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THE WATER ISSUE

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sarong

It seemed like only yesterday that the rumor mill on the island was in overdrive about a new restaurant in Seminyak promising a hawker mix of Asian cuisines. Sarong has now landed, but is it actually worth a visit?

IMAGES CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
ethereal glow of sarong
dim sum selection
chicken martabak with pickled
cucumber and sambal manis

At last! Minimalism is on its way out, maybe even dead. Hooray! Good-bye minimalism, hello sensualism, screams Sarong (*Jl Petitenget 19X, Seminyak, T: 0361 737 809*) - Bali's newest ubergroovy restaurant where post-minimalism roars into eclecticism and revels in romance.

Open only since April, Sarong is quite different from any other restaurant on the Island, and one that (even at such an early stage of its operation) is destined to be up there with Bali's best. If you've not yet visited this newcomer, prepare yourself for a surprise. Approaching the antique Javanese doorway for the first time, I certainly had no idea of what to expect on the other side and uttered a few wows in delighted amazement at the sheer size and the indubitable sexiness of the rich, sumptuous interior.

Oozing with visual texture and lush fabrics, Sarong comprises of two open pavilions, the first of which houses a lounge with sofas, armchairs, lamps and artwork

in a setting so comfortable and cosy that you could mistakenly believe you have walked into someone's private home. Adjacent to the lounge is a large bar, a huge wall mirror, an ornamental pool, a bubbling urn, and a private, air-conditioned dining room for ten. There is also a crossbar, presenting a cool spot to hang while drinking vanilla vodka and mint tea cocktails as you indulge in the mysteries of the tapas menu.

The main dining area is located within the second pavilion. Here, organza drapes in shades of old gold fall in folds from the high roof, random Chippendale meets quirky millennium, and tables spill out into a candlelit garden.

The menu features the great cuisines of Southeast Asia with dishes (and chefs) from China, Thailand, Malaysia and India. Readers may remember the



insuppressible maverick entrepreneur-chef, Will Meyrick, of Husk and Blossom fame. Well, he's back, and his 'Thai-cooking-with-a-twist' is as bumpin' good as it ever was.

To be fair, this review of Sarong took place during its soft-opening phase, a low-profile period allocated to testing systems and gauging customer feedback. Sarong wasn't ready for a food critic and I sneaked in unannounced and incognito. I was aware that there were still a number of small things that needed to be ironed out, but I couldn't fault the food...

Will's fresh, crunchy, glossy betel leaf parcels of raw tuna, shallots, chilli, lemongrass and basil made a truly lip smackin' starter, while my date, a Thai food enthusiast, maintained that the Pad Thai tossed with tofu, the Chinese Broccoli known as gailan, pickled radish and garlic chive flowers was the best she'd ever tasted. The Dim Sum selection cannot be faulted either, nor can the classic Indonesian Martabak given an invigorating facelift by the talented kitchen crew of Sarong. I selected the zafferani paneer tikka grilled cottage cheese, served kebab-style with North Indian chutney. Its smoky flavour and firm texture heralded perfection, it was divine. We finished up with duck egg and ginger custard with palm sugar caramel, the zesty tastes near-as-damnit hatched in our mouths and flew off our tongues.

Going out for a good dinner should be a sensational experience in which every one of the five senses is alerted, tantalised, indulged and gratified. If this was the mission and philosophy of the owners in their creation of Sarong, then they have already succeeded.