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Eat Like the World: A Culinary Tour from Your Own Kitchen

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Introduction

Food is a universal language that transcends borders, cultures, and generations. Through a single meal, we can experience flavors born from centuries of tradition, shaped by geography, climate, migration, and innovation. The act of preparing and sharing food forms the heart of countless family traditions, community celebrations, and rituals of everyday life. In our fast-paced world, cooking global recipes at home offers a delightful and meaningful adventure—one that brings the world a little closer, one unforgettable dish at a time.

Eat Like the World: A Culinary Tour from Your Own Kitchen invites you to travel the globe without ever leaving your stovetop. This book is more than a collection of recipes: it's an immersive journey through the kitchens of 25 distinct cultures, each with its unique dish, story, and tradition. With every chapter, you'll unlock a treasured recipe, gain practical cooking insight, and discover the traditions and celebrations that have made these dishes beloved for generations. Whether you're a seasoned home cook or just starting your culinary journey, you'll find inspiration, encouragement, and approachable guidance to bridge cultures and broaden your own cooking repertoire.

Beyond the plate, food offers a window into the spirit of a place—its history, values, and the ingenuity of its people. The aromas of spices in a bustling Moroccan market, the lively communal tables of an Argentinian asado, the delicate assembly of sushi in Japan: each is a story waiting to be savored. In these pages, you'll meet both signature dishes and the communities who nurture and celebrate them. Alongside step-by-step recipes, you'll find context on when and why these meals matter, colorful anecdotes, and tips to adapt traditional flavors for any kitchen.

Cooking globally at home is an act of discovery and connection. It encourages us to step out of our routine, try new techniques, source unfamiliar ingredients, and appreciate the remarkable diversity of our world. Some recipes may challenge your knife skills or introduce spices you've never tasted; others will echo flavors you already love, expressed in new and surprising ways. Most importantly, every dish in this book is tested and adapted to empower cooks of all skill levels, with suggestions for ingredient substitutions and techniques to suit any pantry.

As you explore each chapter, remember that authenticity is not about perfection or strict rules—it's about honoring and understanding the heart of a dish. Turn your kitchen into a playground for curiosity and connection, bringing family and friends together around a meal that tells a story. By flavoring the everyday with global perspective, you'll nurture both your palate and your sense of belonging to a wider world.

Welcome to your culinary passport. May these 25 dishes—their stories, customs, and flavors—bring warmth, inspiration, and discovery to your table. Here's to expanding your kitchen, one country, one tradition, one delicious recipe at a time.

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CHAPTER ONE: Pad Thai (Thailand)

Stepping into the vibrant world of Thai cuisine, our first stop brings us to a dish that has captured hearts and palates across the globe: Pad Thai. More than just a noodle dish, Pad Thai is a symphony of flavors—sweet, sour, salty, and umami—that dance together in perfect harmony. It's a staple of Thai street food, a beloved comfort meal, and a national icon, found everywhere from bustling Bangkok markets to Michelin-starred restaurants.

You might imagine a dish so deeply ingrained in a nation's culinary identity to have ancient origins, perhaps passed down through generations for centuries. But the true story of Pad Thai is far more recent and, surprisingly, tied to a pivotal moment in Thai history. While stir-fried rice noodles were introduced to Thailand by Chinese traders centuries ago, the dish we know as Pad Thai today was actually created in the mid-20th century.

During World War II, Thailand faced a severe rice shortage due to the war and widespread floods. In response, Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram launched a nationalistic campaign, encouraging the consumption of noodles as a way to reduce reliance on rice and strengthen the economy. His government promoted rice noodles and sought to establish a distinct Thai identity through cuisine. The campaign slogan "noodle is your lunch" pushed Pad Thai heavily across the country. The government even distributed recipes to restaurants and offered free food carts to street vendors, while quietly banning foreign nationals from selling their wares. This strategic move helped make Pad Thai a staple of Thai street-food culture and a symbol of national pride.

The name "Pad Thai" itself offers a clue to its origins. "Pad" means "fried," and "Thai" means "Thai style." The original name, "Gway Teow Pad Thai," reveals its connection to "kuai tiao," a type of thick Chinese rice noodle. Essentially, it was a Chinese-influenced stir-fried noodle dish that was adapted to the Thai palate, incorporating the distinctive sweet, sour, salty, and spicy balance that Thai cuisine is known for. This fusion of Chinese stir-frying techniques with authentic Thai flavors and ingredients led to the creation of what would become Thailand's national dish.

The beauty of Pad Thai lies in its complex yet balanced flavor profile. It masterfully combines the tanginess of tamarind, the savory depth of fish sauce, the sweetness of palm sugar, and a hint of chili spice. These core components are stir-fried with thin, flat rice noodles, eggs, tofu, and often shrimp or chicken. The addition of fresh bean sprouts, crushed peanuts, and lime wedges provides a delightful contrast in texture and a burst of freshness.

When preparing Pad Thai, the quality of your ingredients truly shines through. While some components like rice noodles, eggs, and common proteins are readily available, others might require a trip to an Asian grocery store for the most authentic experience. Tamarind paste, for instance, is crucial for that characteristic sour note. If you can't find it, some recipes suggest using rice vinegar and lime juice as a substitute, though it won't quite capture the same depth. Fish sauce is another indispensable ingredient, providing the savory, umami backbone. For sweetness, palm sugar is traditional, but brown sugar or even regular granulated sugar can be used.

Other traditional additions include dried shrimp, which offer a unique seafood depth, and sweet preserved daikon radish, contributing a subtle tangy-sweetness and crunch. Garlic chives are often used for their mild garlicky flavor and vibrant green color, though green onions or leeks can be a substitute. And of course, fresh bean sprouts provide that essential crispness.

Making Pad Thai at home is a rewarding experience. The process typically involves soaking the rice noodles until pliable, preparing the sauce by combining palm sugar, water, tamarind paste, and fish sauce, and then stir-frying the ingredients in a wok or large skillet. The key is to work quickly over high heat, ensuring that the noodles cook through but retain a slight chewiness, and that all the flavors meld together. Many recipes suggest cooking the protein and vegetables separately, then adding the soaked noodles and sauce, and finally incorporating scrambled eggs and the finishing garnishes.

In Thailand, dining is often a communal affair, with multiple dishes ordered and shared among everyone at the table. While Pad Thai is a complete meal on its own, it can certainly be part of a larger spread. When eating Thai food, the spoon is typically held in the right hand and used for eating, while the fork in the left hand is used to push food onto the spoon. Knives are generally not used as most dishes are served in bite-sized pieces. It's also considered polite to wait for the eldest or highest-ranking person at the table to begin eating before you start.

If you're looking to expand your Pad Thai feast, there are several traditional accompaniments that pair beautifully. Fresh spring rolls or crispy Thai fish cakes can serve as delightful appetizers. For a refreshing contrast, a vibrant green papaya salad (Som Tam) or a simple cucumber salad with a tangy dressing are excellent choices. And to conclude your meal on a sweet note, mango sticky rice is a classic Thai dessert that provides a creamy, fragrant, and juicy finish.

Pad Thai is more than just a delicious dish; it's a testament to resilience, adaptability, and the power of food to connect people. Its journey from a wartime necessity to a global culinary icon speaks volumes about its enduring appeal. As you prepare this iconic dish in your own kitchen, remember the story it carries—a story of innovation,

cultural exchange, and the vibrant spirit of Thailand.

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