

Heya Durian Lover!

This is a sample collection from my new book, The Penang Durian Guide, to help you get a feel of the style and the content of the book.

If you are a fan of this blog already, you will feel right at home. I wrote it just for you.

The Penang Durian Guide took me four durian seasons to compile and write. It's more than 300 pages and a whopping 360-something pictures.

I hope you find even this sample entertaining, educational and inspiring for your next durian trip. You can buy the whole book at [this link](#).

-Lindsay

www.yearofthedurian.com



Sample From Tasting Durian

Texture

The pleasure of eating a durian is partially in the texture. Some durians have flesh so firm and waxy you can pick up the pod without needing to lick your fingers. Others are dry or even bready, with strands that pull free of the butter-cream. Still others are nearly fiberless, slipping through your fingers like melted marshmallows.

And of course, each of us has different preferences --whether we like to slurp or chew -- so knowing how to pick dry or wet durians is important. This mouthfeel of a durian is largely dependent on four factors:







Fiber

Durian flesh contains insoluble fibers that give the flesh some structure. Most of this fiber is pectin, but some, like the stringy bits you sometimes see hanging off the seed, is cellulose. Different varieties of durians naturally contain varying quantities of pectin and cellulose. The amount of pectin in a durian changes as the durian ripens, breaking down and becoming water-soluble, which is why overripe durians can have the texture of a thick soup. But cellulose doesn't break down, which is why you can have durians that are both soupy and stringy.



Starch

Unripe durian flesh is primarily composed of amylopectin starch. It has a waxy texture similar to an uncooked potato. As the durian ripens, enzymes convert the starch to sucrose until most of – but not all – of the starch is sugar. Some studies estimate that a durian can go from being 40% starch by weight to only 9-11% starch by the time it falls.

When a durian is picked too early, as sometimes happens when durians fall off in storms, the process of starches converting to sugar is disrupted. The durian may still ripen, but it'll be weird, rubbery, watery, and flavorless. In Thailand, where durians are picked rather than being allowed to fall, durian farmers who pick and sell their durians with more than 25% starch can be sent to jail for violating an actual law -- Article 271 of the Criminal Code and the Consumers Protection Act.

Starch is also responsible for the lack of uniform texture in a durian. You've noticed it – chewy in one area, squishy in another. For reasons scientists haven't totally figured out, starch doesn't develop evenly around the seed and also doesn't evenly convert to sugar.

Some varieties, like D24 or Monthong, have trouble with uneven ripening.



Sugar Content

Sugar is more than just a quick hit on our sweet tooth. Sugar crystals add volume and create the illusion of fluffiness or even butteriness without any fat content at all. Imagine popping a whole marshmallow into your mouth. It's nearly 100% sugar, yet melts like cream.

Durians are notoriously high in sugar. Diabetics avoid them like the plague, which is too bad since durians are still lower in sugar and higher in fiber than most desserts. Ripe durian is primarily made up of sucrose, with minor quantities of glucose and trace amounts of fructose. As the durian ripens, the sucrose breaks down, upping the ratio of glucose and fructose.

Not surprisingly, there's a pretty big range of sugar content in durians. Most studies rank durian around 33 brix (the measure for sugar, where watermelon is about 10 brix and honey is around 90 brix), but according to one friend with a professional-grade brix

refractometer, a standard, middle-of-the-road kampung measures about 20 brix, while a Musang King tops the charts at 37 or even 38 brix.



Fat Content

Fat makes durian into the rich, naughty cream that washes over your tongue and coats your throat in a milky film. Durians average around 30% fat by calorie, but as you've probably already guessed, different varieties contain varying quantities of fat. Even more importantly for texture they also contain different ratios of saturated to unsaturated fats. Remember that fats react differently to heat, and that unsaturated fat tends to be runny in warm weather like the tropics.

A study comparing fat content in four clones of Malaysian durians [Barry et al] found that not only do Malaysians prefer durian with higher fat content overall, they also preferred durians with a higher ratio of saturated to unsaturated fats, like D2 and D24. This preference isn't just because there's something devilishly delicious about foods that aren't good for us, but because saturated fats bind with and holds more volatile aromas, meaning that a fattier durian may also have a more complex flavor.

Sample From Choosing Durian:

Avoiding Bad Durian

In general durian sellers in Penang are an honest crowd, or at least as long as you let them know you aren't going to eat their swag. Tourists who look too clueless or timid approaching a durian stall may find themselves sitting down to an overripe, underripe, or just generally bad durian.

It's important to pay attention when trying out a new stall or farm. Here are the characteristics of a bad durian that you should pay attention to and definitely reject (unless it's really cheap, you're really hungry, or you just like it this way. No judgment).



The durian is yellow on the outside

Durians in Penang should be bright green to brown or grey on their thorns and shell. When a durian begins to turn gold or even yellow, usually this means it has been sitting off the tree for quite some time and will taste flat. Yellowing durian is usually paired

with an old-looking stem. If the stem is fresh and the durian is yellow, look more closely before dismissing.



The stem tip is brown or withered and dry

A dry or dark stem denotes a durian that is not fresh. Look for durians where the stem is light brown with a greenish hue, a thin skin, plenty of moisture, and pale tan, white, or green color where it broke off the tree.



The stem looks like it's been sliced off

Occasionally you'll see that a stem top is unnaturally smooth. It may be pale and look fresh, but instead of the slightly jagged, slightly concave indent on the top of the stem, it looks smooth like it was sliced off with a knife. It has. This practice attempts to disguise either the browning from oxidation that reveals how long the durian has been off the tree, or that this durian was cut off the tree rather than allowed to fall.



The stem has yellow powder or paint across the top.

Not only is the stem in the photo above obviously dried out and sliced off, it also has a bright yellow color. This yellow comes from a chemical typically used in Thailand to ripen durians artificially, called Ethephon. If you see this yellow color, it means the durian came from Thailand and also that it was harvested by cutting early rather than by falling.



The durian is splitting open, cracked, or “smiling.”

Once a durian drops off the tree, it doesn't stop being alive. The fruit actually breathes, and as it respirees it loses water to the air. Eventually, the durian shell becomes so dehydrated the seams peel away from each other, cracking or, as some locals say, “smiling.”

There are people, especially back-to-nature types, who will swear you should wait to eat a durian until it has cracked itself open. At this stage, the durian's funkier, eggier, most sulfuric aromas will be unleashed and the durian can taste sour or watery. Smiling is a sign that the durian is not fresh; however, some varieties like 604, D11, and Musang King crack easily from impact or dehydration due to their thin skins, so make sure to look at the whole picture before dismissing a durian. Avoid thick shelled durians that are cracking.



Holes in the durian

There are two species of moth that bore into young durians to lay their eggs. As the fruit grows, the eggs hatch into caterpillars, which also grow, eat durian, and eventually bore themselves out. If you see a durian with a round peg-like hole between the spines, it may have the mess left over from a very hungry caterpillar inside.

Sandy dark brown dirt in between the spines

The caterpillars don't just eat the durian flesh and seed, they also poop. Often, if you find a pebbly, dark brown dirt caught between the spines, this is actually *frass*, or bug poop, and is another sign that you might discover an unwelcome friend inside. It's also a sign that your fruits haven't been sprayed, so if you're into organic the presence of caterpillars may be a bonus.

Sample From Identifying Durians:



Centipede

Not registered

Other names: Lipan, Yah Kang

When: Early season

Centipede is beloved by the old school durian lovers, the ones who want to pop a whole seed in their mouths and just suck, nursing the white bitter-sweet flesh off the seed with their tongues while keeping their eyes closed the whole time.

Centipede is an old, old variety. It once belonged to a very ancient tree that grew near the Chinese cemetery in Sungai Ara, however that tree was long ago chopped down. The tree, no surprise, was often populated by centipedes.

Centipede is a great example of a *kampung* durian that people loved so much for its flavor that they kept it around, despite its obvious commercial defects.

How to recognize Centipede







This durian has particularly cruel, curving thorns covering its slim, oblong shape. The thorns tend to be brown with black towards the tips and are long, wide and curved on the tips.

The bottom is pointed and forested in thorns the whole way down, as is the top. It looks like a particularly unfriendly football.



Inside, the white or ivory flesh thinly covers a number of seeds in each pod. Sometimes, the flesh is so thin the seeds are visible, which locals call “laughing.”

Each section has at least 4 seeds, and you really don’t get a lot to eat with this durian. It’s also not a particularly bitter durian, but it’s so sticky and smooth, with a sweet tendency toward mouth-tingly numbness, that nobody minds that you’re not going to get full super quick. Centipede is a great appetizer durian, or one to savor, slowly, over the course of a hot afternoon.



D11

Not registered with MARDI (or registration lost)

When: Early season

This sticky, pale yellow durian may be one of the oldest varieties on the island.

Back in 1909, Mr. Fox planted 300 durian trees in an acre at the entrance to the Penang Botanic Gardens. The trees are pretty obviously not there now. Now, when you enter the Botanic Garden you are greeted with the leaning stump of a rain tree and a few cannonball trees. But the consensus of the old durian farmers is that they, or their fathers, collected the grafting material for D11 from somewhere near the entrance of the Botanic Gardens.

One farmers said the tree was along the small stream that runs down from the waterfall. Another said it was near the Lily Pond. Another said it was just behind what is today the Rifle Range. By the 1950's or 60's, the tree was already very old.

It's fun to speculate that D11 was one of the trees planted by Mr. Fox, but who really knows. By the time Mr. Lim Boon Teong became the garden's director in 1993, the trees

had been gone long enough to be forgotten.

Good thing we didn't forget D11. An early season durian, D11 is sweet and milky with just a hint of bitter. When really fresh, it's sticky and has a tendency toward the gassy, tongue-tingling numbness that so many of us love.

How to recognize D11







D11 is a small, oval durian that looks geometric. It's thorns are large with flat sides, like 5-sided pyramids clustered together. It has a tendency to turn golden-brown or even slightly yellow in hot weather, and due to its thin shell cracks open easily. Unlike other durians, a cracked or golden D11 may still be very fresh and good quality.

But, you still want to eat it as soon as possible.



Inside, D11 has many seeds wrapped in a pale yellow to slightly copper flesh. Eat D11 early in the morning, when it's sticky and sweet, or you may write it off as bland and watery.

D11 tends to go soft quickly, losing its flavor and thick texture in the heat. It quickly takes on a grey hue, especially over the funiculus area (where the seeds attach to the shell).

Sample From Finding Durian:



The South: Bayan Lepas to Kampung Genting

Persevere through the traffic snarls of the urban corridor south of George Town -- past Jelutong Market, past the Queensbay Mall, past industrial Bayan Lepas, past the airport -- and you'll arrive to one of the quietest, sleepest corners of the island.

Life hasn't changed much over the years in these fishing villages in the far southwestern corner of the island. The hills slope gently into a placid turquoise sea dotted with small islands. You can charter a fishing boat to go snorkeling around **Pulau Kendi** (pictured above), enjoy the isolated sands of **Kembina Beach**, or picnic on the quiet rocky shore of **Tanjung Asam Beach** (pictured below), all within minutes of your durian feast and only 20 minutes from the airport.



Past the airport, the road continues through the small town of Teluk Kumbar and begins to wind back north through mountainous durian farms towards Balik Pulau. Along the placid highway you'll find a number of small pop-up durian and cempedak stalls and people selling durians from the trunks of their cars.

Stop and see what's for sale -- there will probably be a lot of *kampung*. Then, for a magnificent view over Pulau Betong (Turtle Island) and Balik Pulau, drive up **Bukit Genting** to the dilapidated leisure park stuffed with an eerie collection of statues. The entire hill is a durian and rambutan farm, and during the season, durian is often for sale at the top.



The southern area's proximity to the airport makes it a convenient durian-dine-and-dash if you're eating on a layover or need one last hit before you go home. If you have your heart set on a farm, try Friendly Home Farm, only 20 minutes away. If you need a quicker turnaround, Poh Beng Durian Stall is less than 10 minutes away in the heart of Bayan Lepas' concrete jungle (above).

While the urban zone has swallowed the original farms (and mother trees) of two durian varieties, Hor Lor and Centipede, durian orchards still rim the hillsides and produce some of the best Hor Lor on the island. Kapri has its home here too, on the road between the airport and Teluk Kumbar. The durian season tends to arrive 2-3 weeks earlier here, so if you're planning a trip at the beginning of the Penang season make sure to schedule a farm visit down here to find Red Prawns and other later-ripening varieties.



Hunt For: Hor Lor, Centipede, Capri

How to get there: If you don't feel like renting a motorbike or car, you actually can use Uber to explore parts of the area because it's so close to the airport. There are also many buses that ply the route from George Town as far south as the airport, and the 401 or 401E loops all the way around to Balik Pulau. Use the Rapid Penang website to find the route that best fits your needs.

Where to stay: Accommodation is plentiful in the urban southeastern zone. As a residential area, the island's most budget-friendly Airbnbs are here and you can pick up an entire apartment for half the price of one in George Town. However, tourist destinations are few and traffic is lousy, so you'll want to choose your neighborhood wisely.

Two of the most upscale nature resorts are tucked into these southern mountains. For a peaceful get-away-from-it-all, try the [Fig Tree Resort](#) or [Malihom Private Estate Hotel](#). The [Lexis Suites Hotel](#) is right next to the Goh Bro's Stall, and if you'd like to stay on a durian farm, **Nature Fruit Farm** offers private chalets, rooms or dorms. Mention Year

of the Durian for a discount.