

For Review Only

Spices & Lime



**Recipes from
a Modern
South East Asian
Kitchen**



Shamsydar Ani



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 **Marshall Cavendish
Cuisine**

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contents

To my beloved Sambal Prince, Irfan Helmi.

introduction 7

understanding how the halal diet works 11

in a modern south east asian kitchen 13

imalay 15

streetfoodasia 33

weeknightwinners 45

weekendwarriors 63

easyentertaining 71

#onthegrill 79

doughordoughnut 93

sweetlikehoney 105

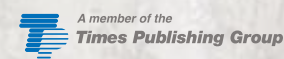
acknowledgements 119

weightsandmeasures 120

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A close-up photograph of a white ceramic bowl filled with penne pasta. The pasta is coated in a thick, vibrant red tomato-based sauce. The bowl is set on a light-colored wooden surface. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the pasta and the gloss of the sauce.

For Review Only

Introduction

I have always proudly been a Singaporean Malay – I cannot run away from being identified as Malay and Muslim, especially since I have a tan and I pretty much wear my religion on my head. Often times, though, I get comments from new friends or people I meet, saying that I either speak with an accent, or that I have adventurous taste buds. I blame too much American TV for the former and my family for the latter.

Growing up the youngest of five in Singapore during the '90s was hard on my family. I remember that we did not eat out a lot. We always had dinner at home, and restaurant meals were reserved for special occasions. I don't think I missed out much though. Apart from occasional midnight suppers of *prata*, *sup tulang* (a delicious red stew made with beef bone) and durians, I vaguely remember being fed things my friends never heard of.

Being Malay also means being fed your standard array of *nasi padang* dishes as a child, day in and day out. Rice is a staple, and God forbid the rice container in the pantry should ever be empty, or all hell would break loose. Splashes of oil and *rempah* (spice paste) around the stove were common, and proteins such as chicken and fish were always fried. My mother's old Baby Belling oven would sit nicely on the kitchen countertop, only to be used during Hari Raya Aidilfitri (Eid) when she would make *kek lapis*, *kek buah* and *kek marble*.

Being raised by a Malay mother means that you're expected to help around the house, but never in the kitchen. The kitchen was always her territory – enter it when she is cooking and you'll end up getting scolded without even knowing why. Try even breathing in her direction, towards the kitchen, and you'll incur her wrath. I really do love my mother, but not when she's in the kitchen. I vaguely remember being tasked to peel eggs as she prepared the sambal on the stove one time, but I ended up eating the eggs because I was too hungry. I avoided being in the kitchen with my mum after that, until I was in my late teens at least.

But of course, having four daughters meant that my mother had to share her kitchen sooner or later, even if she wasn't the one teaching us to cook. My eldest sister, Shamsynar, became the first in our family to study abroad. Having to live on her own, my dearest sister had to learn to cook because living on government scholarship wasn't much and Malay food was hard to come by in the UK. When she came home, she brought along with her a copy of Jamie Oliver's *The Naked Chef*. One of the foods she first served us was a simple pasta dish – *aglio olio*. She went on to make bolognese and, eventually, lasagna, which became her signature dish. This was way before there were any halal Italian restaurants around in Singapore!

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In 2009, we made a trip to Vietnam as a family, and Shamsynar, who organised the trip, made sure there were some good local restaurants we could try. As usual, she came back eager to make pho like the ones we had in Vietnam. Needless to say, I never eat lasagna and beef pho unless they are made by my sister.

Then there's my second sister, Malisa, the disciplinarian and baker. She picked up baking and began making cakes, brownies and cookies. She had a few cookbooks that she kept high up on the bookshelf, but I was tall enough to stand on my toes and reach for it, just so that I can gawk and drool at photographs of cakes. Malisa developed a specialty in making American-style cheesecakes, and she dragged me into the kitchen to help with preparing them. I was always tasked with crushing digestive biscuits and cracking eggs, since these required minimal effort and I couldn't possibly eat raw eggs. I have never written down the recipes or saw her write them down herself, but thanks to my elephant's memory, it's forever recorded for years to come in this book. Though I complained about the times I unwillingly spent in the kitchen with her, I did manage to get my hands on some of her signature recipes, which have indeed been helpful since her move to the United States years ago.

My third sister, Mira, was the only one allowed to take on Food and Nutrition, also known as Home Economics, as an examinable subject in school. She would come home from school with containers of food and bakes she made in school, and have me devour them. With her lessons as her springboard, she would make cheap cheats of otherwise expensive and tedious recipes. Being entrepreneurial, she began selling her bakes and dishes while working as a stay-at-home-mum.

Finally, the matriarch – my mother, my Ibu. My mother routinely cooks a repertoire of Malay dishes: *ayam masak merah*, *ayam lemak chilli padi*, beef rendang, *kuah celok*, *kari ayam* and so on. Occasionally, Ibu would surprise us all with a dish she considers the most tedious, her *laksa ikan tenggiri*, complete with *sambal telur burung*. Some weekends, we woke up to *nasi lemak* ready for breakfast. These Malay dishes made my childhood, and they are the ones I keep coming back to because of familiarity, comfort and nostalgia. I remember the excitement I would feel when arriving home from school. Taking in the aroma of spices wafting through the air, I would scream at the door while taking my shoes off, "DID YOU COOK MY FAVOURITE LEMAK CHILLI PADI TODAY?!", and take comfort in knowing that my mother was at home.

It is no surprise that I grew up a chubby child, always the odd one out in school, prioritizing recess over the mandatory Trim and Fit (TAF) Club that all overweight students were forced to attend. In secondary school, I joined a competitive sport – canoeing – and went on to win medals and trophies for the school, yet I was still the big girl who would run from the classroom to the canteen to queue for the halal fishball noodles. I got into trouble once when I skipped TAF Club and persuaded a few other members to join me in eating those fishball noodles. Needless to say, my teachers are probably having a laugh right now because they already knew that nothing can come between my food and me.

My love for food would not exist if not for the family that raised me. As much as my family is a difficult one to live with, it is through food that we make amends after fights, arguments and silly misunderstandings. Birthdays are always celebrated with cake, candles and a dinner of our favourite dishes. The fasting month of Ramadhan and Eidulfitri always brings with it copious amounts of food, and the table becomes the centre of attraction. Public holidays like Christmas, which we don't even celebrate, become days for us to gather with more food. We may not receive expensive gifts, but food is always in abundance at home. Food has and will always be our love language.

Now that I'm married and with my own little family, I hope to continue the food traditions I hadn't realised that my family had been practising. These recipes passed down from my mother and sisters to me, tricks we learnt from watching Jamie Oliver or reading random cooking blogs, and cooking techniques we learnt from each other shall be taught to my little ones. In the meantime, this book will serve as an encyclopaedia of sorts for my family's favourite recipes from around the world. I'm thankful for a husband who loves food and actually gives me constructive comments and suggestions on how to make my food better. I'm also glad I married into a family of good cooks, with my mother-in-law and her sisters being wonderful cooks, especially when it comes to traditional Northern Indian cuisine.

I hope the recipes in this book create new memories for you and your loved ones, just as how writing this book has led me through a journey of rediscovering my roots and understanding where this insatiable appetite for non-local food comes from. This book is merely a guide; substitute ingredients as you feel suitable, add your own twist, and most importantly, cook from the heart no matter how corny it sounds.

Shamsydar Ani



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understanding how the halal diet works

Similar to the kosher diet, the halal diet requires meat to be slaughtered Islamically by reciting "Bismillahirrahmanirrahim" (In the name of God, the most compassionate and merciful) before the animal is slaughtered in a humane manner by slitting through its jugular vein. By saying the Basmallah, the animal calms down as it takes its last breath and faces its fate which has been pre-determined by God. Slitting the animal at the jugular vein ensures a painless, instant death without any forms of torture.

Apart from swine, Muslims are prohibited from eating meats of amphibians and pests, as well as consuming alcohol. Any food items, ingredients or chemicals derived from non-halal sources are also prohibited. Now you're probably wondering, how then, do Muslims like me eat out or enjoy food? The answer is pretty simple – we choose to eat natural foods, and prefer snacks that have ingredient lists we as laypeople understand. It's a lot easier to eat out when you're in Muslim majority countries like Malaysia or Indonesia and in the Middle East. In Singapore, a lot of food establishments are halal-certified; this allows Muslims to consume their food without any doubts or worry.

When I travel to Europe, the Americas and Australia, though, I tend to go pescatarian or vegetarian. Since there is an increasing demand for vegan food, it's even easier for Muslims to eat out when travelling. Most of the times though, it's more fun to explore the local halal butchery and cook on our own. Produce in different countries often excite me since locally grown produce is always fresher and there is a variety of fruits and vegetables to choose from. Some of my favourite cuisines to draw on when cooking for my family are Italian, French (their desserts!) and hearty Moroccan.

Islam is a relatively easy religion, and while our dietary restrictions make it challenging to join in the fun sometimes, eating as naturally as possible makes it possible to enjoy food. If all else fails, you can always refer to this book if you're craving for some foods that aren't traditionally halal.

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#imalay

My mother is a pure Boyanese since both my maternal grandparents came from the island of Bawean, Indonesia. My father is of Minang descent, and his parents also came from Indonesia, albeit the city of Padang in West Sumatra. One particular dish that the Minang are known for is Rendang Minang, a hearty beef stew cooked in spices and coconut milk. Not being biased, but my mother, the Boyanese, makes the best Rendang Minang around. Of course, being me, I have to elevate it a bit more by using one of the more expensive beef cuts — beef cheek — instead of the cheaper beef chuck. I’ve also made the recipe simpler by using the oven instead of letting the dish cook over the stove.

IBU’S BOUJEE RENDANG MINANG

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Tbsp cumin seeds
- 2 Tbsp fennel seeds
- 1 Tbsp coriander seeds
- 1 star anise
- 5 cloves
- 2 sticks cinnamon
- 3 large red onions, peeled
- 1 head garlic, peeled
- 2.5-knob ginger, peeled
- 50 g bird’s eye chillies
- 100 g fresh red chillies
- 50 g dried chillies
- 2 knobs galangal, 2.5-cm each, peeled
- 5 candlenuts
- 4 stalks lemongrass
- 1 kg beef cheek, cut into 2.5-cm chunks
- Salt as needed
- Vegetable oil as needed
- 1 turmeric leaf
- 8 kaffir lime leaves
- 500 ml fresh coconut milk
- 50 g tamarind paste, diluted with 50 ml water

METHOD

1. Toast cumin, fennel and coriander seeds with star anise, cloves and cinnamon in a dry frying pan over medium heat until fragrant. Place toasted spices in a food processor together with onions, garlic, ginger, all the chillies, a knob of galangal, candlenuts and 3 stalks lemongrass. Blend until a fine paste forms. You may have to add a dash of water if the paste is too thick but not as fine. Set aside.
2. Drain excess water from the beef and pat dry with paper towels. Place on a tray and sprinkle liberally with salt. This helps the beef absorb flavours as well as makes it tender. Set aside until the *rempah* is ready.
3. Preheat the oven to 160°C.
4. In a Dutch oven over medium heat, add enough vegetable oil to cover the base of the pot. Once the oil is hot, add the *rempah* and sauté until it has dried up, or when the oil starts to separate from the paste. This takes 15-20 minutes on medium-low heat. This process of *pecah minyak* is crucial in making the rendang. Be patient and continue stirring and sautéing the spices.
5. Add the remaining lemongrass and galangal, as well as the turmeric and lime leaves, then sauté for another 5 minutes. Add beef and stir to coat with the *rempah* before pouring in coconut milk. Stir once more, cover the pot, then place in the oven and cook for 2 hours. After an hour, stir the rendang, scraping the bottom of the pot to ensure nothing sticks. Cover the pot and let it finish cooking.
6. Remove the rendang from the oven, add tamarind juice and season with salt as desired. Serve with white rice.



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#streetfoodasia

I attended a kindergarten at a local mosque near my childhood home instead of the public kindergartens, which my friends went to. One of my best memories of going to school was the makeshift canteen stall selling traditional *kuih*, snacks and treats. As a six-year-old, I got excited when my mum would let me choose my after school snack. Sometimes it would be french fries doused in bottled chilli sauce, other times it would be fried doughnuts. One of my favourite after-school snacks was of course, *macaroni goreng*. It's the perfect marriage of East and West — using pasta instead of noodles as a base for a spicy dry sauce.

MACARONI GORENG

Serves 5

INGREDIENTS

1 tsp coriander seeds
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 medium red onion, peeled and cut into chunks
2 shallots, peeled
3 cloves garlic, peeled
2.5-cm knob ginger, peeled
3 Tbsp vegetable oil
Salt as needed
500 g elbow pasta
1 Tbsp dried red chilli paste
200 g minced beef
1 Tbsp tomato paste
1 Tbsp sweet soy sauce (*kicap manis*)

GARNISHING

2 eggs, beaten
Spring onions, chopped
Chinese celery, chopped
Fried shallots

METHOD

1. Toast cumin and coriander seeds in a dry frying pan. Place toasted spices in a blender, together with onion, shallots, garlic, ginger and oil. Blend until a fine paste forms. You may have to add a dash of water if the paste is too thick but not as fine.
2. Boil a pot of water and salt it liberally. Once the water is boiling, add pasta and cook for about 10 minutes, or until al dente, then drain and set aside. Cooking the pasta in salted water ensures that the pasta absorbs the flavours of the *rempah* (spice paste) when it's being fried later on.
3. In the meantime, heat a wok over medium heat and sauté the *rempah* until it is tempered, or when the oil starts to separate from the spices. This would take 6–7 minutes with constant stirring. This process of *pecah minyak* is very important in eliminating the raw taste of the aromatics. Add chilli paste and continue cooking for another 2–3 minutes.
4. Add minced beef and cook for about 3 minutes on high heat, stirring constantly. Turn the heat to low, then add tomato paste, sweet soy sauce and pasta. Bring the heat back up to high, then toss the pasta and sauce together until well combined. Transfer to a serving dish.
5. Drizzle some oil into a frying pan over medium heat and swirl the pan around to coat its base well. Add eggs, then swirl the pan around to spread the eggs evenly. Cook on one side for about 3 minutes before flipping the omelette and cooking for another minute. Set aside to cool before cutting into strips for garnishing.
6. Serve the *macaroni goreng* garnished with omelette strips, spring onions and Chinese celery, along with fried shallots.



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#weeknightwinners



A hearty lasagna reminds me of the time my Kak Nai became obsessed with making lasagna upon returning from her studies in the UK. She made everything from scratch, save for the pasta sheets. When she got married and moved out of the family home, I missed the lasagna so much, I kept trying to make it. I got away with using instant pasta sauces, but eventually got around to making my own bolognese and béchamel sauces. I remember giving her some to try, and my then 8-year-old niece, who had previously refused to eat lasagna, asked for more of it. I take full credit for getting her to eat lasagna.

KAK NAI’S COPYCAT BEEF LASAGNA

Serves 8

INGREDIENTS

LASAGNA SHEETS

300 g Tipo 00 flour
3 large eggs
1 tsp salt

BÉCHAMEL

80 g unsalted butter
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
50 g all-purpose flour
500 ml fresh full fat milk
100 g mozzarella cheese, grated
100 g cheddar cheese, grated
A pinch of ground nutmeg

ASSEMBLY

500 g bolognese sauce (page XX)
200 g mozzarella cheese, grated
200 g cheddar cheese, grated
50 g parmesan cheese, grated

METHOD

1. Prepare the lasagna sheets by mixing everything in a food processor to form a dough. Tip the crumbly dough into a bowl and knead for a bit until it comes together and firms up nicely. Cover with cling film and leave to rest for 30 minutes before dividing the dough into 5 equal portions. Roll out each portion into balls and cover with a damp cloth until needed.
2. To prepare the béchamel, melt butter in a medium pot over medium heat and fry garlic until fragrant. Turn the heat to medium-low, then add flour and stir quickly to make sure the roux is cooked properly. Stir in milk gradually, allowing it to absorb the roux and thicken up, then add cheeses and nutmeg. Once the béchamel coats the back of a wooden spoon or spatula, remove from the heat.
3. Preheat the oven to 180°C.
4. Roll each dough ball out into a sheet the size of your casserole dish. Each sheet should be opaque but not too thin. Check by holding the lasagna sheet against light; you should see the shadow of your palm.
5. To assemble the lasagna, spread about a tablespoonful of bolognese sauce over the base of the casserole. Cover with a lasagna sheet, then spoon a quarter of the bolognese sauce over, followed by a fifth of the béchamel and finally a quarter of the mozzarella and cheddar cheeses. Make sure each layer is spread evenly. Repeat to use up the bolognese sauce and both cheeses. Finish with the final lasagna sheet and the remaining béchamel, then top it off with parmesan cheese. This will give you a nice golden crispy crust.
6. Bake for 30-45 minutes, until the cheeses have melted and the top most layer is a beautiful golden brown with spots of dark brown. Remove from the oven and let the lasagna rest for 20-30 minutes before cutting into slices and serving.



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#onthegrill

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I neither watch Korean dramas nor listen to K-Pop. But the one thing the Koreans have me at is certainly their food. I love watching recipe videos of Korean food, and I constantly crave spicy soupy dishes often featured on television shows. It doesn't help that many Korean food joints in Singapore are halal-certified, making it easy for me to feed this addiction. Gochujang is a spicy paste of red chilli pepper flakes, fermented soybeans, glutinous rice and salt. Commercial gochujang usually contains alcohol since artificially fermenting the soybeans will quicken the process. Fortunately, halal gochujang is readily available in the market, making it easy for those practising the halal diet to consume Korean foods.

GOCHUJANG GRILLED CHICKEN

Serves 4-5

INGREDIENTS

1 kg chicken wings
1 Tbsp salt
100 ml gochujang sauce
1 Tbsp dark soy sauce
1 Tbsp light soy sauce
1 tsp sesame oil
1 tsp olive oil
Sesame seeds for garnishing

METHOD

1. Clean and pat dry chicken wings. Sprinkle salt over, ensuring that each wing is covered by some salt. Set aside for an hour.
2. Add the remaining ingredients except sesame seeds to the wings and mix to coat every piece well. You can use your hands to do this. Cover and let the marinated wings sit in the refrigerator for at least an hour. You can leave them overnight and grill them the next day too.
3. To cook, preheat the oven to 200°C on the grill setting. Arrange the wings on a tray and grill for 25-35 minutes, until cooked through.
4. Transfer chicken wings to a serving plate and garnish with sesame seeds. Serve as a side dish or eat them as a snack.

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#sweetlikehoney