

Sri Lanka



Recipes from Home

தாயக உணவுகள்



A special collection of tastes and memories
from Sri Lankan survivors of torture



Freedom from Torture

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A book of bravery



As a chef my life has pretty much revolved around food. From glitzy Michelin star cooking, TV shows, recipe books and now a small group of gastro pubs my world is fairly gastronomic. But it's not all glitz and glam. Food and very importantly the eating and sharing of food impacts way deeper within my soul.. Food evokes memories and captures moments throughout my life.

Kuku Aku Paka is a dish my mum makes – she learned to make this in Zanzibar.. my birthplace. The three key ingredients are chicken, fresh coconut and nostalgia..

Food connects us to people and places in a way that photographs seldom do. Only music comes close in my opinion. How many of us recall our granny's baking, our mum's roast potatoes, that paella we first tasted on holiday.. even the burnt sausages dad proudly served from the barbecue. But imagine you are miles from home. Immersed in a new and dauntingly different culture entirely. Imagine that you can't go home however much you long to. Food is one way of covering the miles your physical self is unable to travel.

I first became involved with Freedom from Torture back in 2007. I was invited to visit a community garden run by the charity. There were people from Sri Lanka, Uganda and Kosovo.

They were busy growing herbs, leaves, fruits and vegetables that they would use in their own cooking. At the centre of all this activity was a garden shed. I was invited inside. Rather than wheelbarrows, garden forks and watering cans this shed had a huge tandoor oven in the centre and the smell of baking bread was mesmeric. We all sat on the floor to eat. Dishes from all nations were passed around and stories told about the country and the region from where they came. I was humbled to witness the power of food in a way I never had before.

Following this visit I became much more involved with the charity. Over the last 12 years I have been lucky enough to organise an annual foodie event that we call The Great Street Feast. I pull in various well known chef friends

துணிச்சலான ஒரு புத்தகம்



from all across London to contribute their own dishes but the stars of the show are the cooks from Freedom from Torture's Tamil Group.

I have worked as a chef in Sri Lanka and have no hesitation in endorsing the national cuisine as one of the best in the world.. but this book is way more than an introduction to Sri Lankan cuisine. This book is a collection of memories, a connection to a beloved country far away and the loved ones left behind. This book serves as a testament to the bravery that is required to survive the horrendous torture and mistreatment handed out by the most appalling side of humanity and to rebuild a life far, far away. I'm very proud to be asked to introduce this book and it's been an honour to meet, work and eat with such talented cooks and inspiring people.

Paul Merrett

Chef, author and supporter of Freedom from Torture

Onion Roti வெங்காய வர ஈட்டி



Ingredients

1kg of plain flour
2 large onions
7-10 green chillies
2 tablespoons of oil
(you can use coconut, sunflower or vegetable oil)
200g of grated coconut
Water (a little at a time as needed to form a dough)
Salt to taste

Method

1. Finely chopped the onions and the green chillies.
2. In a bowl sift the flour and add the chopped onions, the green chillies and salt and mix well.
3. Add the oil and grated coconut to the flour mix. Then add water a little at a time until it forms a dough, but not a sticky dough.
4. Make the dough into balls, each weighing around 50g. Keep them separately.
5. Roll the dough flat around 4" diameter.
6. Heat a heavy duty skillet or a cast iron skillet. On a medium to high heat cook on both sides until it is browned.



Recipe from Yalan

Plain Dosa தோசை



Ingredients

3 ½ cups of rice
1 cup of urad dal (*black gram*)
2 tablespoons of fenugreek seeds
2 tablespoons of bengal gram dal (*optional*)
gingelly oil (*sesame oil*)
salt to taste

Note: The above proportions will give nice crispy dosas. If you want softer dosas, reduce the rice quantity to 2 ½ cups.

Method

1. Wash and soak the rice and urad dal with bengal gram dal and fenugreek seeds separately or together. Traditionally they are soaked separately and ground separately, but with modern mixers and grinders you can grind everything together at once.

2. It is better to soak the seeds and pulses overnight but if you have limited time, 1 hour of soaking will do.

3. After soaking, drain and grind the ingredients to a smooth paste. Add salt and water to thin the batter, if it is still thick just add more water.

4. Let the batter ferment overnight until it rises to double the size.

5. Heat a cast iron dosa pan; you can also use non-stick dosa pans. The pan should be hot enough so that when you sprinkle a few drops of water on it, it should sizzle right away.

6. Just add 3–4 drops of gingelly oil and spread it all over the pan using a slice of onion or a clean kitchen towel.

7. Pour a ladle full of batter onto the pan. Spread it using the back of a spoon in a circular motion to about 9 inches round.

8. Add a few drops of oil around the edges of the dosa.

9. Once it turns slightly brown and the edges start lifting, flip and brown the other side too – then it is ready to serve!

Serving Suggestion
Serve hot with Sambhar or chutney

Recipe from Tamilan

Devilled Anchovies நெத்திலி பொரியல்



Ingredients

500g small salted dried anchovies
2 big white onions
10 green chillies
200ml coconut oil
2 teaspoons turmeric powder
2 teaspoons chilli powder
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon garam masala powder
1 lemon
1 bell pepper (*red or green*)

Method

1. Wash the anchovies thoroughly. Add salt, turmeric powder, chilli powder, garam masala powder and mix well. Marinate for 5 minutes.

2. Finely chop onions and green chillies. Slice the bell pepper.

3. Heat 150ml of coconut oil in a pan. When the oil is hot add the anchovies and fry for 10–15 minutes. When the anchovies are fried set this aside.

4. In another pan heat 50ml of oil. When oil is hot add the onions, green chillies, bell pepper and stir well. Cook for 4–5 minutes.

5. Add the fried anchovies, mix well and cook for a further 5 minutes. Take the pan off the heat and add the lemon juice.

Now the Devilled Anchovies are ready!

Recipe from Yalan

“This is my mum’s recipe, also from Sri Lanka and India. The first time I ate at my home in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, my mum prepared this for me. I have now learned how to cook it from a friend in the UK.”

Coconut Sambal தேங்காய் சம்பல்



Ingredients

1 whole grated coconut
10 whole dry red chillies
1 onion
5 curry leaves
½ lemon or ½ teaspoon
of tamarind paste
1 tablespoon of vegetable oil

Variation: Maldive fish flakes
can be used for added taste

Method

1. Scrape the coconut and set this aside.
2. Finely chop the onions.
3. Heat the oil in the pan and fry the red chillies, half the onions and the curry leaves.
4. Pound the red chillies and the other half of the onions in a pestle and mortar until it becomes a paste. Then add the grated coconut and pound this all together for another minute. Into this mixture add the fried onions and the curry leaves and pound again for a further minute.
5. Squeeze half the lemon or add ½ teaspoon of tamarind paste and add salt to taste – mix well.

Note: A food processor can be used instead of a pestle and mortar

Recipe from Yalan

“I have memories of my mum making this dish. I used to prepare this dish with my mum and now I make this dish myself.”

Origin

“Sambal is a traditional Sri Lankan dish. My mother likes to make this dish. This dish should be eaten with other foods such as rice, rotis or bread.”



Vegetable Rice குழ சாதம்



Ingredients

500g red rice
250g pumpkin
150g tapioca (cassava)
7 green chillies
1 big onion
3 potatoes
1 carrot
1 banana pepper (or green pepper)
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon turmeric powder
2 tablespoons sambar powder
3 tomatoes
1.5 litres water
1 whole head of garlic
1 aubergine
1 piece of ginger

Method

1. Cut all the vegetables into small pieces. Finely chop garlic and ginger.
 2. Wash the rice thoroughly and then put the rice and 1.5 litres of water in a big pan. Bring to boil and boil the rice for ten minutes.
 3. Add all the vegetables, ginger and garlic.
 4. Cover the pan and cook for 10 minutes.
 5. Add turmeric powder, salt and sambar powder and stir well.
 6. Cover the pan and cook for 30 minutes.
- Now the vegetable rice is cooked and ready!

Recipe from Yalan

“Hindu temples in Sri Lanka offer this very nutritious dish as a sacred food. We cook this dish at home in the UK, and I have seen it being cooked at Hindu temples in the UK.”

Fish Sothi மீன் சொதி

Ingredients

200g fish
3 tomatoes
6 green chillies
1 large onion
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon turmeric powder
100ml coconut milk
200ml water (approx)
4 cloves garlic
½ teaspoon mustard
¼ teaspoon fennel seeds
½ teaspoon tamarind paste
6 curry leaves

Method

1. Finely chop garlic, tomatoes and onions.
2. Heat the oil in a pan and when it is hot add the mustard and the fennel seeds and fry until it splatters.
3. Add the finely chopped onions, green chillies, garlic and curry leaves. Fry until the onion becomes golden brown.
4. Add the tamarind, tomatoes and 200ml of water.
5. Cover the pan and cook for 5 minutes.
6. Add turmeric powder and salt. After it boils for 3 minutes add the fish.
7. Cook for 10 minutes.
8. Now add the coconut milk and cook for a further 5 minutes.

Now the Fish Sothi is ready!

Recipe from Yalan



Fish Cutlet மீன் கட்லட்



Ingredients

300g of tuna
1 large onion
4 green chillies
1 large potato
2 eggs
1 lime
200g of breadcrumbs
Oil for frying
Salt to taste

Method

1. Boil the potato and mash.
2. Finely chop the onions and green chilli.
3. Add the mashed potato, onion, green chilli, tuna and salt in a bowl.
4. Cut the lime and add the juice and mix well.
5. Make a ball about the size of a lime from the mix.
6. Beat the egg in a small bowl and keep it aside.
7. Dip each ball in the egg then roll generously in breadcrumbs.
8. Heat oil in a frying pan and when the oil is hot, fry the balls.

Recipe from Kanaki

Meen Kuzhambu மீன் கறி



Ingredients

For the ground masala
¼ cup of grated coconut
4–5 pearl onions
3 garlic cloves
4 curry leaves
3 red chillies
1 teaspoon of cumin seeds

For the curry
2 fish fillets, cut into pieces
1 tomato, diced
¼ cup of tamarind juice
¼ teaspoon of turmeric powder
1 teaspoon of chilli powder
1 tablespoon of coriander powder
4 curry leaves
1 green chilli
¼ teaspoon of mustard seeds
2 teaspoons of oil
¼ teaspoon fenugreek seeds
¼ teaspoon of asafoetida powder
Salt to taste
Coriander to garnish

Variation: Pieces of raw mango can be added along with the fish fillets.

Method

1. Heat some oil in a skillet and fry all the ingredients for the ground masala. Once an aroma starts coming, remove it from the heat and let it cool. After it cools, grind everything together with some water to form a very fine paste and keep aside.
2. Now take a deep dish and heat some oil, the mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds and curry leaves.
3. Now add the tamarind juice, chilli powder, coriander powder, turmeric powder, tomatoes, salt, asafoetida powder along with the ground masala and bring to the boil.
4. Add the fish fillets, cover and cook for 10 minutes on low to medium heat. The fish fillets are cooked when they become opaque and soft.
5. Garnish with fresh curry leaves, coriander, split green chilli and serve hot.

Recipe from Tamilan

Tuna Sambal மீன் (சூரை) சம்பல்



Ingredients

2 320g tins of tuna chunks
2 large onions
2 tomatoes
7 green chillies
Salt – as required
½ teaspoon chilli powder
½ teaspoon masala powder
2 curry leaves
2 tablespoons oil
(vegetable or coconut)

Method

1. Finely chop the onions, green chillies and tomatoes.
2. Heat the oil in a pan and when it is hot add the chopped onions and green chillies.
3. Fry it until the onions are golden brown and then add the tomatoes and mix well.
4. After cooking for 5–6 minutes add the curry leaves, and then the salt, chilli powder and masala powder and mix well.
5. After 3 minutes add the tuna chunks and mix well. Keep stirring for 7–10 minutes and then remove from the heat.

Now the Tuna Sambal is ready!!

Recipe from Yalan

“I have watched my friend making this dish in the UK and now I have got used to making this dish for myself at home. In Sri Lanka the Sinhalese use this as a stuffing for fish buns, and in Colombo they sell this fish bun in the shops. However, Tamils don't make this fish bun often.”

Mutton Curry ஆட்டிறைச்சி கறி



Ingredients

1kg of mutton
2 onions
50g of ginger paste
6 crushed garlic cloves
40g of curry powder
1 lime
50ml of oil
Salt to taste
1 teaspoon of mustard seeds
1 teaspoon of fennel seeds
A few curry leaves
3 green chillies
2 cups of water

Method

1. Heat 50ml of oil in a pan. When the oil is heated add the mustard seeds and fennel seeds. When it starts to splatter, add the onion, ginger paste and crushed garlic. Fry until it becomes golden brown.
2. Add the mutton and the salt then cover and cook until the meat starts to release water.
3. Add the curry powder, curry leaves, green chillies and 2 cups of water. Reduce the flame, let it cook until the water evaporates.
4. Take off the heat and add the lime juice.

Note: This curry is served as a dry dish, and can be accompanied with rice or roti.

Recipe from Kanaki

Devilled Chicken கோழி பொரியல்



Ingredients

800g chicken breast
2 large onions
7 green chillies
2 banana peppers
(or green peppers)
2 medium-sized tomatoes
1 sprig curry leaves
1 teaspoon turmeric powder
1 tablespoon curry powder
1 tablespoon garam masala powder
200ml coconut oil
1 lemon
3 tablespoons chilli sauce
3 tablespoons tomato ketchup
2 tablespoons soya sauce

Method

1. Cut the chicken into small pieces. Mix garam masala, salt, curry powder and turmeric and marinate the chicken for 30 minutes or more.

2. Slice the onions, green chillies and tomatoes. Slice the banana pepper or green pepper lengthwise.

3. Heat 150ml of the oil in the pan, and when it is hot add the chicken and cook, stirring frequently, for 10–15 minutes. Remove from the pan.

4. Heat the remaining 50ml of oil in another pan. When it is hot add the onion, green chillies and banana pepper or green pepper. Cook for 2–3 minutes, stirring well.

5. Add the fried chicken and mix well. Cook for 4–5 minutes and then add the soya sauce, tomato sauce and chilli sauce at 1-minute intervals and mix well.

6. Finally, add the lemon juice and cook for two minutes before removing from the heat.

Now the Devilled Chicken is ready!

Recipe from Yalan

“My Mum makes this dish, and I have seen it being made in restaurants, as well as watching it on YouTube. I have tasted this dish in the UK at parties, and my friend makes it as well.”



Kothu Roti கொத்து ரொட்டி



Ingredients

8 rotis
300g chicken/mutton/lamb curry
1 carrot
½ leek
2 sprigs curry leaves
½ teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons coconut oil
2 big onions
6–8 green chillies
2 beaten eggs

Method

1. Cut the onions, green chillies, carrot and leek finely.
2. Cut the roti into small pieces.
3. In a wok, heat the oil until it is hot.
4. When the oil is hot add onions and green chillies, followed by carrot and leek.
5. Cook for 5 minutes.
6. Add the beaten eggs and the salt, mix well and cook for 2 minutes.
7. Add the roti, followed by the meat curry.
8. Keep mixing this for 5–7 minutes and then remove from the heat.

Now Kothu Roti is ready!

Recipe from Yalan

“I saw this in a food shop in Sri Lanka when I was 15 years old. I tried to make this recipe at my home and became an expert. My cousin had a Kothu Roti shop. I remember finding Kothu Roti in Wembley when I came to the UK.”

Lamb Curry ஆட்டிறைச்சி கறி



Ingredients

1kg lamb
50ml oil
¼ tablespoon mustard
½ teaspoon fennel seeds
2 large onions
8 green chillies
Piece of ginger
1 whole bulb of garlic
8 cloves
1 cinnamon stick
2 cardamom pods
3 tomatoes
¼ teaspoon turmeric
3 tablespoons curry powder
Salt as required
2 curry leaves
¼ lemon

Method

1. Finely chop the onions, green chillies, ginger and tomatoes.
2. Cut the lamb into small pieces and set this aside.

3. Heat the oil in a pan and when the oil is hot add mustard and fennel seeds. Fry until it splatters.
 4. Now add onion, green chillies, garlic and ginger. Fry this for around 3 minutes then add the meat.
 5. Cook the meat for 2 minutes. Add turmeric, cardamom and cinnamon stick, cover the pan and cook for 10 minutes.
 6. Add salt and curry powder. Stir well. Cook for around 6–7 minutes.
 7. Add tomatoes and curry leaves, cover the pan with lid and cook for 20–25 minutes.
 8. Switch off the cooker and add ½ lemon.
 9. Stir well.
- Now the lamb curry is ready!!

Recipe from Yalan

“This recipe is from my mother. We cook lamb curry on special days in Sri Lanka such as festivals and weekends. I learned how to cook this from a friend in the UK.”

Pittu පිටු



Ingredients

1kg red rice flour or plain flour
400g grated coconut
2 tsp of salt, or as required

Note: A pittu steamer is a metal vessel with two sections. The lower section holds water and the upper section holds the pittu. In Sri Lanka, a number of alternative cooking vessels are used, such as traditional vessels where a perforated coconut shell is attached to a section of bamboo, or a chiratta pittu made of a coconut shell or of metal shaped similarly to a coconut shell.

Method

1. Sift flour and salt together and set aside.
2. Bring the pittu steamer with water to boil until steam comes out of the steamer.
3. In a separate bowl add the sifted flour and salt mix, grated coconut and some hot water. Use fingers to create a crumble texture.
4. Fill the steamer with the crumble mixture and let it steam until you see steam coming out at the top of the steamer again. (Make sure the two parts of the steamer are properly tightened up, so to prevent steam escaping at the bottom part of it).
5. Pittu is now ready. It can be served with fried potato, aubergine, onions or eggs, or any other preferred curry.

Recipe from Kiruban





Watalappam வட்டிலப்பம்



Ingredients

1kg Kithul Jaggery (*palm sugar*)
21 eggs
50g ginger
600g coconut milk
25 Cardamom pods

Note: Palm sugar is commonly referred to as jaggery in south asia where it is widely used. It is brown with a crumbly texture and available in most supermarkets.

Method

1. Heat the pan slightly. Add the Kithul Jaggery.
2. While it is heating add the crushed cardamom.
3. In another bowl add the eggs and finely chopped ginger.
4. Beat the eggs and ginger with an electric beater for at least 5 minutes
5. When Kithul Jaggery is melted thoroughly remove from fire and let it cool slightly.
6. Add the coconut milk into the melted Jaggery mixture.
7. Add the beaten eggs.
8. Beat this mixture thoroughly, strain and bake in a tray covered with kitchen foil for 1 ½ hours at 160C.

Recipe from Yalan

“This recipe comes from Sri Lanka and takes me back to my time in Jaffna. I learned how to make Watalappam in the UK from a friend.”

Tamil survivors of torture



Freedom from Torture currently works with more torture survivors from Sri Lanka than from any other country. The Tamil Support Group provides a safe, sociable environment for survivors from the Tamil community. Like other torture survivors, our Tamil clients are often indelibly scarred, isolated and suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Tamil Support Group has become so important to its members that many have come to call it their family. Here they can open up because they are with others who have suffered similarly. It helps them cope, relieves anxiety, provides support and makes them feel valued again.

Freedom from Torture's support groups are a vital, unique part of our care for people who have been tortured and they only exist because of the generosity of our supporters.

One person who benefits from the Tamil Group is Haarun.

Haarun was detained and tortured by government forces after he was accused of supporting the Tamil Tigers. He was released only after his family sold everything they had to pay a bribe.

After Haarun fled to the UK in fear of his life, he lost everything. In Sri Lanka he had a family, a home, a degree and a job. Here he found himself sleeping on the streets.

When he came to Freedom from Torture he felt lost and alone and was having suicidal thoughts. We gave him welfare advice and one to one therapy. Gradually he started to recover. He joined the Tamil Support Group and found people who had gone through the same experiences of torture and exile as himself.



Haarun says:

“Before Freedom from Torture I didn't know anyone and I had many problems. I had nowhere to live and I struggled financially. The group has helped me, the welfare people gave me good advice and helped me find somewhere to live. The therapy saved my life.”

Cooking is so important within the Tamil community. It provides a link with their beloved homeland, and makes it easier to bear the burdens of exile and dispersion. This book enables us to share some of those memories and stories, and we hope you enjoy reading and recreating their recipes.

Freedom from Torture



Since 1985 Freedom from Torture has been supporting people whose lives have been devastated by torture. Our expert staff and volunteers are here to help men, women, children and families to recover from the unimaginable pain that they have endured, supporting them as they rebuild their lives here in the UK.

As well as counselling and psychological support, we offer valuable group therapies, such as gardening, art, cookery, and community focused groups such as our Tamil Support Group. By coming together to grow herbs and vegetables, paint, or bake bread, torture survivors are able to find a way to deal with the unspeakable. These groups and communities offer a safe place for survivors to open up about their experiences, build lasting friendships and discover the freedom to be themselves.

Cooking and sharing food is incredibly valuable to survivors of torture who have been forced to flee their homelands. In many cases the taste or smell of a cake, spice or fresh fruit can help to bring back memories of their loved ones, whilst helping them to re-connect with their culture.

This book is a celebration of food, memories, and our Tamil community.

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