

Curries come in a wide range of choices – pork, chicken, beef, fish, shrimp and mutton – but whichever you select it comes with an extensive array of sides. The number and types of sides vary from restaurant to restaurant but among them may be sautéed bamboo shoots, fermented tea leaf salad, vegetable soup, fiery chili tomatoes, chickpeas, fried vegetables, and a plate of fresh greens, cucumbers, radishes and herbs. Condiments may range from fish sauces and fried garlic to dried shrimp and chili pastes. You can ask for more of any of the dishes – you can eat until you are full. The final course may be chunks of palm sugar or slices of watermelon, which is the ubiquitous and most popular fruit in Myanmar.

Burmese Curry is a parade of the ingredients and spices – lime juice, coriander, turmeric, ginger, garlic, cumin, curry pastes, coconut milk, chilies, fish sauces – and the flavors – sweet, picante, sour, salty – of Myanmar. And this far-reaching culinary experience is a bargain too, as is traveling in Myanmar in general: If you don't fear eating on the street Burmese Curry can be enjoyed for under a dollar, while in the typical sit-down restaurant it runs about \$3-\$3.50.

I first tried it in Mandalay, at Aye Myet Tar Restaurant. I hesitated at the large neon sign out front blaring in English “Traditional Myanmar Food,” but decided to take the plunge. Greeted by three young boys in red shirts and blue longyis (the wrap-around traditional dress worn by men and women), calling out “Mingalaba” (welcome), I was instantly led to a table by the juvenile servers – and the side dishes and rice immediately started arriving before I had even ordered. Within a couple of minutes the entire feast had been assembled before me including pork curry, Myanmar Lager Beer and more than a dozen side dishes.

The meals are tasty and easy to eat. The curries themselves tend to be simpler than Indian curries with fewer ingredients, less fragrance, not as much heat and a much oilier consistency. The sides have bright flavors that range from the familiar to the exotic to the fiery hot.

If you travel the country by bus, and happen to be on the road in the early afternoon, it is virtually de rigeur for the bus to stop at a Burmese Curry restaurant for lunch. Everyone pours off the bus, lines up at sinks to wash their hands, and sits down at tables to the fast-served parade of Burmese Curry dishes. Thirty minutes later the passengers are ushered back aboard, resuming their journey.

They eat the same thing, virtually every day, with the only variation the protein choice. And they wouldn't have it any other way. Burmese Curry is all theirs – their preference, their joy, their national dish.

<http://www.examiner.com/article/burmese-curry-is-a-parade-of-the-ingredients-and-flavors-of-myanmar>