

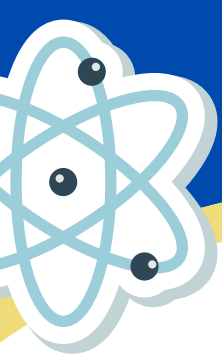

Academy of Language Studies  
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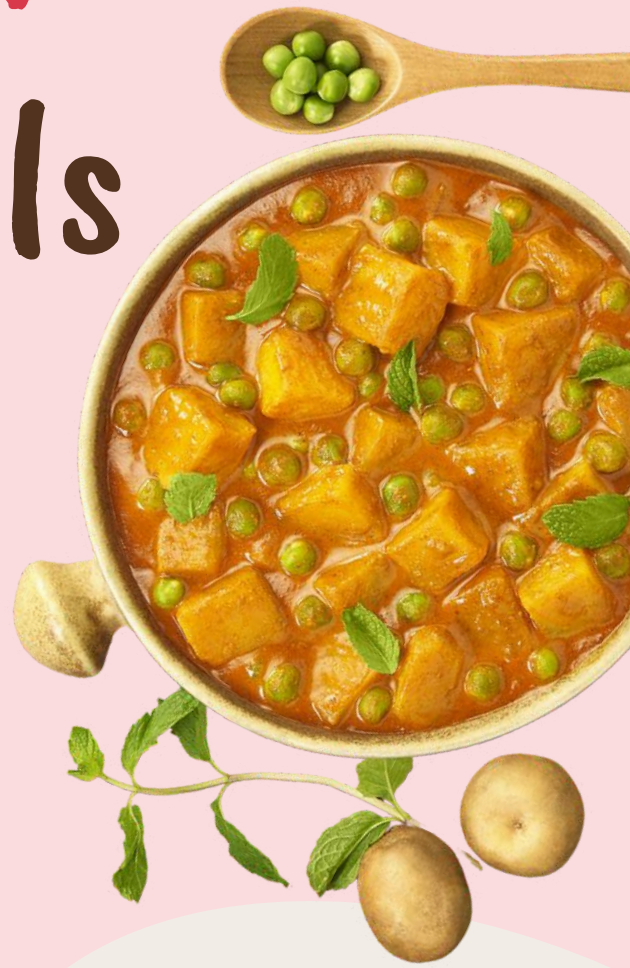
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# Head over Meals



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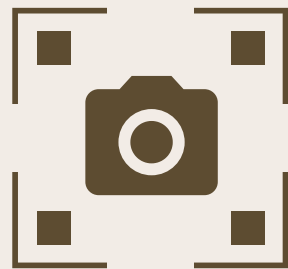


Little Chefs in Making 28



and order now!

scan the code



## Is Comfort Food the Same as Favourite Food?



By Nazima Versay Kudus



During the COVID-19 restrictions, many people have gone the extra mile to enjoy their favorite comfort foods. With a lot of free time on their hands, they have been experimenting with cooking and sharing their culinary adventures online. For many who are unable to travel back home or "balik kampung" to enjoy their mothers' home-cooked meals, these online food creators have become a comforting alternative.

Entrepreneurial ventures like the Nasi Kandaq Transporter experienced a surge in popularity during the lockdown. Nasi Kandar, a beloved Penang dish, is not easy to prepare due to its complex nature, consisting of a rice base topped with a variety of curries. These curries are challenging to make as they are a blend of different flavors, including fish, chicken, beef, prawns, squid, and other curry dishes. During that period, Nasi Kandaq Transporter offered delivery services on specific days of the week from Penang to the Klang Valley area. Consumers were able to relish the nostalgic taste of this Penang specialty, and the convenience of having the food delivered is especially appreciated during times when travel for food is not feasible. Indeed, if one cannot travel for food, the food can travel to you.

In his journal article titled "Comfort Food: A Review" (2017), Charles Spence summarizes the defining characteristics of comfort food as outlined by various authors. Comfort foods are those that offer consolation and a sense of well-being, providing psychological and emotional comfort. They are often linked to childhood memories or home cooking, prepared in a simple or traditional style with a nostalgic or sentimental appeal that reminds us of home, family, and friends. These foods are significant in celebratory meals, typically being favorites from one's childhood or associated with specific people, places, or times that evoke positive feelings. The act of eating one's preferred comfort food is believed to improve mood and overall well-being.





Opor Pahang



According to Sultan Al-Abdullah’s palace cook, Hasnah Koming, a common dish served to His Majesty is Opor Pahang (Menu kampung pilihan Agong, Raja Permaisuri, 2019). A collection of the late Tunku Abdul Rahman’s recipes were documented by his daughter, Tunku Dato’ Paduka Khadijah Tunku Abdul Rahman, in a recipe book entitled Favourite Dishes from Tunku’s Kitchen among others kerabu perut kacang botol, otak otak daun mengkudu, gulai daging Siam and telur itik masak kuning dhal. Meanwhile the daughter of the Prime Minister, Dato’ Seri Anwar Ibrahim’s revealed that her father likes to eat cekodok (Rosmah Idayu, 2022).

My all-time comfort food, lovingly made by my mother especially when I am feeling under the weather, has to be her delicious egg rasam. This flavourful dish with its slightly sour, spicy and hot taste profile originates from South India. Its rich soup base comprises a medley of ingredients including mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds, coriander seeds, turmeric powder, black pepper, cumin, garlic, chilies, ginger, tomatoes, curry leaves and tamarind. This aromatic blend not only delights the palate but also has therapeutic benefits, such as helping to unclog a stuffy nose. The Penang Jawi Peranakan variation takes it up a notch by incorporating eggs into the boiling soup, making it not just a comfort but also a nourishing option during times of reduced appetite, such as during a fever. While it may not be the most visually appealing dish, its taste and health benefits more than make up for its appearance.

Preparing and consuming bubur lambuk during Ramadan creates a sense of comfort and nostalgia. The porridge, rich in flavours and hearty ingredients cooked in large pots, fosters a spirit of gotong-royong as communities come together to the surau or balai raya to prepare this beloved dish. The process of making bubur lambuk involves an elaborate mise en place, from washing and soaking the rice to preparing the meat, spices, vegetables and herbs. The involvement



Egg Rasam



of adults handling sharp cutlery and hot pots underscores the seriousness of the preparation. Young ones are often sent by their elders to collect the bubur lambuk but are cautioned about the hot pots. As the bubur lambuk simmers and fills the air with its enticing aroma, it becomes a focal point of anticipation when that family rep repeatedly asks "dah siap ka?" (is it ready?), awaiting his/her share of the meal. Alongside bubur lambuk, air halia (ginger tea) is prepared during bulan puasa. The tea, brewed with slices of ginger, coriander seeds, black pepper, cumin, cinnamon and pandan leaves, creates a scent trail like a Pied Piper, drawing people towards the aromatic fragrance. Both bubur lambuk and air halia hold a special place during Ramadan. They are packed with quick carbohydrates, proteins, and vitamins, making them an ideal choice for iftar. Despite being enjoyed throughout Ramadan, there is a strange feeling that these dishes never taste quite as good as during the fasting month, perhaps due to their shared experiences and memories.

Comfort food and favourite food are distinct concepts although both relate to personal enjoyment of food. The former specifically refers to culinary choices that evoke a sense of nostalgia, sentimentality or emotional well-being within an individual, often linked to specific cultural backgrounds or personal experiences. On the other hand, the latter encompasses a broader range of edible delights that individuals find pleasurable due to factors such as flavour. While comfort food tends to be chosen for its emotional benefits, favourite food is selected primarily for its sensory qualities. Notably, comfort

food does not necessarily align with general preference for flavours or textures, as it is influenced by psychological associations rather than inherent properties of the food item. Conversely, favourite food reflects individual tastes and preferences.

Whether the food you enjoy is comforting or a favourite, the first step towards maintaining good health is cultivating healthy eating habits. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, an octogenarian himself, advises people to embrace the principle of "eating to live, not living to eat." Additionally, he imparts another valuable lesson from his mother: knowing when to stop eating, especially when the food is delicious (Mahathir, 2019).



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