



Teoh Yew Aun (right) enjoying a dish of stir-fried bees in Tumpat. — AFP, JOLEEN LUNJEW & TEOH YEW AUN



Another restaurant that the family frequents is Ahan Thai at Pengkalan Kubur, near the duty-free area. Besides fried bees, the restaurant serves stir-fried sago worms as well.

"The restaurant staff told us to bite the heads off the worms before eating them. I like it as it's quite creamy but my husband refuses to eat it," grins Chan.

Chan hasn't tried the larger fried insect snacks but she would love to when she goes to Bangkok. She is looking forward to trying more insects with her mother-in-law when she heads to Shenzhen, China, at the end of the month.

Kelantanese Teoh Yew Aun, 34, is also a frequent customer of restaurants in Tumpat that serve fried bees.

"I can't remember the restaurant name but locals call it 'Victoria Station' as it is located next to the train tracks. The place is run by Chinese-Thais and their specialty is fried bees," says Teoh.

The project manager has been eating fried bees since he was young and says that the baby bees (with wings but not stingers) are stir-fried together with the bee larvae, creating an interesting and colourful mix.

"The first sensation you feel is the squishiness of the larvae before the crunchiness of the baby bees, much like *pisang goreng* batter. It's hard to describe the taste. It's very different because of the larvae but it tastes very good. Especially with beer," smiles Teoh.

Entomophagy is also very common in various parts of Sabah and Sarawak where sago worms and other kinds of bugs are sold at local markets. The sago worms I tried came from Satok market in Kuching, Sarawak.

"My grandfather used to buy seasonal live worms from our local market in Penampang when I was growing up. It's supposed to have health properties," says Kadazan John Maximillan.

The 31-year-old advertising executive describes the worms as light brown in colour with a longer body compared to the sago worms. He also eats another type of worm that feeds on tree bark when he goes into the interiors east of Sabah. These whitish worms look like maggots but are slightly bigger and can be eaten live or stir-fried.

Eating worms and insects is not strange to Maximillan as he has been exposed to the practice since young. He reveals that there is

a place along the Peninsula's East Coast that serves fried insects.

"We were travelling through the plantations and came across a place that sells toddy. We stopped for a drink and discovered that they had fried insects as well. I'm not sure what they were but I think they were grasshoppers, crickets and cicadas. It tasted all right as they were deep-fried."

Perhaps introducing insects into our daily diet won't be that difficult to stomach since there are already people predisposed to it, but for those who hate creepy crawlies with a vengeance, it might take a bit more effort.

"I have a horrible phobia of cockroaches so eating anything that resembles them is totally out of the question. I hate flying insects, too. Their skinny legs and large wings creep me out," says 18-year-old student Fadilah Ibrahim.

Fadilah might consider eating insects if she really had to but they have to be in some other form.

"Maybe if it's ground up into powder and mixed into food like herbs or mashed and shaped into meatballs. But don't tell me what it is..." she says.

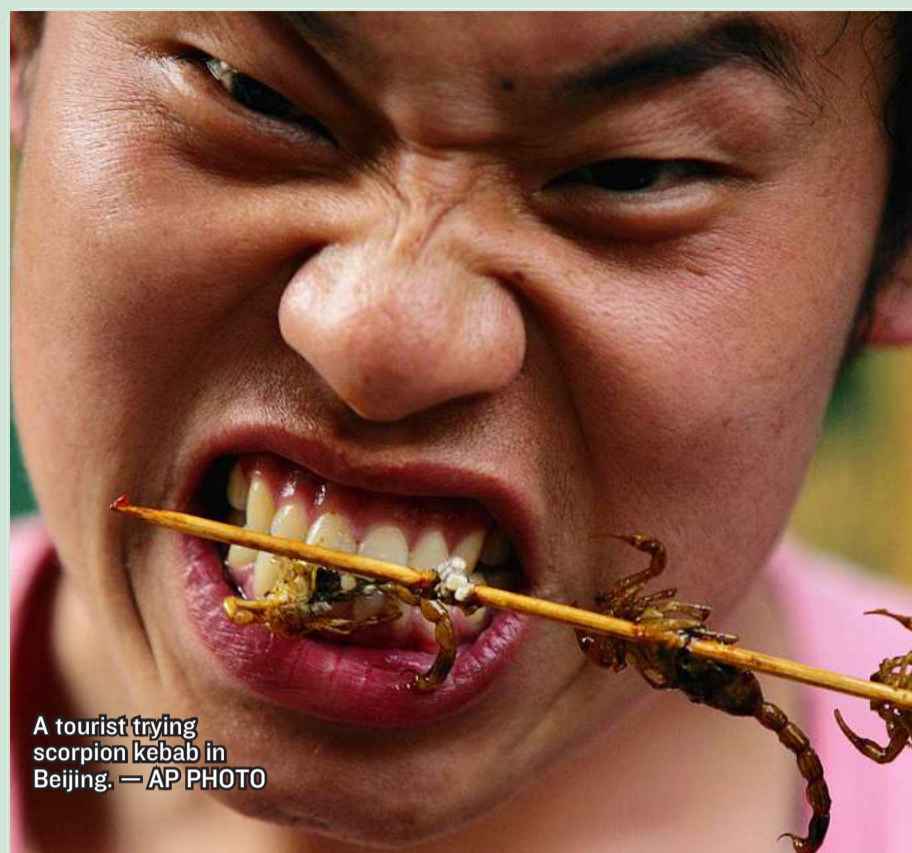
Teacher Ferina Chew, 25, has never eaten insects and would give it a wide berth. "I might if you gave me RM10,000," she jokes.

But what if food became scarce and you needed the protein?

"Well, then maybe I'd consider chopping them up into unrecognisable pieces and frying them. I think it's more psychological than anything. If you gave me fried grasshoppers in unrecognisable bits and told me it was *keropok*, I probably won't think twice about eating it, but anything wormy that's alive, no thank you. I'll stick to vegetables and beans," Chew says.

I guess the UN have their work cut out for them if they really want to implement this proposal successfully. I'm just thankful that normal food is still abundant in Malaysia. Now, where's the nearest Ramly Burger stall?

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A tourist trying scorpion kebab in Beijing. — AP PHOTO

There are surprisingly a lot of people advocating entomophagy. A quick search on Amazon.com revealed a fair bit of cookbooks featuring creepy crawlies as their main ingredient.

Among the more popular ones is *The Eat-A-Bug Cookbook* which proudly proclaims "33 ways to cook grasshoppers, ants, water bugs, spiders, centipedes and their kin" on its cover. The book, originally published in 1989, is written by Seattle-based David George Gordon, who is a science writer by profession.

You will get easy-to-follow recipes with insight into which insects are the most delicious and which to avoid, how to cook them, and which wine to drink with them.

Here's a simple recipe taken from www.davidgeorgegordon.com

Sheesh! Kabobs

Yield: six servings

Ingredients:

1/2 cup lemon juice
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon honey
1/2 teaspoon freshly grated ginger
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoon minced fresh herbs: parsley, mint, thyme and/or tarragon
1/4 teaspoon salt
pinch of freshly ground pepper
12 frozen katydid, locusts or other suitably

Delightful bugs

sized orthoptera, thawed
1 red pepper, cut into 1 1/2 in chunks
1 small yellow onion, cut into 8 wedges

Method:

Mix all the ingredients for the marinade in a non-reactive baking dish. Add the orthoptera, cover and marinate overnight. When ready to cook, remove the insects from the marinade. Pat them dry for ease of handling.

Assemble each kebab, alternately skewering the insects, tomatoes and onion wedges to create a visually interesting line-up.

Brush the grill lightly with olive oil. Cook the kebabs two or three inches above the fire, turning them every two or three minutes and basting them with additional olive oil as required.

The exact cooking time will vary, depending on the kind of grill and types of insects used. However, the kebabs should cook for no longer than eight or nine minutes.

□ You might also like to check out www.insectsafood.com and books *Entertaining with Insects* by Ronald L. Taylor, *Creepy Crawly Cuisine* by Julieta Ramos-Elorduy and *Man Eating Bugs* by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio for more "buglicious" recipes.

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