



FLAVOURS

GETTING ANTSY

Are these edible insects the next big culinary trend?

Finding a bug in your food isn't always a cause for alarm. Creepy crawlies have long been considered a traditional delicacy in certain countries across Asia, and ants are definitely part of the menu. For instance, you can slurp up *gaeng kai mot daeng* (red ant egg soup) in Laos and north-eastern Thailand, or sample some red ant chutney in India. If you have the stomach for it, that is!

Recently, more contemporary eateries have been offering new ways to enjoy these famously social insects. For starters, intrepid foodies in Phnom Penh can tuck into stir-fried red tree ants with beef and holy basil at popular restaurant Romdeng, or sample mutton mixed with black ants at beer garden 54 Langeach Sros.

In Singapore, it's now possible to enjoy these bugs at new cocktail bar Native. Priding itself on using regionally foraged ingredients in its tipples, from curry leaves to jasmine blossoms, the bar's most intriguing concoction is a cocktail called Antz. A tropical blend of Chalong Bay rum, aged sugarcane, coconut yogurt, salt-baked tapioca and soursop, it's garnished with a sprinkling of crunchy weaver

LEFT: CRUNCHY WEAVER ANTS ARE USED AS A GARNISH AT SINGAPORE COCKTAIL BAR NATIVE. THE BAR GOES THROUGH UP TO 4,000 ANTS A MONTH

ants. The latter, which are dried and pasteurised at 85 degrees, are sourced from a farm in Thailand.

"Ants pack a lot of formic and ascorbic acid [vitamin C]. They give your cocktail an extra zing... it's almost like adding limes or lemons," explains Vijay Mudaliar, owner and head bartender of Native. "The type of ant we use is also particularly crunchy, creating

an extra textural dimension."

In fact, edible insects may well be the next big thing in the culinary industry. As Vijay says, "farming insects is less harmful to the environment, as compared to livestock. Also, adding insects to dishes creates a whole new flavour paradox that chefs are starting to experiment with."

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