

Culinary Adventure of an Island

Posted on

Sri Lanka is resplendent with gifts from mother nature. Aromatic spices, luscious vegetables and the island's freshest seafood are the hallmarks of our cuisine. The island's microclimates render each province its own natural bounty. Thus, each region of Sri Lanka has its own signature dishes, which are proudly prepared wholesomely and deliciously. These are some of Sri Lanka's most popular regional food; a must-try!

Words Keshini de Silva

Matara Ambul Thiyal



The Southern coastal area of Matara is known for its delicious rice and curry, the flavour of this traditional afternoon meal is quite distinctive. It is the reason many eateries in Colombo display 'Matara Bath Kadey' signs stating they serve authentic 'Matara rice and curry'. The area's stand-out curry dish is that of Malu Ambul Thiyal, a peppery, tangy preparation that tingles the taste buds. Ambul Thiyal originated as a means of preserving fish. Once the fishermen returned with the catch of the day off the coast of Matara, their families would clean the fish and immerse it in a paste of pepper, salt, roasted curry powder, cinnamon,

cardamom, cumin and brindleberry (goraka). It is cooked in a clay pot over a wood fired stove, the slow cooking imbuing the dish with its traditional taste. It is enjoyed with milk rice, string hoppers or bread.

Jaffna Kool

✖ In the blazing hot Northern peninsula, the *Jaffna Kool* is a very popular delicacy. It is a time consuming preparation that was traditionally made with ingredients that would refresh the body. A bowlful of this wholesome, delicious dish will keep your hunger satisfied for hours. *Jaffna Kool* is also called *Odiyal Kool* as the main ingredient is *odiyal* (palmyrah) flour; an ingredient found in plenty in the Northern peninsula. The exotic dish includes a range of seafood – prawns, fish, cuttlefish and crab, leafy greens, jackfruit and seeds, cassava and spices such as tamarind. Each hot spoonful represents the very spirit of Jaffna's agriculture.

Jaffna Kool is served for lunch and dinner as well and traditionally with no accompaniments.

When in the Northern peninsula, be sure to relish and savour the exciting, wholesome flavour of *Jaffna Kool*.

Unduwel from Kandy

✖ The citadel in central Sri Lanka is known for its sugary delights. If you visit Kandy, returning with a package of *Unduwel* is a must. These wiry circular treats oozing with treacle are believed to have been enjoyed since the time of Kings. It is a sweetmeat indigenous to Kandy, not to be mistaken with India's jalebis. The bronze-hued *Unduwel* are made of *kitul* (jaggery palm) treacle and flour. To prepare these delightful coils, the mixture is piped into hot oil; they are fried, drained and soaked in a warm treacle syrup. The first bite has a slight crunch, then the sweet honey trapped within the coils are unleashed in your mouth. It is a blissful experience, especially for those with a sweet tooth. An ideal treat after a hearty, spicy meal. During the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, *Unduwel* is a staple on the festive table of nearly every Kandyan home.

Negombo Prawn Curry



Another seafood favourite is the famous Negombo prawn curry. These crustaceans fished from the waters of Negombo are famous worldwide. No one prepares the much-loved prawn curry quite the same as the residents of Negombo. The curry is traditionally made in a claypot, slow cooked to imbue the favoured seafood with the zesty, spice hints. The taste buds tingle at the very tastes of lemongrass, garlic and ginger.

Enjoyed with rice at noon, the prawn curry is also relished with freshly-baked roast paan (bread). It's a dish best enjoyed hot. Sit by the western coast and under a starry night and savour this absolutely flavoursome and very succulent dish.

The prawn curry in Negombo is a 'must try' and once savoured, you will definitely want to have more. Embark on a culinary adventure and experience these heavenly tropical dishes that have their own unique identity.

Kattankudy's Maravali Kilangu



The preparation of cassava or manioc in this town in Batticaloa is quite unique. Large chunks of spiced and fried cassava are garnished with a tangy curry or topped with a portion of fried *babath* (tripe). The fried cassava is squashed to ensure it absorbs the curry and flavour well. Each bite will prove to be an exotic experience, both crispy and tender, trickling with island spices. Nearly every eatery in Kattankudy serves this delicious dish, the vegetarian version being called '*Maravali Kilangu*' while 'Tasty Parcels' are the meaty version. One can very much enjoy this dish with family, or as a night-time snack while exploring the town.

When in Kattankudy, do not forget to walk into any eatery and ask for this dish and enjoy with family and friends before leaving the town.