

## MY FOOD DIARY: Palembang: Of Pempeks and Pindang Patins



In 2013, I travelled to Palembang (as well as Surabaya, Madura, Medan, Banda Aceh, Pontianak, Singkawang and Lombok) to do research for my novel, *Aruna dan Lidahnya (The Birdwoman's Palate)*, which has since been made into a movie (now available for viewing on Netflix).

Here are some of the downhome eateries that make it into the novel, though in the novel I leave them deliberately unnamed.

**PEMPEK BERINGIN**

**Jl. Lingkar 1 no. 20/B 9, Palembang**

**Tel. +62 711 315691**



With such an obsessive clientele, I can't imagine how much lovely hard cash the owners of this *pempek* specialist put into their coffer every night.

Their *pempek* (the signature dish of Palembang; large dumplings made of boiled fish lightly fried and served with *coko*, a spicy sauce suffused with chilies, dried shrimp, soy sauce, vinegar, tamarind, palm sugar and a truckload of garlic) is utterly divine, easily the best I've had anywhere, and the basic, run-of-the-mill tile-and-laminex surrounds do nothing to distract you from the perfection in your plate. And there is no going past that sauce: the *coko* is a delicate balance of sweet, sour, hot and garlicky, driving the *pempek* home without overwhelming it. The fish cakes themselves are crisp on the outside, tender but firm on the inside, with none of that off-putting fishy aftertaste.

Behind the dry snacks galore—including, curiously, *kopi luwak* (coffee made of the excrements of the common palm civet) that cost Rp 235,000 a packet—there definitely is a serious kitchen that knows what it's doing.

I absolutely LOVE this place.

PS. They do nationwide delivery.

Opening hours: 10.00 – 22.00







**PEMPEK VICO**

**Jl. Let. Kol. Iskandar no. 541-542, Palembang**

**Tel. +62 711 316066**



A firm favorite with the locals, Vico turns out a mean *pempek*, faintly browned and crisp, with *coko* just a notch in quality below Beringin's.

The place itself is more spacious than most of its competition, and offers a more varied menu (forget the noodles). Yet the indisputable standout is the *es kacang*, a sparkling red bean-based syrupy iced drink laden with fruity tidbits. Someone describes it, not inaptly, as reminiscent of "red jewels."

PS. Like Beringin, they also do nationwide delivery.

Opening hours: 10.00 – 22.00













**PEMPEK 'EK' DEMPO**

**Jl. Lingkar no. 60/357-E, Palembang**

**Tel. +62 711 357751**



Pundits swear this is the home of best *belida* (generally acknowledged as a more superior fish than the commonly used *tenggiri pempek*). The fundamentals are certainly there: serviceable, if not slightly bland *coko*, and fish cakes that are somewhat less compact in texture than the Beringin (or Vico's for that matter) version. The superb *tekwan* (clear broth with fish balls made of sago flour

mixed with minced knife fish), however, is clearly the main draw. The mom-and-pop environs add a feeling of authenticity—what else, after all, is more satisfying than a class act in small doses?





LLIA

4815 SUR TELP. 350791-373877 PALEMBANG

PEMPEK "EK" DEMPO

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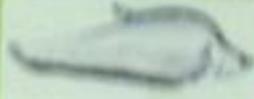
Jl. Lingkar I No. 81 - 201 E Telp. (0711) - 313118 - 313121

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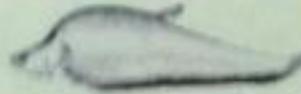


JL. LINGKAR

# PEMPEK "EK" DEMPO IKAN BELIDA



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R. Lingkarun I No. 60 / 357 E Palembang Telp. 0711 - 313170 / 313121



Pempek Lenjer	Rp 50.000
Pempek Telor Besar	Rp 25.000
Pempek Telor Besar + Mie	Rp 30.000
Pempek Campur Kecil	Rp 5.000
Mie Tahu	Rp 20.000
Tekwan Ikan	Rp 20.000
Model Ikan	Rp 20.000
Fangsit Ikan	Rp 25.000
Langgang Goreng	Rp 25.000
Langgang Goreng + Mie	Rp 30.000



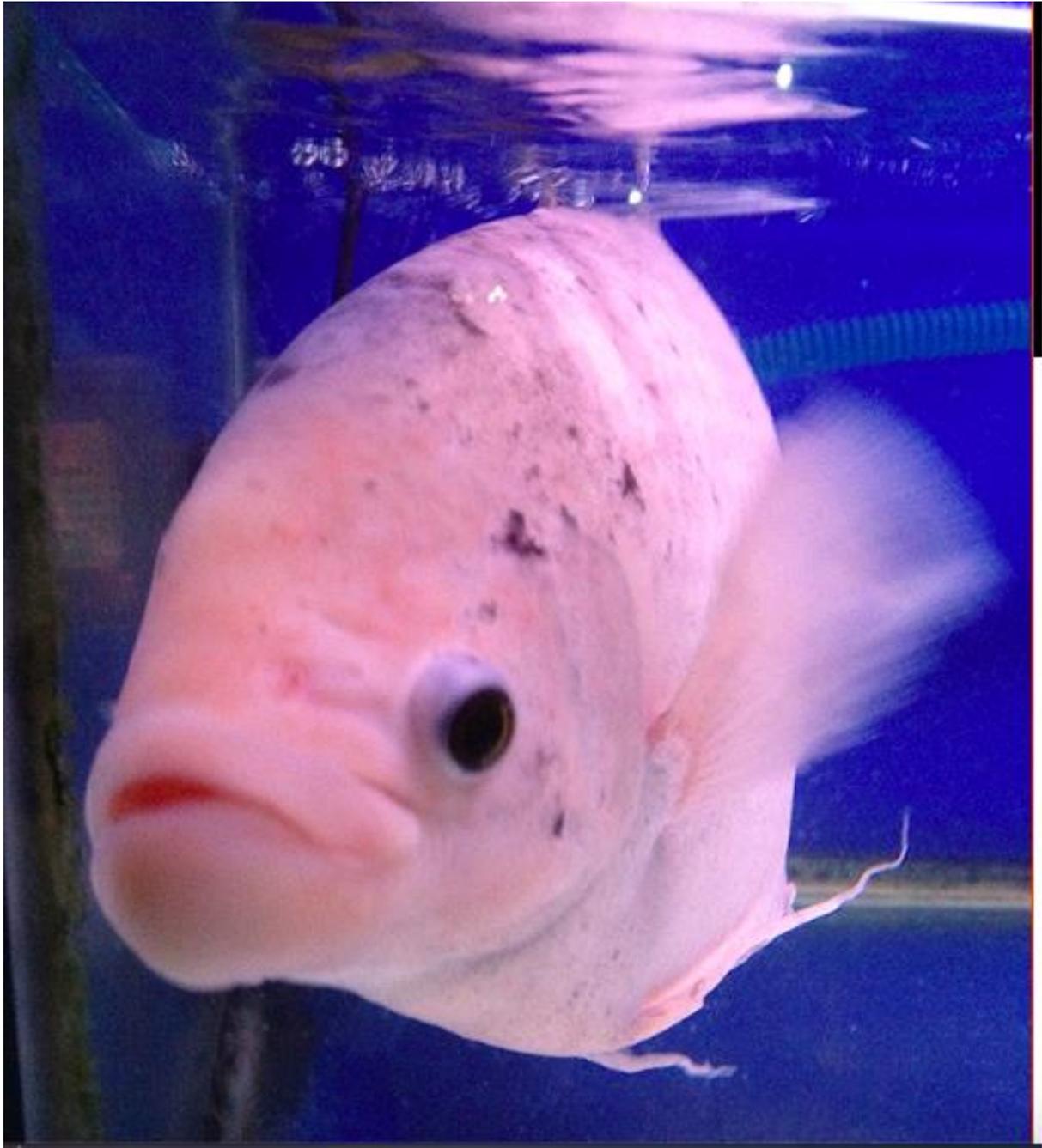
Juice Timun	Rp 15.000
Juice Tomat	Rp 15.000
Juice Wortel	Rp 15.000
Juice Alpukat	Rp 15.000
Juice Apel	Rp 15.000
Juice Belimbing	Rp 15.000
Juice Jambu	Rp 15.000
Juice Jeruk	Rp 15.000
Juice Mangga	Rp 15.000
Juice Sirsak	Rp 15.000
Juice Strawberry	Rp 15.000
Juice Anggur	Rp 20.000
Juice Durian	Rp 20.000
Juice Leri	Rp 20.000
Juice Lengkeng	Rp 20.000
Juice Rambutan	Rp 20.000
Milkshake Chocolate	Rp 20.000
Milkshake Cappuccino	Rp 20.000
Cappuccino Cold	Rp 20.000

Es Kopi	Rp 7.500
Es Kopi Susu	Rp 10.000
Es Jeruk	Rp 7.500
Es Jeruk Nipis	Rp 7.500
Es Campur	Rp 12.500
Es Cincin	Rp 12.500
Es Cendol	Rp 12.500
Es Kacang	Rp 12.500
Es Sup Buah	Rp 15.000
Es Buah Campur	Rp 15.000
Es Leri	Rp 20.000
Es Lengkeng	Rp 20.000
Es Soda Susu	Rp 20.000
Es Miho	Rp 20.000
Es Teh	Rp 10.000
Es Teh Manis	Rp 3.000
Es Teh Susu	Rp 5.000

**PEMPEK SUDI MAMPIR**

**Jl. Merdeka no. 8/22 Ilir (in front of the Kantor Walikota, the Mayor's Office), Palembang**

**Tel. +62 711 314417**



I haven't been.

SBY, on the other hand, has.

**RIVERSIDE RESTAURANT**

**Kawasan Wisata Sungai Musi, Kompleks Benteng Kulo Besak,**

**Jl. Rumah Bari, Palembang**

**Tel. +62 711 368222**



Another near-flawless restaurant: its *pindang patin*, a local version of tom yum soup, whose crowning glory is the freshly-trawled *patin* fish from down below, is truly a thing of beauty.

For the uninitiated, *patin* fish is a preternaturally plump fish, the flavor and texture of which are so singular they defy description. Then there is that broth—the *pindang*—and oh, what a broth: hot, sweet and sour in equal measure, like a good marriage.

While the 'indoor' part of the restaurant, with its gaudy giant aquariums and seedy lighting, feels oppressively generic, the riverside setting is almost too lovely, with the suitably festooned Ampera Bridge looming large in the background.

