

Fresh twist to traditional cuisin

NEW RESTAURANT

Bayang
#01-05 Clarke Quay
3A River Valley Road
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WHILE we've had decent enough Indonesian food in Singapore, the Indonesian food scene isn't exactly what you'd call exciting. Most people have simply gotten used to staples like soto ayam (chicken soup) and cumi-cumi (squid) done in a variety of styles, and it's always a good option for family-styled dining if you want rice and some dishes to go with it, but not at a Chinese restaurant.

Two-month-old Bayang at Clarke Quay then brings in a more modern take on Indonesian cuisine by serving a few specialities from Bali, even though the menu still mostly features dishes that we're familiar with.

The restaurant itself is attractively designed, with snazzy white wayang kulit reliefs on a wall as the main visual feature in a roomful of restaurant furniture that's mostly about clean, simple lines and earthy colours. Besides offering a contemporary take on a traditional artform, it's also an apt illustration of the restaurant's name, Bayang, being Indonesian for "shadow".

The food isn't a shadow of the real thing, however. Far from it, actually, because Bayang's cuisine is easily at the top of the list where Indonesian food in Singapore is concerned.

Some of the well-known dishes from Bali are Bebek Betutu (baked duck in banana leaf), Sop Buntut, and Tum Ayam. We decided on the duck for our dinner which lived up to the friendly operations manager's recommendation.

The baked duck (\$14) had firm, tender meat and each piece was coated with a rich mixture of spices, herbs and also tapioca leaves — which gave it that steamed otak-otak flavour.

The rendang beef (\$10) was another main dish we tried. It wasn't as dry as expected, but was still appetising, with a well-blended curry. The beef cubes were a little tough though.

The assorted vegetables, or chap chai, (\$10) was pretty standard with gravy that had an underlying sweetness to it. The grilled squid, too, which we'd asked to be done in Balinese style, was quite standard — grilled in a sweetish black sauce — although I would have preferred the squid to have a more *al-dente* bite to it.

We thought the rice, individually wrapped and steamed in banana leaves, had an aromatic touch. What did bowl us over — from the start of the meal — was the beautifully done tahu telur (\$8), which was still crackling when it was served to us. The lemony sauce that went over the deep-fried soybean square had a complex mixture of spices that was very smoothly blended and was just right.

Something as basic as the soto ay-



Go Indonesian: Bayang serves up Balinese favourites such as (clockwise from above) Soup Buntut, Bebek Betutu (baked duck in banana leaf) and Tum Ayam

am (\$10 for two) was also done well — savoury chicken soup, generously garnished, with none of the powdery texture that you often find in soto. This one had real herbs in it, and was perked up with cherry tomatoes. The gourmet factor — other than the fact that the soup came in a small tea-light-fired claypot, to be kept warm — was the boiled quail's eggs instead of the usual chicken egg.

Give the desserts a miss though; they aren't great — which is to be expected when you use canned coconut milk instead of the freshly-squeezed version for traditional dishes like cendol.

Another thing worth mentioning is the service, which was efficiency at its personable best — in Singapore, that is.

Bayang is part of the F&B group which runs outlets like BaliThai and RennThai. To celebrate its opening, the restaurant will have a weekly brunch buffet priced at \$16/+++ per person every Saturday and Sunday, from 12pm to 3pm, during the months of September and October.

Rating: 6.5/10

By Cheah Ui-Hoon