

Food, Glorious Food



Mary-Slater Linn & Jeffrey Nystuen with Chef Chandra Longsaravane getting ready to consume the results of a class at the Tum Tum Cheng Cooking School

What would we find in Luang Prabang, the old royal capitol of Laos. One restaurant boasted of a cook trained at the old royal palace. How different would the food be from Thailand? Would there be unique flavors and products? Let's prowl the food markets, try the street stalls, verify the recommendations of the guidebook. We signed up for a cooking class.

Tum Tum Cheng Cooking School

We met at the Tum Tum Cheng Cooking School at 10 am. Mary-Slater and I were the only students. The instructor, chef, and owner, was Chandra Longsaravane. There were no written materials for us. What dishes did we want to prepare? We could choose four from the restaurant's menu. We wanted to make traditional Lao food. How different was it from Thai? Chandra didn't think that it was too different. "After all, Luang Prabang was the capital of northern Thailand BEFORE Chiang Mai." In other words, Thai cuisine is provincial offshoot of Lao cuisine. Try that line in Thailand. Chandra didn't have a cookbook to share with us, but recommended *Traditional Recipes of Laos* by Phia Song (ISBN #0-907325 60 2). What should we cook? We quickly decided on fresh spring rolls, and a soup – Sour fish soup, but then stalled as we tried to pick other representative dishes. Chandra lobbied for stewed vegetables with beef. I resisted. Fried chicken with chili paste?? No, let's do a traditional Lao chicken curry. Chandra still thought stewed vegetables with beef would be good. Ok. It turned out that the beef stew was HIS favorite dish, and he ate most of it when the time came to consume. With the menu set, we headed to the food market to buy food.

Phosey Food Market



Food vendor at the Phosey Market

Good cuisine starts with good ingredients. The Phosey Food Market is the best place in town to buy food. Chandra visited his favorite vendors buying food for the day, for both us, and the restaurant. He had an assistant with us to carry purchases back to the truck. He didn't spend too much time explaining the different foods to us, but did know about them when I initiated questions. I requested that we work with some of the eggplant varieties, especially the tiny (pea sized), slightly bitter one. We wandered around on our own a bit, while Chandra negotiated with a fish monger.

The "deli" was open. Here fresh roasted fish and chicken are ready to go. But we didn't want to spoil our appetite. I bought some packaged rolls of Mekong Riverweed to carry home.



Once we got back to the school, it was time to start cooking. Chandra set us to food preparation on the back porch. There was plenty of room, since there were only two of us. And it seemed like we were preparing a lot of food for just two. Chandra explained that most recipes worked best if intended for four or more people. There would be leftovers. When we started cooking, Chandra demonstrated that he really was a chef. He added a dash of this, and a spoonful of that. I was trying to record the ingredients, the sequence of cooking, and I wanted to get photographs. I took my turn at the wok, but Mary-Slater did most of the cooking.

Mary-Slater with Chandra



Chicken curry in the wok



Final presentation for Lao chicken curry



Sour fish soup

Some recipes from the Tum Tum Cheng Cooking School:

Mint Shake:

1 cup milk
½ cup ice
handful of mint
2 tsp honey
3 limes - juice

Blend together and
serve

Sour Fish Soup:

galangal or ginger
chopped onion
tamarind sauce
firm fish
oyster sauce
fish sauce
fresh cilantro
green onions

Stir fry galangal and onion in hot oil
Add tamarind sauce
Add fish chunks, careful not to break
Add 1 liter of water and bring to boil
Add oyster and fish sauce (2 tbsp each)
Garnish with cilantro and green onions

Lao Chicken Curry:

Lemon grass
Chopped onion
Galangal root
Mixed vegetables
Chicken
Bean crème sauce
Oyster sauce
Soya sauce
Fresh basil

Stir fry lemon grass, onion and galangal
in hot oil with pinch of sugar
Add chicken – brown pieces
Add vegetables
Add prepared sauces to taste
Cover and stew for ten minutes
Add sweet basil and serve

Some of the prepared sauces included:

Healthy Boy Brand Yellow Bean Crème
Healthy Boy Brand Soy Sauce
Golden Mountain Brand Oyster Sauce
Golden Mountain Brand Sweet Soy Sauce
Knorr Premium Fish Sauce

Meals:

***Maruay Garden Hotel – Bangkok - good
Egg roll
Seafood soup
Deep-fried Catfish sections

**Vientiane Airport – good quality
Buffet

**Street market – lots of fun – noisy and good
Mixed stir fry
Roasted Fish
Lao Beer

*Eggplant salad kitchen
at the street market*



***Indochina Spirit – very good
Mekong Riverweed
Lao Sausage
Lao Salad
Fish Soup
Deep Fried Bamboo Shoot with minced pork
Sticky Rice
Fruit Salad

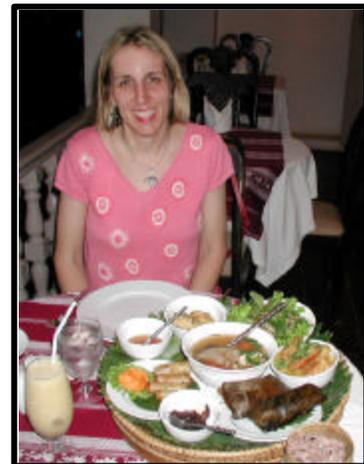
**Visoun Restaurant - fair
Coconut Fish Stew - delicious
Spicy Chicken Soup – too salty
RiverWeed – ok
Jeo Bong – Luang Prabang curry sauce – acquired taste
Fruit Shakes – yumm

*Paying the bill at Visoun
This huge wad of Kips is only a few dollars!*



**Princess Restaurant – Villa Santi – fair and expensive
Deep Fried Spring Rolls
Spicy Pork Salad
Hot and Sour Soup with Fish
Lao Curry with Fish
Steamed Egg Rolls with Minced Pork
Grilled marinated Fish in Banana Leaves
Luang Prabang Sweet Chili Paste
Sticky Rice
Seasonal Fresh Fruit

Dinner at Princess Restaurant



***TumTumCheng Cooking School
Fresh Spring Rolls
Sour Fish Soup
Chicken Curry
Stewed Vegetable with Beef

****Malee Lao - excellent
Watercress Salad – excellent – dish of the trip
Luang Prabang Minced Duck
Vegetable Lao Curry

*Watercress salad at
Malee Lao Restaurant*



***Nazim Indian Restaurant – very good
Vegetable Samosa
Chickpea Masala
Chicken Tikka Masala
Garlic Naan
Rice
Pineapple Lassi

**Atlanta Restaurant – Bangkok
Lime Juice
Lime and Lemon Grass Soup (prawns)
Traditional Curry with Chicken

**Mekong River Breakfast Café
Noodle Soup with Chicken or Pork
Lime Juice
Fruit Salad
Fruit Shake
Lao Coffee

*Mekong River breakfast
Asian style*





Kueng Si Falls

The cooking class was over by mid-afternoon. What should we do? There is a nearby waterfall park, Kueng Si, and Mary-Slater likes waterfalls. Furthermore, there should be birds at a park. Let's go. We talked to a 3-wheel open air taxi. He could get us there, but it would take an hour. We had to return to the guesthouse to get some things. A van was waiting. The driver, Mr. Phoumy, approached us. He could get us there sooner, more comfortably and with air-conditioning. Furthermore, he would wait while we explored the park. Ok. We switched to Phoumy's van.

Kueng Si Falls



Orchids at Kueng Si Falls

The drive was about 18 kilometers up into the hills away from the Mekong River. We passed a burning field. No wonder the air is filled with smoke and ash. The park has tall trees. Mary-Slater and I walked in while Phoumy waited in the parking lot. There weren't many people around. It was near the end of the day. The food and curio stands were closing. Mary-Slater climbed the trail behind the main waterfall, while I searched for birds. I only

found three – TOTAL! What's going on? It looks like good habitat, certainly better than the surrounding countryside. There was a small zoo near the entrance. It was closing time, but we ducked in for a moment. There were a trio of sun bears and one tiger, and a donation box to buy food for them. They looked healthy. We left some money. As we approached the parking lot, I



noticed two little boys placing a mist net (for birds) in a small tree at the park entrance. There won't be any birds tomorrow either.

The tiger at Kueng Si Falls was hungry, but there was food today.



Burning rice field on the way to Kueng Si Falls

Driving with Mr. Phoumy

*Mr. Phoumy,
driver and guide*

Muong Khai

Perhaps it is the people that one should visit in Laos, even if your Laotian is weak. As we left Kuang Si, Mr Phoumy suggested that we visit the village of Muong Khai on the way back to town. He knew a house that was available for sale. Well, I'm not sure about buying a house in a village in central Laos, but visiting would be fun. We agreed. Mr Phoumy noted that Muong Khai had gotten electricity for the first time in 2003. Again, I thought great, but then "This is 2004. It is about time."



Home owner, Muong Khai

The house was a typical two-story building, with the main living quarters on the second

floor. I wonder how different it is in the rainy season. A pack of children gathered and I met with the owner. We really couldn't communicate. The local schoolteacher, Mr. Phamsavang joined us and tried to translate. I think that they wanted about \$30,000 for the house. The man wanted to build a new home on the outskirts of the village. This building has in the middle of the village. I didn't consider making an offer, but when the schoolteacher suggested that I buy beer, I did agree. A group of village men had gathered in the yard. As darkness came, we sat and drank beer with snacks. Again, communication was limited, but we tried. Eventually, it was time to leave.



Mary-Slater with a gang of kids

Mr. Phoumy dropped us back at the hotel, but had arranged to drive us to another couple of outlying villages the next morning. I went on my usual nearly-the-end-of-trip shopping spree. The best buy were silk panels (scarves), possibly for curtains, although I don't sew. The skies were threatening the first rain of the season and most of the street vendors had abandoned the street. But the food stalls were open, and so I had another roasted fish and mixed stirfry from the street stand.



Evening street market – selling silk and cotton



Street market open air kitchen

Long Lao Mai and Long Lao Kuo

Long Lao Mai

Our last visits were to two adjoining hill villages – Long Lao Mai and Long Lao Kuo. These villages were on the second ridge back from the Mekong River, not too far from the Kueng Si falls. It was possible to hike to the falls, but we didn't think that there was any good reason other than exercise. The villages felt poor. I don't think that there was



electricity. We sat and talked with a Hmong woman holding her baby, but again communication was very limited. While Mary-Slater extended the conversation, I tried to look for birds on the wooded hills surrounding the villages, but didn't expect or find much. There was a captive Red Junglefowl (chicken) that was used to lure wild birds to within the range of hunters. And we did meet one little boy who was learning how to catch bugs. The pressure on wildlife must be intense. After walking around Long Lao May, we visited Long Lao Kuo. Mary-Slater visited with women and kids, while I sat with Mr. Phoumy and an older man who was making carrying sheaths.



Mary-Slater and Mr. Phoumy visiting with Hmong family



Handicrafter at Long Lao Kuo

Transitioning to the future, a roadside house featuring a satellite dish.

Mr Phoumy tried to get us to stop for lunch at a couple of different “restaurants” that he knew, but we didn’t find anything that looked like a restaurant. Instead, we ended up back in Luang Prabang in the early afternoon and had



Mr. Phoumy drop us off at Malee Lao, a restaurant highly

praised in the guidebook. We had three dishes including a very good watercress salad. It was one of our favorite dishes of the trip – watercress with garlic, peanuts, fish sauce, tomatoes and sliced egg. We explored a couple more temples before hiring a tuk-tuk to take us back to the hotel for a siesta.



Prepping watercress for the market

Delicious watercress salad at Malee Lao Restaurant



Wat Ho Siang and Wat That



*Novice monks at Wat Ho Siang
Novice Doua, on right, engaged us in
conversion and exchanged email
addresses.*

In the late afternoon, we walked to the Dalap Market. I was expecting handicrafts, but instead it was local shops all of which were closing for the day. And so we decided to visit more temples – Wat Ho Siang and Wat That. This proved to be fun as a young monk, Doua, approached and engaged us in conversation. His English was quite good and he is obviously using his time as a novice in Luang Prabang to make contacts with the outside world. He said that he was a Hmong (ethnic tribe) from the north of Laos. I pointed out that Hmong are not usually Buddhist, but he didn't seem fazed. Young men often spend 2-5 years at a temple training and treat it as an educational option. Doua has an internet account, and has been in contact with us. Doua showed

option. Doua has an internet account, and has us around Wat Ho Siang, explaining some of the murals. The Laotian temples are covered with brightly painted murals depicting various fables, presumably with spiritual significance. Doua was also able to identify a Mother Earth figurine that had been puzzling us. As darkness fell, monks entered the temples and began their evening prayers.

Mother Earth figurine

For dinner we decided to try the Nazim Indian restaurant. It was typical Indian fare: Vegetable samosa, channa masala (chickpea), chicken tikka, garlic naan and mango lassi. The owner was Indian, but had been in Luang Praband for many years. It was a very nice last supper for the trip.





Interviewing a monk, Wat Ho Siang

*Painting a Naga
Wat Ho Siang*



Mural at Wat That



Nymphs rising towards the clouds, Wat Ho Siang



Nymphs bathing in lotus pond, Wat Ho Siang



Monks praying, Wat Ho Siang

Laos Lists

Luang Prabang

March 2004

Jeffrey Nystuen and Mary-Slater Linn

Temples:

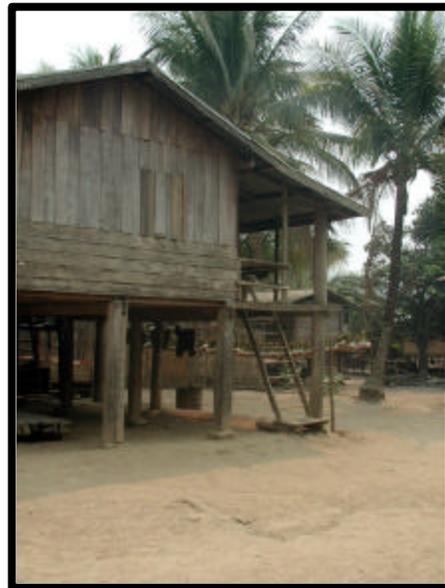
- Wat Mai (near Palace)
- Wat Xieng Muan (across street from Sayo Guest House)
- Wat Chum Khong (next door to Xieng Muan)
- Wat Nong (polishing Buddha)
- Wat Saen
- Wat Xieng Thong (end of peninsula)
- Wat Chom Si (top of Phu Si hill)
- Wat Aham
- Wat Visoun (Monk Sith)
- Wat Ho Siang (Monk Doua)
- Wat That (next to Ho Siang)
- Wat That Luang
- Wat Tham Xieng Maen (across river)



Wat Xieng Thong

Villages:

- (On the Mekong River)
 - Ban Xang Khon (paper)
 - Ban Xang Hai (moonshine)
 - Pak Ou (across from Tham Ting cave)
- (Day hike)
 - Muong Kam (riverweed)
 - Hue Pong (Kamu village with garlic)
 - Na Bua (water stop)
- (ride from Kueng Si Falls)
 - Muong Khai (Lao house for sale)
- (day trip to visit villages)
 - Long Lao Mai (poor Hmong village)
 - Long Lao Kuo (down the hill a bit)



Hue Pong

People:



Novice Vongsith @ Wat Visoun
vongsith2003@hotmail.com



Chandra Longsaravane – Cooking class instructor
tumtumcheng@yahoo.com



Boun Khong Phamsavang
@ Moug Khai Secondary School
Moug Khai Village
House 65/6



Mr Phoumy @ Bam Nong Khan Village (driver/guide)



Novice Doua Thao @ Wat Ho Siang
doua333@yahoo.com

Bird List

March 2004

Mary-Slater Linn and Jeffrey Nystuen

Luang Prabang, Laos

Bangkok, Thailand

Little Ringed Plover
Common Sandpiper
Spotted Dove
Rock Dove
*Large Hawk Cuckoo (a)
Greater Coucal
Asian Palm Swift

Mekong River
Mekong River
Bangkok
Luang Prabang
hike
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang



Red Jungle Fowl being held prisoner at Long Lao Mai. He is being coerced into luring wild brethren into the range of hunters.

Large-billed Crow
Black Drongo?
Asian Paradise Flycatcher
*Black-naped Monarch?
Blue Whistling Thrush
Barn Swallow
Grey-fronted Canary Flycatcher?
Red-throated Flycatcher
Asian Brown Flycatcher
Oriental Magpie Robin
Common Iora?
Common Taylorbird
#Siberian Rubythroat
*Greenish Warbler?
*Two-barred Warbler?
Sooty-headed Bulbul
Black-crested Bulbul
Red-whiskered Bulbul
Common Myna
Tree Sparrow
*Brown-cheeked Fulvetta?
*Crimson Sunbird
*Ruby-cheeked Sunbird
Olive-backed Sunbird?

Luang Prabang - hike
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang - hike
Luang Prabang - hike
Kueng Si Waterfalls
Bangkok
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang
Bangkok
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang
Tham Ting Caves
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang - hike
Bangkok
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang - hike
Luang Prabang
Luang Prabang
Bangkok

*Long-nosed Squirrel

Luang Prabang

* new sighting for Jeff

? identification questionable

captured bird, released for good fortune



Morning Procession