam pla*, an aromatic and strong fish sauce, and lime extract, the *tom yam* ideally whets one's palate.

Though often mistaken as curry, the *rendang* is a dish made from beef (or any meat) slowly stewed in coconut milk for several hours until



Bagoong rice

almost dried and seasoned with spices such as ginger, turmeric, and pieces of chili. The slow cooking process enables the meat to absorb the flavor of the various spices and condiments and makes it very tender. Beef *rendang* is served with rice, *ketupat* (compressed rice cake from Malaysia), and/or *lemang* (glutinous rice cooked in bamboo).

Indonesian (Javanese) in origin, *sabay* (sate) or grilled meat (pork or chicken) on bamboo skewers has become a popular street-food in Thailand seasoned with various spices. It is often served with cucumber salad and peanut sauce. Memorable in this dish is the exceptional tenderness of the meat. It is easy to eat and though it may look dry at first, one will be

surprised by how moist and soft the meat is. This is a meal or a snack that knows no boundaries as it can be found from the streets of Thailand to upper-class restaurants. This dish is also present in traditional feasts.

Gung hom sabai is a filling entrée and could easily be a meal all by itself. It promises to be a Pinoy favorite as the taste is close to home. Comfort fare for shrimp fanatics, the *sabai* is actually deep fried marinated prawns tightly wrapped in egg noodles. Also served with sweet and spicy sauce, the *sabai* can be paired with plain rice or eaten by itself. The egg noodles proved to be crunchy and golden brown while the prawns still retained its suppleness.



Gung hom sabai

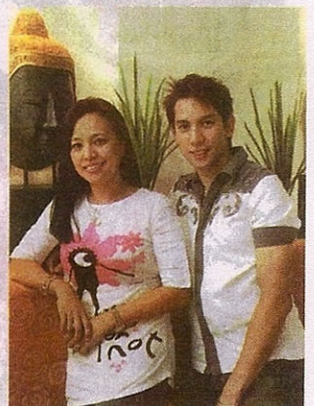
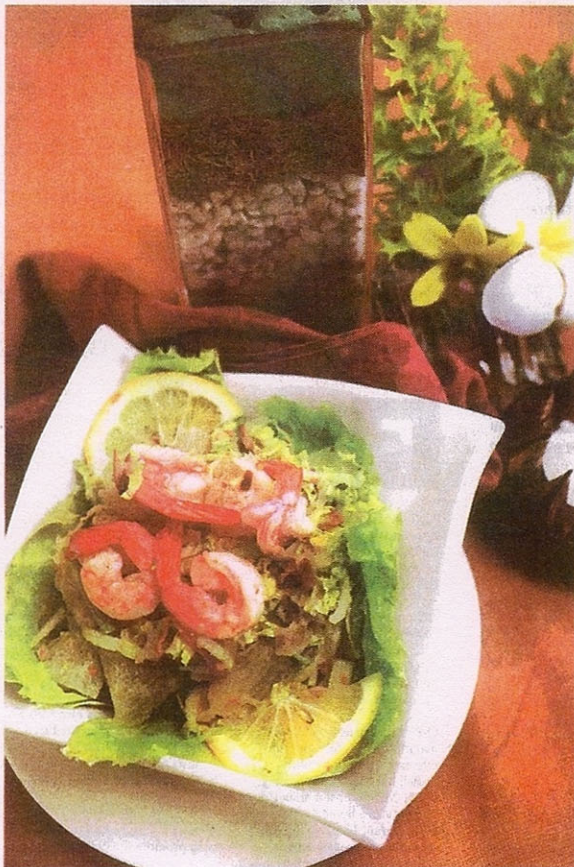
Another savory dish that could answer one's palate's prayers is the curried prawns. They are prawns stir-fried in yellow curry paste and coconut milk. In Thai cuisine, the yellow curry is much creamier and richer compared to other curries available in the Thai market. Fodder served with this type of curry is often paired with coconut milk to tone down its spicy kick.

Not to be missed in the restaurant is its offerings of staple Thai meals such as *pla gao rad phrik* (deep fried and deboned *lapu-lapu* or *muyamaya* topped with chili sauce), *bagoong* rice and pomelo salad. For dessert, there's nothing quite like their banana fritters topped with vanilla ice cream—sinful and comforting. And the *pandan* juice

is a cool treat and a must-try, not sickly sweet like others.

Asian Spices' take on Thai fare is one that is not quite distinctive from the rest, blame this to the mushrooming of such restaurants almost everywhere in the metropolis, however, dining at the Zen-motivated bistro of the Baldeos is an appreciated experience. You'd definitely get value for your money, still. Finally, you'd realize how life (or pigging out) can be so boring with just sugar and everything nice and sans the spice.

Visit Asian Spices at Segara Villas, Waterfront Road, SRF Compound, Subic Bay Freeport Zone (042-252-8622 to 23).



Asian Spices' Chicken cashew nuts (top, far right) and Curried prawns (center far right); sibling owners of Asian Spices Genevieve Baldeo-Siy and David Baldeo (bottom far right); Pomelo salad (right)