

## **Special Report: The Cambodian Food Culture**

### **The Introduction of “The Palm Sugar” No. 2 in a Series**

Ry Manydine

*Jumonji University, Saitama, Japan*

Talking about sugar you may have thought that it is just one of the basic ingredients that is used to enhance the sweetness in meals or desserts. White sugar or brown sugar are very commonly used all over the world, however in Cambodia there is a different type of sugar that can be seen used along with other types of sugar. It is known as the “Palm Sugar”. What makes palm sugar different from the other is very fascinating. To slightly introduce Cambodian palm sugar, you have to know that palm trees only grow in a tropical country with slightly hot weather. The type of palm tree that is used to extract palm oil is a different type of palm tree, the one that is used to make palm sugar is often confused as a coconut tree. The palm tree that is used to make the palm sugar is very tall, it can reach up to 30 meters with a fan-shaped leaf up to 3 meters. It is also known as “Cambodia’s National tree”.

In this study, I went to interview a local palm sugar maker in Banteay Srey village, Siem Reap, Cambodia. The village is known as the palm sugar village, many families in that area rely on making the sugar and sell it to the tourist, in order to make a living. It was very fascinating to interview and learn about how sugar is made. Many desserts and dishes can be made by using palm sugar as the main ingredient.

#### **How to extract Palm juice:**

The tall palm tree, may looked like no one can climbed up to the top but, in Cambodia a lot of villagers climb up until the top to extract the juice, As you claimed to the top of the tree, you can see there are two types of palm fruit known as the “Male palm” and the “Female palm”. Both types contain juices that are known to make the sugar



**Fig 1. Palm tree**



**Fig 2. Palm sugar village shop**



**Fig 3. Male palm (left) and female palm (right)**

**How to make Palm sugar:**

The extracted juice is directly poured into a big pot, with low heat wood fire, it's required to keep stirring until the juice thickens and becomes a palm sugar. Some are air dry to make it into a solid form, and some are stored in an airtight container to keep as a paste form. 40

liters of juice resulted in 4 kilograms of sugar. This process showed the dedication and requirements in order to make palm sugar that is served in Cambodian dishes and dessert. The process might not be complicated but the labor is very much needed in order to successfully make the palm sugar.



**Fig 4. Making palm sugar**

**Recommend Recipes**

**Kor sach Jruk (Caramelized pork stew)**

*Ingredients:* Pork belly, boiled egg, palm sugar, garlic, fish sauce, soy sauce, salt, black pepper

*How to make:* In a separate bowl mix seasoning together (Garlic, fish sauce, soy sauce, salt and black pepper). In a hot pan put in the palm sugar until it melted and give the aroma of sweetness then pour in the mixed seasoning, mixed it well and put in the pork belly and boiled egg. Close the pot lid, and simmer it until the pork is well cooked. Constantly pour in some water, to avoid burning. This dish is such a comfort food to many Cambodians, it is easy to make and delicious, also its one of the dishes that popularized the used of palm sugar in Cambodia.

In conclusion, I hope that this articles could reach many audiences and spread more about Cambodian food culture. Our food are our pride, so Palm sugar is

the delicacy that Cambodian people loved, with this articles. I hope that many people will start to acknowledge more of our food culture and become more recognizable to other nation.



**Fig 5. Kor sach Jruk (Caramelized pork stew)**