

Le Cordon Bleu: Scholarships ++ await two 'Somtam stars'

Le Cordon Bleu: Scholarships 'plus, plus' await two 'Somtam stars'

Steve Thompson visited Le Cordon Bleu Dusit Culinary School this week to learn about an intriguing new scholarship contest. Two winners of a 'Somtam' competition launched by the school in tandem with 60 vocational training institutes nationwide will get the chance to study at Le Cordon

Staff Writer

Although its main focus is producing world class international chefs, Le Cordon Bleu ('the Blue Ribbon') Dusit Culinary School held a special event this week focused on somtam, the spicy papaya salad dish that is almost synonymous with Thai cuisine.

Before the event, which could be described as a 'Somtam Show', I was briefly introduced to Dr Parichart Jumsai Na Ayudhya, the executive director of the Thai branch of the world-renowned school of culinary arts, who was later to act as the perfect host of an interesting event featuring government ministers, as representatives from foreign embassies or consulates based in the capital.

... And now for something completely different

But first, guests were invited to watch a cooking demonstration by two leading chefs from Le Cordon Bleu Dusit Culinary School – Executive Master Chef Fabrice Dannel and Chef Instructor Cedric Maton.

Firstly, I must say that I was extremely impressed by the demonstration kitchen where this event took place. While a large number of photographers from mainstream and specialist media were armed with large SLR cameras, it made it a little tricky to see exactly what the chefs were up to at some points. However, two large overhead screens show you a revealing view from above, meaning that you won't miss any of the culinary action.

Without going into step-by-step detail, the two French experts produced two very interesting dishes based on the classic Thai dish, but with very different forms.

Chef Dannel showed participants from start to finish how to produce a Somtam Cake, while Chef Maton produced a Somtam Mousse (full name, Somtam in a Verrine & Green Papaya Sherbet). The ingredients are listed as part of this article (see recipes), but perhaps the photographs included in the accompanying gallery below best demonstrate the extremely professional performance of the chefs and their attention to detail.

What I can say, however, is that the Somtam Cake I sampled was absolutely delicious. This frozen cake was sweet but in a subtle way, while still managing to captivate many of the unique tastes and flavors found in a regular savory Thai somtam.

A chance to win

The main thrust of this event was to launch a new contest, through which the school will award two lucky persons with a full scholarship to attend Le Cordon Bleu Dusit Culinary School, along with a monthly stipend towards all other costs, such as accommodation (valued at 700,000 baht [about US\$20,000] each). Four runners-up will get the chance to work at Thailand Plaza and Banana Bay in the United States.

The main objective of the Somtam Siam Culinary Contest is to encourage vocational students to feel proud of their chosen career. The contest will provide a stage on which they can demonstrate their creativity, while promoting somtam as the country's national dish. The contest will be a battle between 60 vocational students chosen from 60 schools across the country.

The competition will run from May 23 through July 25, when the final will take place at the Dusit Thani Bangkok. Six other Dusit Thani properties across the country (Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hua Hin, Korat [Nakhon Ratchasima], Khon Kaen and Phuket) will host regional contests ahead of the final. These events will be held over two days – on day one there will be a briefing on modern food by chefs from the school, while the competition phase will begin at 10 am on Sundays. The competition will be televised on television Channel 3 and Channel 11.

A grand finale

Once the two chefs had produced their *pièces de résistances*, Parichart Jumsai Na Ayudhya took over the reins as she introduced some high-profile guests – Sathit Wongnongtoey, the minister for the Prime Minister's Office, and Pornthiva Nakasia, the minister of commerce.

Parichart spent some time talking to the two ministers in great depth about the importance of somtam as a national dish along with Rapeepan Luang-aramrat, a leading socialite credited with creating microwavable meals for the masses.

Before a final announcement regarding the launch of the competition and a plan to launch a somtam cookbook, several very game members of the Bangkok diplomatic corps were invited on stage to get the chance to try producing the spicy papaya salad for themselves. Among those who took part were leading representatives from the embassies or consulates of Argentina, the Netherlands and Portugal.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Parichart in her great abilities as our host, along with Joint Venture Director Gary Cromie, who kindly explained in greater detail some of the developments currently taking shape at the school. Thank you very to Abhirarm Chandrasen, too, who kindly arranged my attendance at this enjoyable event at such short notice.

To learn more about this opportunity or other aspects of the school, contact Abhirarm Chandrasen on Tel: +66 (0)2 237 8877, extension 202, or email

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Course structure

There are three certificate levels (basic, intermediate, superior) for cuisine or pâtisserie disciplines, each lasting three months. So to get Le Cordon Bleu Diploma of Cuisine or Diploma of Pâtisserie takes nine months in total. To earn Le Cordon Bleu Grand Diploma of

Cuisine and Pâtisserie (both disciplines) would therefore require 18 months study in total. This Grand Diploma was earned by Phol Tantasathien, an actor and host of the 'Nine Society' cooking show, is Le Cordon Bleu Dusit Culinary School's brand ambassador.

Recipe: Somtam Cake

Papaya and peanut cake

45 g lightly roasted peanuts

37 g flour

10 g fresh ginger (zest)

25 g egg yolks

One lemon zest

Half a teaspoon lemon juice

40 g papaya (grated)

40 g carrot

25 g honey

34 g egg whites

27 g unrefined raw sugar

Fruit jelly

260 g papaya puree

60 g passion fruit

10 g tamarind puree

One lime

20 g palm sugar

Two sheets gelatine (agar-agar)

Panna cotta

400 g coconut milk

200 g whipped cream

Four stalks lemongrass (crushed)

Five leaves Kafir lime

40 g sugar

50 g trimoline

10 g gelatine leaves

Garniture

Papaya cubes macerated in lime juice

30 g roasted peanuts

10 g sugar (caramel)

White glaze

250 g coconut milk

Ginger

80 g glucose

Four gelatin leaves

300 g white chocolate
300 g white chocolate glaze
Orange food coloring

Recipe: Somtam in a Verrine & Green Papaya Sherbet

Eight tomatoes (peeled, seeded and chopped)
Eight garlic cloves (chopped)
Two teaspoons dried shrimp
Four teaspoons fish sauce
Three red chilis (pureed)
Gelatine (20-25 g/liter)
Whipped cream (300-400 g/liter)

Green papaya and lime mousse
500g green papaya diced 1 cm
Two teaspoons lime juice
Two teaspoons zest (grated)
Salt (pinch)
Gelatine (15g/liter)
Agar-agar powder (4g/liter)
Whipped cream (150-200 g/liter)

Green papaya jelly
200 g green papaya (brunoise)
300 g papaya (blended, sieved)
Gelatine (15 g/liter)
Agar-agar powder (4 g/liter)
Salt (pinch)
Lime juice

Peanut crumble

55g butter

35 g peanut powder

25 g hazelnut powder

30 g flour

30 g roasted rice flour

40 g sugar

Salt

Green papaya sherbet

400 g raw papaya puree (from blended papaya used for jelly)

400 g papaya juice

150 g sugar

One teaspoon lime juice

Two egg whites

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