

Lessons from ladies

CHILLI CHICKS
www.chillichicks.co.uk

FOR many people, neighbourly behaviour extends to watering plants or the occasional offer of a cup of tea. But when Naraphorn "Bookie" Phromlok moved into the flat above Tahel Barel, the two women saw it as an opportunity to show off their respective Thai and Israeli heritage through cooking elaborate and imaginative meals for each other.

Having impressed with their signature dishes (and swapped recipes), they felt there was a market to pass on their skills and passion to other people. In July, they set up business together as the Chilli Chicks. Based in Tahel's elegant, spacious Hove flat, the pair, who both have backgrounds in catering, offer one-on-one and group Thai cookery lessons, as well as a catering service that features both Thai, Israeli and European food.

"We wanted to show people that it's easy to make fresh, wholesome, tasty food from easily-sourced ingredients," says Tahel. "Bookie, who is a fantastic cook, taught me how to make Thai food, so I know what it's like to learn to make these dishes and we can pass on what we've learned to other people."

"We just want people to feel comfortable in the kitchen and happy to experiment with new dishes and techniques."

Bookie adds: "There is no one else in Brighton and Hove, as far as we know, offering Thai cookery classes, yet Thai food is getting more and more popular. It's not necessarily hard to make, but it's much easier when you learn from someone else."

Students can choose what they are taught to cook from an extensive list of starters, salads, main courses and puddings that include popular dishes like satay chicken, Tom Yum soup, Thai Green Curry and Pad Thai, as well as banana fritters and sticky rice in coconut cream. They are later given the recipes to take home. They can also choose where they are taught. Classes generally take place in Tahel's well-equipped kitchen, but the pair will also come to people's homes for an extra charge.

"We've had all sorts of people taking lessons," Tahel says. "From people in their 60s - one of whom was coming to cooking for the first time in his life - to two ten-year-old kids who came with a group of 14 people taking part in a team-building exercise."

"We thought we'd put a movie on for them and leave them to it, but they loved getting involved in the cooking and were soon mashing up spices with a pestle and mortar!"

"We've had so much interest," says Bookie. "We could probably run classes every night of the week if we wanted to. It's all word of mouth, which is the best thing you could wish for. People really seem to enjoy it."

Away from the classes, the pair have catered for commercial open evenings and charity events. Most recently, they provided food for the performers at the Burlesque Against Breast Cancer ball, held last month at the Old Market in Hove.

One of the more unusual outcomes of good neighbours becoming good friends.

Nione Meakin

Nione (centre) with the Kluyay Tord she cooked under the guidance of Bookie Phromlok (left) and Tahel Barel



THE CLASS

I'D DESCRIBE myself as an average cook, with more enthusiasm than genuine skill. I can follow recipes without major disaster and knock up a decent enough meal for friends, should every restaurant in town be inexplicably closed for the evening.

But it was testament to Bookie and Tahel's talents that, by the end of our two-hour session, I had convinced myself I was an excellent cook.

As I admired the three-course Thai meal I'd made, beautifully laid out and looking rather impressive, it was too easy to forget all the help I'd had along the way.

The tiny bowls of ingredients, for instance, neatly prepared for me beforehand as if by elves; the numerous gentle, helpful hints that had made all the difference to the dishes (cut chicken against the grain - it's more tender that way, add a little sugar if it's too spicy, try not to grate your fingers in with

the carrot); the swift and good-humoured clean-up operation when I managed to toss noodles against the cooker splashback.

Both women were approachable, hugely knowledgeable and, importantly, without the highly-strung tendencies associated with cookery fanatics.

Any unease they may have felt about watching someone hacking away at an apple with a very expensive, very sharp chef's knife or gaily splashing fritters into boiling fat was

who lunch



WHAT NIONE COOKED

Starter: Som Tam - carrot and green apple salad in a hot and sour sauce

Main: Chicken Pad Thai - chicken with noodles, carrot, bean sprouts, Chinese leek, roasted peanuts and lime

Pudding: Kluyay Tord - banana pieces fried in a batter of flour, coconut and evaporated milk

kept well-hidden. They guided me through the process for each dish subtly - the overall feel was that of cooking with a couple of friends, who are far better at it than you but who graciously keep quiet and provide assistance only when needed. Oh, and the end results were delicious.

Needless to say, it wouldn't have been quite as good as this cooked at my house. But I felt enthused and confident enough to think I'd give it a good crack.

INFORMATION

Chilli Chicks
First Avenue, Hove
Contact Bookie - 07885 902855
or Tahel - 07806 481769
Visit www.chillichicks.co.uk

Lessons costs £50 for a one-on-one session cooking two dishes, £65 cooking three dishes. For two people it costs £40/£50 each and for three to four people, £35/£45 each. Classes can be booked from 6.30pm Monday to Friday and from 11am on Saturdays and Sundays.