

Once, while working on this book, we found ourselves at the end of a long day at a new mall development in Yangon. While malls are commonplace in the rest of Asia, this one was a first for Yangon—though it's assuredly a sign of what's to come. We browsed the grocery store on the ground level and then headed upstairs to encounter a lackluster food court with watery Chinese noodles. The only thing worth eating was at the next stall over, a tea shop selling *nan gyi thoke*. Consisting of chewy, round rice noodles lightly coated in a savory chicken curry topped with hard-boiled eggs, it was a perfectly balanced plate of noodles.

Also called Mandalay *mouti thoke*—a tribute to its origin city—and *nan pia thoke* when made with flat rice noodles, *nan gyi thoke* is a classic Burmese noodle preparation that leverages the richness of Coconut Chicken Curry. Make it when you have leftover curry, or make a batch of curry specifically for these noodles.

NAN GYI THOKE

SERVES 4 AS PART OF A LARGER MEAL

3 1/2 cups Coconut Chicken Curry (*See previous Recipe*)

Salt or fish sauce

1/4 cup toasted chickpea flour (see below)

1/2 teaspoon dried chile flakes

12 ounces extra-large or large round rice noodles

1 lime or lemon, cut into wedges

1 cup sliced red onion or shallot, soaked in water and drained

1/2 cup minced cilantro

4 hard-boiled eggs (see sidebar, below), sliced into wedges

1/2 cup crispy Fried Onions (see below)

In a small pot, bring the curry to a gentle simmer. If some of the pieces of chicken are longer than an inch, chop them up and return them to the pot. Taste the curry. It should be rich and savory. Add a teaspoon of salt or a tablespoon of fish sauce if the flavors need more oomph—the noodles will be bland, so all of the seasoning has to come from the sauce. Mix in the chickpea flour and dried chile flakes. If the curry looks broken (with oil rising to the surface), don't worry: just give the pot a good stir.

Bring a pot of water to a boil. Add the noodles and cook, stirring often with chopsticks, 9 to 12 minutes (depending on how thick the noodles are) or until tender but still chewy. If the pot starts to boil over, add a cup of cold water to temper the heat of the water. Drain in a

colander and rinse well under cool running water until room temperature. Give the colander a shake to remove excess water.

Transfer the noodles to a large mixing bowl. Add the curry and combine with tongs. Taste, adding a pinch of salt or a splash of fish sauce and a couple of squeezes of lime. Stir in the red onion and cilantro.

Divide the noodles among serving bowls or plates and top each with hard-boiled egg wedges and some fried onions.

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HOW TO HARD-BOIL EGGS

Older eggs are easier to peel than fresh eggs, so if you're making a lot of hard-boiled eggs, it's not a bad idea to buy them a week in advance.

To hard-boil eggs, place cold eggs in a pot and cover with cold water. Bring the pot to a boil, cover, and set a timer for 10 minutes. Have a bowl of ice water and a spider or slotted spoon handy. Once the timer goes off, use the spider to lift the eggs out of the hot water and into the ice bath. Peel when cool enough to handle.

Frying onions requires a decent amount of oil and some patience. The good news is that the fried onions keep well for a week or two in an airtight jar (although they lose their crispness when stored—which is perfectly okay). And all that onion frying oil comes in handy when you're making Burmese salads.

Thin, evenly sliced onions will fry more uniformly. Use a sharp chef's knife and halve through the root end. Peel the onion and trim off the root. Slice each half thinly lengthwise (from the tip to the root end), not crosswise. If you want to use shallots instead, use the same method: halve the shallots and slice lengthwise into strips (not crosswise into half-rings).

FRIED ONIONS AND ONION OIL

MAKES ABOUT 1 1/2 CUPS FRIED ONIONS AND JUST OVER 1 CUP ONION OIL

1 1/4 cups canola oil

2 cups thinly sliced yellow onion

1/4 teaspoon salt

Line a heatproof bowl with a strainer. Line a plate with paper towels.

In a wok or 2-to 3-quart saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat for a minute or two (the oil shouldn't be scorching hot). Add a piece of onion to test the heat of the oil—if bubbles form around the piece right away, the oil is hot enough. Fry the onion slices, stirring often. Within a minute or two, decrease the heat to low and continue to fry, stirring often, until deep golden, about 20 minutes. Be patient—the onions take a while to change color, but once they do, it happens quickly. You are close when you notice that fewer bubbles gather around the sides of the onions. If the onions are close to being done, you can turn off the oil and let them continue to cook in the hot oil for another minute or two.

Pour the contents of the saucepan into the strainer-lined bowl. Lift the strainer up and shake off the excess oil. Scatter the onion pieces onto the lined plate and season with salt. The fried onions can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 week or in the refrigerator for 1 month. Store the oil in the refrigerator for up to 2 months.

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TOASTED CHICKPEA FLOUR

Chickpea flour is always toasted before it's mixed into Burmese salads and noodle dishes. Toasted chickpea flour keeps in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 2 months. For longer storage, keep it in the freezer.

For a small batch, spread 1/4 cup of flour in a skillet and heat over medium heat, stirring often, for 3 to 4 minutes or until the flour has deepened to a light caramel color.

For larger batches, use the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Spread 1 cup of flour across a rimmed baking pan. Bake, stirring often, until the edges are starting to brown and the center is a light caramel color, about 20 minutes. The toasted flour keeps for a few months in a cool, dark place, making it convenient to have on hand for sprinkling on salads and noodle dishes.

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