A Scrumptious Feast…

Posted on



The Fat Crab with the ocean providing the perfect backdrop

The scrumptious aroma of spices mingling together wafted through the air. Intent on discovering this seemingly enticing delight, we stepped into The Fat Crab and set about unravelling the mystery behind their savour of crabs…

Words Krishani Peiris **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda

The Fat Crab, owned by Don Stanley’s and located at the corner of Haig Road, Bambalapitiya facing the Indian Ocean, offers a tantalising getaway to experience some of the best crab dishes in the island. Seafood lovers who wander into this quaint little restaurant will be treated into a delectable feast, with the dazzling ocean reflecting the various shades cast upon it by the setting sun, rendering a picturesque view. Though, at times one would be startled by the din of the rushing trains on the railway tracks by the ocean. However, this contributes to the informal setting of the restaurant while adding to the exciting ambience of The Fat Crab.

In through the narrow doorway and up a flight of stairs, one would be guided to the restaurant built atop a wooden platform. As such, the design of the whole restaurant consists of dark tones and timber while a touch of vibrance is added by the myriad of colourful posters neatly hung in two rows on one wall. Proffering such

simplicity, The Fat Crab manages to direct the sole focus of the customer toward the wonderful spread of crab dishes prepared by the skilled team of chefs.

Able to accommodate 40 guests, the restaurant is guided by Athula Senanayake, a veteran in the field of hospitality and a connoisseur of crab dishes. Showcasing his flair for cooking, he offered us a sneak peak into how to cook up the perfect crab curry.

The Perfect Crab?

Sri Lanka is famed as a haven for seafood dishes, crab in particular. Endowed with a natural abundance of lagoons, the best crabs are said to be found in these brackish water bodies and are commonly known as mud or lagoon crabs. Measuring various sizes, depending on its life cycle, a mud crab suitable for export should measure more than 13 cm and The Fat Crab pays meticulous attention to obtain just such fare. According to Athula Senanayake the trick to a perfect dish of crabs lies in the quality of crab and the amount of spice added, mainly by feeling. “Crabs are acquired fresh and we pay attention to how active the crab is as well,” Senanayake further revealed.

A Cook Up!

Jaffna Crab Curry is Sri Lanka’s own concoction of a mouthwatering crab dish and the cooking expedition of this palatable recipe starts by deriving four sections from a crab. Namely these sections are the body divided into two parts and two sets of claws. The four portions are then gently struck to create fractures, taking care not to damage the hard outer covering too much. This is done to ensure that the spices are absorbed into the meat.

The ingredients used to whip up this dish are finely chopped onions, garlic and ginger, ground chilli, turmeric and curry powder, cloves, cardamom, cinnamon, curry leaves and pandan leaves, chopped kathurumurunga leaves, chilli and coconut milk—preferably the second extract.

First oil is heated up in a pan after which the onions, garlic and ginger are added and sautéed until golden brown. Next the crab portions are put in and mixed together. Then the rest of the condiments except for the curry leaves, pandan and chopped kathurumurunga leaves, such as chilli powder for spice and turmeric for colour are added and stirred together. After some time, the coconut milk is added

and the curry is covered and left to simmer until the crab ‘colours’ (takes on an almost orange tinge). As a final touch the curry leaves, pandan and chopped kathurumurunga leaves and ultimately a bit of tamarind is added to impart that much sought after sour taste. The dish is served a little warmer than room temperature.

“We cannot hurry the curry,” said Senanayake revealing the time taken to cook up a crab curry. “Therefore, we prefer to have at least a 12-hour notice so we can get the crab and cook it properly.”

A Feast

A steamy dish of crab curry is set on a table at The Fat Crab with the backdrop of the ocean lending an almost luminous glow. A platter of bread and a small bowl of pol (coconut) sambol is further added to the setting. The flavoursome taste of the Crab curry combined with the sweetness of bread, enhanced by the slight tanginess of the pol sambol and even perhaps complemented with a cool beverage make way for an interesting yet delicious taste, abound with a feel for the unique culinary heritage of Sri Lanka!

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