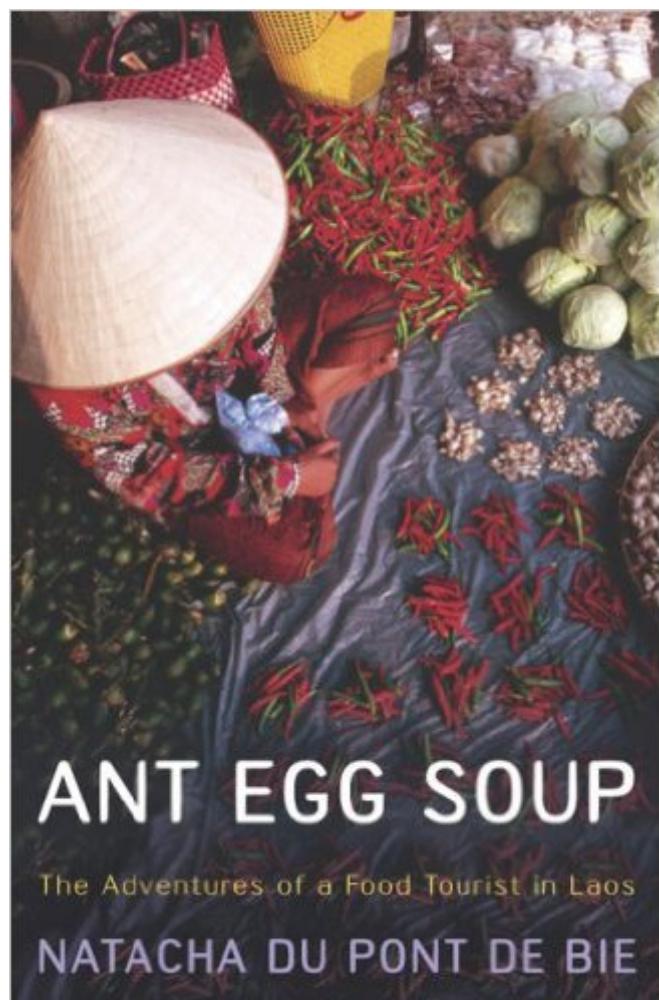


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# Ant Egg Soup: The Adventures Of A Food Tourist In Laos



## **Synopsis**

Natacha Du Pont De Bie is no ordinary tourist. She'll trek for hours or even days in search of a good lunch. Ant Egg Soup is the result of her adventures in Laos, the stories of the people she met, the places she visited and, of course, the amazing food she tasted. Drinking raw turkey blood with herbs in a tribal village, cooking Paradise chicken in a little guest house by the Kung Si waterfalls, and sampling fried cricket during the Festival of the Golden Stupa are just a few examples. Funny and refreshing, with recipes and lines drawings, Ant Egg Soup will awaken the senses while redefining the art of travelling and eating abroad.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

From the moment she lands in Laos and asks a customs official for the most authentic place to eat in town I was hooked on the author's cultural odyssey into the country's gastronomic soul. It's beautifully written and I found it a brave, generous book, suffused with a passion for exotic cuisine and a genuine affection for the people she encounters. Her own illustrations and a glut of tasty recipes nestle with quixotic travellers' tales and stimulating insights into the history, politics and customs of a country that is little known to the West. There are also some apposite reflections on tourism and international development. Complex and, naturally, hunger inducing. I loved it.

This is a beautiful book about Laos, its people, and their customs. The descriptions of the food are spot-on and the recipes are a great bonus. As a transplanted Lao-American trying to recreate flavors of my past, this was quite a gem of a find. If you have any interest in Southeast Asian culture

or tourism, you definitely must read this. The parts about Luang Prabang and the Plain of Jars will have you googling airfare to Laos in no time.

This book was a pretty interesting read and kept my interest through its entirety. I have the attention span of a fly, but was able to read it continuously on a 4 hour flight. There were some things that irked me about the editing, but that is rather minor. Some of the spellings were not consistent or phonetically correct, in my opinion as a Lao person. Also, she called Lao people "Laotians," which I'm pretty sure, is not the correct term. Otherwise, I enjoyed the book, especially the history of Laos and its people. I probably will not try the recipes though, since I grew up on "Americanized" Lao food, i.e., with more meat and less fish/frogs/veggies. Plus, I have my mom and grandma. Bottom line, I would recommend this book.

Natacha Du Pont De Pie's grass-roots-level account of her culinary expedition through Laos is fascinating, enthralling, inspiring, delicious, and well written. She evokes her (mostly) warm interactions with local residents, culture, and the natural environment along the way as skillfully as she brings to life the essential smells & combinations of Lao flavors. All these things earned her deep affection, which she conveys with enthusiasm and a refreshing lack of pretension. She also adds sufficient cultural and historical context to serve as an excellent teaser for those readers for whom this book might be an introduction to this country of material poverty and human riches. Although the treatise of a royal chef (Phia Sing, Traditional Recipes of Laos) is a touchstone for her journey, more often the passport into ordinary kitchens and family dinners is her genuine curiosity and readiness to roll up her sleeves to chop, pound, simmer, and taste. Her experiences certainly ring true and at least partially timeless; in 2014 I could easily identify some of the specific places, situations, and foods described in the narrative from 2000. The context for this exploration of cuisine is a backpacker-style trip of simple pleasures and no frills, which accords with the author's bohemian upbringing. This approach also meets Laos on its own terms - humble and full of life. If the annoyances (bugs, no mattress, Golden Triangle drug tourists, a loathsome millionaire sexual predator) seem too daunting, people with an interest in following her footsteps should know that it is also possible to journey in greater comfort and still eat authentic food in selected locales that have more tourism infrastructure. If using the book as a guide to specific foods, one could wish for an index. In compensation, there is a helpful appendix to (UK) sources of ingredients for those wishing to recreate the numerous recipes, and a list of reference works for further exploration.

This is easily one of the most pleasurable so called travel books I have read. I am not even finished with it yet but am spurred to share its quality with everyone. Not too much history to be opaque and distant, not too much inward introspection to be self-indulgent, not too much about the people she meets to be foreign, not too much about the geography and the journey itself to be boring and not too much about food to be blind to the rest. Everything is related at just the right tempo and you feel as if you are right there with Natacha and her new friends enjoying the journey with little tidbits of insight into everything that is Laos not just food. To her immense credit, her style of writing here comes across as real down-to-earth which paradoxically comes across expertly, or perhaps I mean comprehensible to a non-professional chef like me (but a semi-professional traveler....trying to get to the pros.) I now even have some recipes I can use...and they are good recipes put into the context of where she learned them. That is the best part. I love the way she sketches different things that she sees such as the vegetable gardens along the Mekong, the faces and garb of the hill tribe women she meets and the post slaughter image of a turkey that she later enjoyed. Her description of the children she meets in the countryside and their laughter is so spot on and haunting. The book is a contemporary masterpiece on Southeast Asian culture for foreign readers, like me. I have yet to read a book of the food/travel genre that tells part of the Southeast Asian experience any better than this.....especially for lovers of food and Southeast Asian culture like myself.

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