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The Indonesian Kitchen: Recipes And Stories



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Synopsis

In this ground-breaking book, renowned author Sri Owen provides a unique insight into the ancient, exotic, and varied cuisine of the Indonesian archipelago. Over 120 mouthwatering and easy-to-follow recipes take us from staples and basics to food for festivals and special occasions, with fascinating introductions that place the dishes in their regional and cultural settings. Owen offers enchanting recollections of the food and cooking of her youth, while delving into the historical role of food in the region's culture and society. The recipes are accompanied by detailed explanations of ingredients and techniques, notes on availability and substitutions, and discussions of development over time. Filled with beautiful photography by Gus Filgate, this book captures all aspects of Indonesia's diverse culinary culture and represents a lifetime of research into both traditional and modern cooking methods.

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Customer Reviews

Veteran cookbook author Owen (The Rice Book, Indonesian Regional Food and Cookery, Healthy Thai Cooking, etc.) has crafted her most personal book yet in this culinary memoir-cum-cookbook. Detailing her engagement, her first crash courses in cooking, opening her own London shop and publishing her first cookbooks, among other life events, Owen accounts for her evolving relationship with food. Though interesting, Owen has a tendency to wander and a prose style that isn't nearly as enticing as her recipes. Classics like Gado Gado, flavorful mixed vegetables tossed with peanut sauce; deliciously complex crab cakes with lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, coriander and chili flakes; and Pan-Fried Tuna with Red Chili Sauce are surefire hits that are easy enough to source and

assemble. Those living far from the tropics may have more trouble with ingredients (fresh coconut water, the notoriously foul-smelling durian fruit), though Owen does offer an admirable range of substitutions. Those with access to the accoutrements that make these dishes unique-galangal, kaffir limes and the omnipresent tamarind-will get the most out of the book, but even spectator chefs will appreciate the crisp photography and flavorful combinations. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Sri Owen is the foremost authority on Indonesian food. Born in Sumatra, Indonesia, she moved to Britain in 1964 and is an internationally celebrated author, lecturer and cook. Her books include The Rice Book (winner of the Andre Simon award) and Indonesian Regional Food and Cookery.

Having read Sri Owen's book on Indonesian cuisine over years, I decided to take a look at this work, expecting a more modern pictorial approach. I was surprised at first by this candid narrative of how Sri Owen learnt about food and cooking from her family and surroundings. Her frank, clear stories almost took all of the "exotic" out of this "should be" spicy tale. Her down to earth narrative made it sound so familiar that she could have grown up in Brooklyn like me. It's simply marvelous how she helps the reader relate to her. Truly a great read and a good culinary book.

So the recipes in the cookbook are good so far and the food tastes authentic according to my Indonesian wife. I like the book itself and the story behind the food is nice to bring together the various aspects of the culture. A couple suggestions though... One, it's hard to tell what kind of measurement is being used. It refers to ounces instead of cups for dry goods which could mean by weight or by cup measurement which could be very different so there was a little trial and error on that front. Also, some of these dishes are very labor intensive or time intensive and it would be nice to have an estimation of prep time and cooking time needed so you can plan accordingly. It can kind of be guessed at but when making multiple dishes it is nice to have a reference point that is close to accurate. Overall though I think it is a great book that gives my wife a little taste of home without having to fly around the world to get it.

One of the best Indonesian cookbooks I have found, and I've looked at most of them. Very authentic w/ well chosen recipes.

As an Indonesian studying abroad, I find Sri Owen's cook book delightful as it brings back fond

memories of my home country and of the delicious food that I grew up with. However, I believe that the merit of this book extends beyond its sentimental value. In fact, it is a source of authoritative information on Indonesian food for those interested in Indonesian cuisine, both expert and beginner cooks alike. This book features recipes of many popular Indonesian dishes that Owen herself ate as a child, then as a young woman, and finally cooked in her own kitchen after she got married. Her recipes include an array of Indonesian snacks, appetizers, main courses, and even ice cream with Indonesian flavors. While introducing these dishes, Owen shares her culinary adventure that began when she was a child in the late 1930s Indonesia and which was ongoing until 2007 (before the book was published). I find that her way of weaving her life stories and experiences to the recipes both entertaining and informative at the same time. Even as an Indonesian, I find that the information in this book adds to my knowledge of Indonesian culture and food. In addition to recipes with detailed step-by-step instructions, Owen provides clear descriptions of each dish and for some well-known dishes, such as rendang, she also provides a brief history of the dish, and whenever relevant, its cultural importance. Another excellent point of this book is the information regarding substitutes for food items that are not available outside of Indonesia. As an Indonesian living abroad herself, Owen has done a great deal of research in her own kitchen to find substitutes for hard-to-get ingredients (such as the use of Macadamia nuts or blanched almonds in place of candle nuts), modernize the sometimes impractical traditional cooking methods, and take advantage of Western life conveniences (for example, how to make lontong [rice cake] from boil-in-the-bag rice). As a result, I believe that the recipes in this book work very well for people living in countries where Indonesian ingredients are not as easy to find. Moreover, in most of the recipes, Owen also provides tips on how to pair the dish with other dishes and describes how it is usually served in Indonesia. There is also a glossary of Indonesian words and ingredients at the end of the book (including a rough guide on how to pronounce some Indonesian words/ingredients). For ingredients that are not common outside of Indonesia, she also includes the Latin name whenever possible. This is of course very helpful for those who are completely new to Indonesian cuisine and want to find more information on the ingredient using a search engine. I have to admit though, that the modernized recipes introduced in this book may not yield a taste that is as authentic as that of traditional recipes. Think, for example, of deep-frying your turkey, as opposed to oven-roasting it, for Thanksgiving day. There is nothing wrong with it, it's just that the turkey may not taste the same. Similarly, after making lontong (rice cake) from boil-in-the-bag rice as Owen suggested, I found that there was nothing wrong with it--I actually enjoyed it--but it just didn't taste the same with lontong made the traditional way. I must point out as well that Owen doesn't specify the measurement

system (e.g. American vs. British vs. Australian) she uses in her recipes, so I just assumed that she uses the American measurement system. Overall, I think that this book is both an engaging read for food lovers and a good investment for those who want to experience the flavors of Indonesia and learn more about Indonesian dishes and how to cook them in a modernized and practical way.

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