

Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month

WEEK 1

Indonesia and Sesame Chicken with Noodles

Welcome to Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. This year the theme is ‘Building Leadership: Embrace the Cultural Values and Inclusion.’ For week one, I have provided a brief introduction to the Republic of Indonesia and a recipe that I hope you all will try!

Indonesia is comprised of 17,508 islands and has a population of around 230 million people. It is the fourth most populous country in the world and has the largest Muslim population. The average population density is 134 people per square mile, though Java is the world’s most populated island with a population density of 940 people. There are more than three hundred ethnic groups across the Republic, each with cultural identities that developed over centuries and are influenced by Indian, Arabic, Chinese and European cultures. The national motto of Indonesia is: “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” which translates from Indonesian (the official language) to mean “Unity in Diversity” (literally “many, yet one”).

Indonesia has a history of human settlement going back almost 2 million years. Ideal agricultural conditions and the mastering of wet-field rice cultivation as early as the 8th century BCE, allowed villages, towns, and small kingdoms to flourish by the 1st century CE. Agriculture is still the largest employer in the nation and accounts for 44.3% of the work force. Indonesia has the largest economy in Southeast Asia and is a member of the G-20 major economies. Modern Indonesia is a republic with a presidential system.

Despite the large population and densely populated regions, Indonesia has large areas of wilderness that supports the world’s second highest level of biodiversity. Indonesia is the world’s 16th largest country in terms of land area. Forests cover approximately 60% of the islands, though there are serious problems with large-scale deforestation. Indonesia is second only to Australia in terms of its degree of endemism with 26% of its birds and 39% of its mammals being endemic. The 50,000 miles of coastline are surrounded by tropical seas, which increase the islands high level of biodiversity. And yes, there are over 150 active volcanoes, including Krakatoa and Tambora (famous for devastating eruptions in the 19th century). The eruption of the supervolcano Tuba, which occurred approximately 70,000 years ago, was one of the largest eruptions in history and a global catastrophe.

Indonesian cuisine varies by region and is based on Chinese, European, Middle Eastern and Indian precedents. Rice is the main staple food and is often served as a side dish for a meal.

Some popular Indonesian dishes such as *nasi goreng*, *gado-gado*, *sate*, and *soto* are ubiquitous in the country and considered as Indonesian national dishes.

The Recipe:

Most people think of peanut sauce as being a Thai dish, but many of Indonesian's signature dishes such as satay, gado-gado, karedok, ketoprak, and pecel use a peanut sauce. Indonesian peanut sauce is not as sweet as the Thai version and hosts a delicate balance achieved by ingredients such as fried peanuts, coconut sugar, garlic, shallot, ginger, tamarind, lemon juice, lemongrass, salt, chili, pepper, and sweet soy sauce. But don't worry, this recipe is relatively easy!

Sesame Chicken and Noodles

Ingredients

- Kosher salt
- 1 pound spaghetti or Chinese [egg noodles](#)
- 2 tablespoons toasted [sesame oil](#)
- 1 [garlic clove](#), peeled
- 1 (1-inch) piece peeled fresh ginger
- 1/2 cup smooth peanut butter
- 1/4 cup [soy sauce](#)
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon [rice vinegar](#)
- 3/4 teaspoon crushed [red pepper](#)
- 1/4 cup hot water
- 1 Kirby cucumber, halved and sliced
- 1 cup shredded cooked chicken
- 6 [scallions](#) (white and green parts), sliced
- 1/4 cup dry-roasted peanuts, chopped

Directions

Game Plan: Make the sauce while the noodles cook.

Bring a large pot of cold water to a boil over high heat. When the pasta water boils, salt it generously, add the spaghetti or noodles, and cook, stirring occasionally, until al dente. Drain and rinse under cold running water. Put the spaghetti in a large bowl and toss with the sesame oil.

To make the Peanut Sauce: In a blender drop in the garlic and ginger while the motor is running. When the chopping is complete, stop the machine and add the peanut butter, soy sauce, brown sugar, vinegar, and red pepper. Process until smooth, then--with the blender running--slowly pour in the water.

To serve, toss the spaghetti with the Peanut Sauce, then top with the cucumber, chicken, scallions, and peanuts.

Cook's Note: Toasted sesame oil delivers richness and intensity to our sesame sauce with just a drizzle. Maintain its punch by storing it in your refrigerator.

References:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesian_cuisine

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/food-network-kitchens/sesame-noodles-with-chicken-recipe/index.html>