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Chef T, former executive chef of Gladstone's, works in the kitchen as he places a lobster tail on his Cambodian dish somlor machu youn, or Cambodian sour soup, with fish and tomatoes in Long Beach Monday, Jan. 23, 2023. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

[CAMBODIAN RESTAURANTS](#)

9 HOURS AGO

Cambodian Restaurant Week will kick off in March after being canceled last year

[Kat Schuster](#)



Long Beach's Cambodian Restaurant Week will launch next month with dishes like Cambodian tacos, the delightfully pungent fish amok and a lineup of more traditional fare and fusion.



The festivities begin March 18 with a Cambodian kickoff festival at Long Beach City College that will include a long list of food vendors, candle makers, tattoo artists and more. Then, the official first-ever restaurant week will begin March 19 and end March 26, featuring at least a dozen eateries.

The celebration—arriving on the heels of another successful Black Restaurant Week—was supposed to happen last year, but it was canceled after it didn't gather enough sign-ups from restaurants, said Visoth Tarak Ouk, otherwise known as Chef T.



Cambodian dish somlor machu youn, or a type of sour soup, with fish and tomatoes in Long Beach Monday, Jan. 23, 2023. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

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Ouk, 42, is returning home to the 6th District and his alma mater LBCC to co-organize the inaugural festival and eatery week with nonprofit United Cambodian Community, which was founded in Long Beach by a small group of Cambodian refugees in 1977.

Chef T struggled to get participants on board last year, but he told the Long Beach Post: "This time around it's like, 'Woah!'"

"I'm very excited for the moms and pops, the smaller ones, because they don't get as much exposure as the bigger restaurants," he said.

For curious Cambodian cuisine newbies, Ouk insists that participants "must go with the stinky-stinky" (the beloved, albeit smelly, amok dish we mentioned above).

"Americans, you know, love a blue cheese, limburger cheese—they got a little funk to them," Ouk said. Similarly, amok "is stinky, but it's so delicious."

Fish amok, a Cambodian national dish, is a steamed and fermented fish coconut curry with a fluffy consistency, all tucked neatly within banana leaves.

There will also be several restaurants offering Cambodian fusion fare and other dishes that are unique to the Long Beach food scene, Chef T said.

"Like technology, food evolves," he said. "You gotta put your plate a little more modern—nobody really do no Julia Child stuff no more, you know, bless her heart, she's still one of my idols."

To achieve this, he said many chefs on scene are "taking it a step further into finding out how to fuse being American and being Cambodian."

Lakewood's Chinitos Tacos is exemplary of that concept.

"Chinitos is a taco spot, but it has all of the Asian and Cambodian ingredients in the tacos, so you're getting the best of both," Chef T said.

Shlap Muan (that's Khmer for chicken wings), in the North Long Beach area, is another.

"It's a wing spot that actually has the ingredients and recipes that, like, my grandma would make, but then, on top of wings," he said.

A popular Vietnamese fresh-herb rice-noodle soup, pho, will also join the lineup, since it's a staple for Cambodians, Chef T said.

"Cambodians love pho," he said, explaining that at one time, the Khmer Empire ruled what is now Vietnam. "So it's basically kind of a comfort food for all of us over there in Southeast Asia."

So far, the weeklong event is set to feature 12 different local restaurants, but Chef T will accept additional sign-ups until the last possible minute. He's been doing everything he can to convince local mom-and-pop joints to toss their hat in this inaugural ring.

"Cambodians tend to do stuff very, very late," he laughed. "It was hard to convince some of them, they're still in the old school."

Chef T's storied Long Beach history is flavorful in more ways than one, having worked as a chef for 25 years after leaving a violent gang life. Earlier this month, he parted ways with Gladstone's, where he served as

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"I want all the restaurants to get their shine on," he said.

Restaurants can still sign up for the restaurant week [here](#) (ignore the Jan. 31 deadline) for \$150. The nine-day event will start with a kickoff festival at Long Beach City College on March 18 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. During Cambodia Restaurant week, March 19 to March 26, restaurants will offer specials and deals across the city. For more information and to see the growing list of restaurants, [visit the official website](#).

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