

EXPLORING SERUIT AND IT'S TRANSFORMATION, THE HERITAGE CULINARY FROM LAMPUNG INDONESIA

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Abstract

Seruit is a traditional cuisine from Lampung, with a blend of Indonesian sambal (chili paste), fish, and various vegetables. In addition to fulfilling dietary requirements, Seruit symbolizes the philosophy, culture, and social values preserved by the Lampung community. The impact of modernization has caused the younger generation to favor trendy and convenient foods for its practicality. To maintain continuous acceptability from diverse groups, adaptive strategies were required in the development of Seruit that maintain its philosophical principles. This research aims to identify the uniqueness of Seruit and its transformations in response to modern demands, ensuring its sustainability and establishing it as a cultural and culinary icon of Lampung Province. This research employed a qualitative methodology with an ethnographic approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentary review. Research revealed that the uniqueness of Seruit were attributed to its local ingredients, mixing process of Seruit's ingredients (pijok-pijok), and Seruit's serving and eating styles (nyeruit). Seruit has experienced four transformations to date: preservation techniques, serving styles, sambal variants and ingredients, and consumption space. These transformations expand Seruit's presence in public and commercial areas, while strengthening its status as a cultural and culinary Seruit, Lampung, transformation, heritage, modernization.

Keywords: Seruit, Lampung, transformation, heritage, modernization.

INTRODUCTION

Food is a sort of culture that consistently evolves to accommodate people's lives. Indonesia represents a rich and diverse cultural and culinary diversity. Every region builds its unique flavors through historical events, cultural heritage, and the dynamics of its social interactions. This variety appears in the selection of

ingredients, processing processes, and presentation styles that have been inherited through generations. The archipelago's geographical environment and different natural resources influence the dietary habits in each location. Spices, natural ingredients, and fisheries are essential components in establishing a unique flavor character (Humaedi, 2021; Naisali et al., 2023; Wijaya,

2019). In this context, food not only plays a role as a basic nutritional need, but also as a representation of culture, values, social status and collective knowledge (Alifariki, 2024; Almatsier, 2004; Soeroso & Turgarini, 2020).

Seruit is a culinary dish that symbolizes Lampung's ethnic identity. The combination of several ingredients, including chili sauce, fish meat, fresh vegetables, give a unique richness of flavor to Seruit (Bertalina et al., 2025). Seruit beyond simply taste exploration; it symbolizes a cultural representation rooted in historical and philosophical principles, offering a unique, authentic, and significant approach to both serving and eating. The act of consuming Seruit collectively can be referred by the term *nyeruit* (Ningrum et al., 2014; Suhendri, 2024). Seruit plays a vital role in Lampung culture, emphasizing the significance of culinary traditions as an essential component of local cultural identity.

Nonetheless, a rapid impact of modernization has induced an alteration in consumption patterns. Modern fastfood cuisine is widely popular due to its perceived practicality, particularly among younger generations. The alteration in preferences and consumer behaviors is shaped by a contemporary lifestyle that emphasizes modernity, immediacy, and practicality, weakening historical values and cultural

wisdom (Anggraini et al., 2025; Kristian Sarang et al., 2025; Kusumawati et al., 2021). If not managed wisely this transition might threaten Seruit's status as a traditional cuisine among the Lampung people. This is concerning, because Seruit's potential to become an icon of gastronomy tourism and attract both local and foreign tourists (Harsana & Triwidayati, 2020; Turgarini, 2018).

Culinary tourism, also referred to as gastronomy tourism, is a form of cultural tourism focused on experiencing unique, distinctive, and memorable local food and delicious dishes. This form of tourism necessitates strong participation from local communities, requires protection from local authorities, and can serve as a catalyst for local economic development (Çalışkan & Yilmaz, 2016; Onur & Onur, 2016). The survey results indicated that 88.2% of tourists agreed that local food was a primary factor in selecting the destinations they visited locations (Doldur, 2016). A further survey demonstrated that local gastronomy has contributed to tourism growth, yielding an average response of 8.19 on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 indicated strong agreement (UNWTO, 2017).

An adaptive transformation of Seruit is necessary through several concepts that aim to preserve its cultural heritage, thus

solving the challenges of modernization while maintaining local wisdom. This study aims to examine the uniqueness of Seruit and its numerous adaptive transformations as a means of preserving Seruit in the modern time.

METHOD

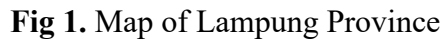
This research utilized a qualitative methodology through ethnography. Ethnography, has been utilized since the 1950s, is a research methodology associated with culture, case studies, field research, interpretive inquiry, and qualitative inquiry. This method facilitates data collection through participant observation within a brief duration (Hammersley, 2010).

The data collection for this project was conducted via in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. The study's informants were local people, Seruit's restaurant enterprenuer, local government officials, and visitors. The analysis employed model consist of encompassing data reduction, presentation, and conclusion formulation. Triangulation and member checking techniques were employed to assure data reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Seruit History

Before discuss the history of the Seruit, it is necessary to explore the history of the Lampungnese who created it. Lampung, the southernmost part of Sumatra, had been chosen as a deportation site for prisoners and refugees by the Banten Sultanate in the 16th and 17th centuries. Nonetheless, Lampung has emerged as a significant contributor to the economy of the Banten Sultanate as a producer and supplier of pepper, which was valued in the global market. The Banten Sultanate offered protection, acknowledgment, and met the essential requirements of the Lampungnese in exchange. The spontaneous migration of the Banten people to Lampung and vice versa illustrated a robust connection between Lampung and Banten (Nurdin et al., 2024). Between 1905 and 1909, under the Dutch colonial occupation of the archipelago, the Javanese population was systematically relocated to Lampung in order to reduce population density on the island of Java (Romli, 2010). Fig 1. displays a map of Lampung Province.



The creation of Seruit was closely linked to the characteristics and livelihoods of the Lampungnese, specifically the Pepadun ethnic group living in rural regions like Way Kanan. Way Kanan features fertile landscape, abundant crop production, and enormous freshwater fishery. Every day people consume a variety of produced vegetables and river fish. The cuisine was created by combining numerous ingredients, locally referred to as pijok-pijok, which was how the term Seruit was less common in its

The Lampung region received demographic transformations due to an inflow of migrants, notably from the Javanese population. According to (Romli, 2010), the relationship between the Lampung people and Javanese migrants occurred not as domination or cultural replacement, but through negotiation and reciprocal adaptation. Berry's concept, as presented in (Pruett, 2026), identified four distinct modes of cultural adaptation: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. The Seruit case study indicated that the Javanese community did not alter the fundamental form or primary structure of Seruit as a distinctive Lampung cuisine. This

interaction enhanced the dynamics of variance in culinary techniques without weakening the primary essence of Seruit due to the blending of local ingredients. The term Seruit should not be seen as the basic adoption of external culture; instead, it symbolizes a result of acculturation between the growing local culture and external influences, therefore classifying it as cultural integration (Nurdin et al., 2024).

Seruit was first isolated to the Pepadun ethnic group but eventually disseminated to nearly all regions of Lampung Province. This distribution was shaped by population mobility and the establishment of economic and social networks, especially in the provincial capital, Bandar Lampung. As the center of governance and commerce, Bandar Lampung accelerated the dissemination of Seruit, leading to its consumption by both locals and tourists.

The authenticity of Seruit

Seruit, a traditional Lampung culinary dish, has a unique composition. Its authenticity is determined not only by the ingredients used, but also by the processing and consumption methods.

1. Seruit composition

The various ingredients in Seruit can be classified into two main categories: essential ingredients and complementary ingredients,

which collectively shape the dish's characteristics. An overview of these two types of ingredients can be seen in Fig 2.

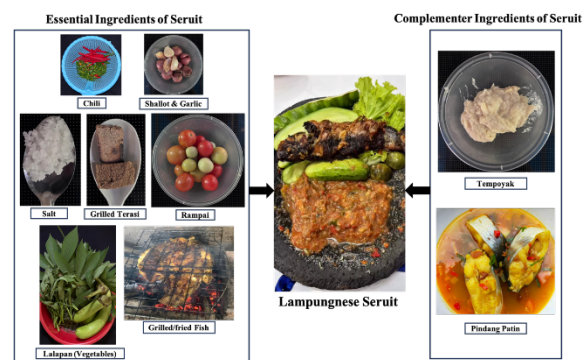


Fig 2. Image of Seruit sourced from Instagram Dindaalamanda

2. Essential Compositions

a. Bird eye chili peppers (*Capsicum frutescens*)

Chili peppers were not originally indigenous to Indonesia. In the 16th century, Portuguese ships introduced chili seeds to Indonesia after obtaining them from South America. Chili plants grew abundantly in Indonesia because of the climate's resemblance to their original place (Rahmah & Ansori, 2023; Surya & Tedjakusuma, 2022). Indonesian sambal (chili sauce) might contain several chili varieties (Witara, 2019), the predominant variety utilized in Seruit is bird-eye chili pepper.

Chilies play a crucial role in creating the spicy flavor of the sambal used in Seruit. Seruit is typically made very spicy because it's made with a variety of ingredients to maintain a balanced flavor, ensuring it's not

bland. Based on interviews with local residents:

"... all the ingredients must be mixed together, if the chili sauce is not spicy enough, it will become bland. That's why it has to be made spicier to balance the taste."

The people of Lampung specifically, and Indonesians broadly, have a strong affinity for spicy cuisine. Indonesians have a deep-rooted history of consuming various foods with sambal, making it an essential component of many Indonesian dishes. One reason is that young Indonesian, from an early age, see behaviors of adults who enjoy consuming diverse dishes accompanied by numerous forms of sambal. Consequently, they get familiar with and even enjoy sambal from an early age, maintaining their enjoyment into adulthood (Witara, 2019).

b. Rampai (*Solanum pimpinellifolium*)

Rampai is a tiny tomato species with higher vitamin C levels compared to other tomato species. Rampai is widely used in numerous recipes from South Sumatra and Lampung [28]. Rampai is vital to the flavor profile of Seruit, contributing its unique scent and tangy taste. Rampai significantly enhances the unique flavor of Seruit, giving it a fundamental ingredient. Based on the interviews with a local community:

"..the uniqueness of the Seruit is the rampai taste"

c. Shallot (*Allium cepa*) and Garlic (*Allium sativum*)

Shallots and garlic are two components frequently used in diverse Indonesian recipes. The predominant onion production occurs on the island of Java (Adin et al., 2023; Wijaya, 2019). Shallots and garlic are vital components in the preparation of Seruit chili sauce, both serving as aromatic elements that form the flavor base and enhance the taste of Seruit [8].

d. Grilled terasi (shrimp paste)

Terasi is Indonesian traditional fermented shrimp paste [30]. Grilled terasi is an essential component that contributes Seruit's unique character, especially its fragrance and umami taste. The grilling step prior to mixing the terasi enhances the smokey fragrance and covers the fishy scent. The terasi amplifies the flavors of the chilies and onions, resulting in a richer and more complex flavor profile.

The addition of terasi in the making of Seruit sambal demonstrated the Lampung people's intrinsic openness to external cultural influences. Evidence from (Herlina & Setiarto, 2024; Prihanto & Muyasyaroh, 2021) indicated that terasi has been manufactured and traded in Java since the 14th century. This indicated that terasi was originally acquired by trade between the citizens of Lampung and the Javanese ethnic

group, or through the acculturation with the Javanese culture that developed itself in Lampung.

e. Fish

Fish provides a source of protein in Seruit. The fish species utilized are predominantly freshwater varieties found in the local river, including catfish (*Pangasius* sp.), tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*), baung fish (*Mystus nemurus*), belida fish (*Chitala lopis*), and gourami (*Osphronemus goramy*) (Hanifah, 2024; Nurdin et al., 2024) stated that the Lampungnese used to lives near rivers, as these rivers offer essential resources such as water, food, and transportation routes.

During the preparation of Seruit, the fish is often either fried or grilled prior to integration. This process not only aims to cook the fish but also to create a texture and aroma that complements the overall dish. Afterwards, the meat of fish is used, minced, and blended with the other components in a procedure termed *pijok-pijok*. It become a fundamental element of the Seruit composition.

f. Lalapan (vegetables)

Lalapan consists of an assortment of vegetables, either raw or boiling, accompanied by sambal as a side dish. Archaeological evidence of "lalap" in Indonesian cuisine is present in the

Panggumulan Inscription, which dates to 902 AD and is found in Sleman, Yogyakarta Province. It described a variety of vegetable-derived components: "rumwah-rumwah, kuluban, dudutan, and tetis." Rumwah-rumwah were raw vegetables; kuluban were boiling vegetables; dudutan are raw vegetables obtained by uprooting; and tetis is a form of sambal or petis (Javanese fish paste) (Rahman, 2018). The lalapan in Seruit has a variety of vegetables that enhance both texture and flavor. According to interviews conducted with local people of Way Kanan:

"The selection of raw vegetables is basically whatever is available, such as eggplant, cucumber, or cassava leaves, which can be adjusted to our preference."

Leaves utilized as Seruit lalapan comprise cassava leaves (*Manihot esculenta*), papaya leaves (*Carica papaya*), and basil leaves (*Ocimum basilicum*). Numerous fruits utilized as lalapan include pumpkin (*Cucurbita moschata*), cucumber (*Cucumis sativus*), jaling (*Archidendron microcarpum*), corn (*Zea mays*), petai (*Parkia speciosa*), jengkol (*Archidendron pauciflorum*), banana flower (*Musa paradisiaca*), long beans (*Vigna sinensis*), cepokak (*Solanum torvum*), and eggplant (*Solanum melongena*) (Suhendri, 2024). The fresh vegetables add a refreshing flavor to the Seruit, balancing the spicy and savory flavors of the chili sauce. The

vegetables also contribute to the Seruit's varied texture.

2. Complementary Composition

a. Tempoyak (salted durian fermentation)

Tempoyak is a fermented durian product characterized by its unique flavor and aroma. Tempoyak is produced from durian flesh (*Durio zibethinus*), which is salted and afterwards fermented in a sealed container for a duration of three to seven days. The main aim of producing tempoyak was to conserve the abundant durian fruit in the Sumatra region, a technique widely practiced among ethnic Malays. The term tempoyak derives from "poyak" or "koyak," referring to the initial tearing of the durian flesh during its preparation. Tempoyak is a condiment used in numerous traditional Malay meals, including tempoyak sambal, brengkes, and tempoyak patin. Tempoyak are common in Riau, Jambi, Palembang, Bengkulu, and Lampung (Anggadhanita et al., 2023; Haruminori et al., 2018; Rajagukguk & Arnold, 2021; Surono, 2016; Wulandari & Fauziah, 2022).

The addition of tempoyak can enhance the flavor profile of Seruit recipes. Nonetheless, despite the unique aroma and flavor, tempoyak is not universally accepted. Consequently, its application in Seruit is optional. The usage of tempoyak illustrates the cultural acculturation taking place in

Seruit, as tempoyak is a cultural product of the Malay ethnic group, the majority of whom don't live in Lampung Province.

b. Pindang Patin

Pindang patin is a clear soup derived from patin fish (*Pangasius* sp.), characterized by a fresh, tangy, spicy, and umami flavor profile. Pindang Patin serves mainly as an additional component; the soup broth is mostly utilized for adding a fresh, tangy, and delicious taste to the Seruit.

One of the most popular pindang dishes is pindang patin. Pindang patin contains omega-3 fatty acids, which can lower bad cholesterol levels, specifically LDL (Low Density Lipoprotein). Research by (Sinulingga et al., 2019) showed that male rats with high LDL cholesterol which were fed pindang patin (using a sonde) for 21 days, resulting in lower LDL levels in their blood. This indicated that, apart its delicious flavor, pindang patin served as a functional diet for health. Nonetheless, not all individuals can appreciate pindang patin, so its addition in seruit is optional.

2. Mixing process of Seruit's ingredients (pijok-pijok)

Seruit from Lampung cannot be simplified to just its sambal, as its true character necessitates a mixture of fish, sambal, and veggies. The procedure of blending these ingredients is referred to as

pijok-pijok, which requires using fingers for the mixing process. Fig 3 displays an image of pijok-pijok.



Fig 3. The process of mixing all the seruit ingredients using the fingers (pijok-pijok)

According to an interview with a local government employee, he stated:

"In traditional cultures, the person who executes the pijok and equitably divides the Seruit is definitely a traditional elder. This symbolizes equivalent social status."

The mixture of all Seruit ingredients is performed using an equipment called a lesung. The procedure of mixing each component in the lesung is referred to as muput lesung.

3. Seruit's serving and eating styles (nyeruit)

Seruit is generally consumed after all the ingredients are mixed. This dish is presented in a muput lesung and

accompanied by rice. Seruit is consumed by taking small portions with hands and eating it alongside the provided rice, rather than using silverware such as spoons and forks [8]. This also symbolizes trustworthiness as it involves consuming Seruit dishes without partitioning different servings. This symbolizes the principles of unity and simplicity no matter your status in society. The act of participating in Seruit communally is referred to as nyeruit. Fig 4 illustrates a representation of nyeruit.



Fig 4. Traditional nyeruit practice:
conducted collectively within a family

The practice of consuming Seruit resembles the eating habits of the Javanese since the 19th century, which involve using the fingers, particularly the right hand, eating on banana leaves or wooden base, sitting cross-legged on the floor, and consistently washing hands before and after meals (Santosa, 2021).

Seruit Meaning in Sosio-Culture for Lampungnese

Three philosophies in the nyeruit activity that characterize the Lampungnese: sakai sambaian, nemui nyimah, and nengah

nyappur (Suhendri, 2024). The term sakai sambaian signifies the encouragement for individuals to support one another in gathering various ingredients for the preparation of Seruit. Nemui nyimah signifies each other's care among all societal strata, emphasizing thoughtfulness, the preservation of Silaturrahim (an Islamic doctrine aimed at strengthening the ties of brotherhood, bonding, and family), and communal participation in nyeruit activities. Nengah nyappur signifies the expectation for all individuals to engage, coexist, and interact with one another despite social status difference. Consequently, this nyeruit ritual will develop significant solidarity among the people of Lampung.

In Lampung society, Seruit is considered not merely as a food, but as a fundamental component of everyday social behaviors. Research indicated that the presence of Seruit is strongly connected to interaction patterns that prioritize the values of togetherness, unity, and intimacy among members within a community. In actuality, Seruit is typically presented in a single vessel for communal consumption. This consumption pattern highlights that dining is a communal rather than an individual activity. All participants can consume the same dish simultaneously, facilitating direct and instantly participation. This activity

surpasses mere consumption; it functions as a medium for communication, story exchange, and a strengthening of social bonds.

Seruit has been officially acknowledged as a part of Lampung Province's cultural heritage. In 2015, Seruit received recognition as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (Warisan Budaya tak Benda/WBTB) of Lampung Province (Anonymous, 2026) Seruit is recognized not merely as a consumption behavior but also as a cultural representation that possesses substantial significance in the lives of the community. This acknowledgment signifies that a previously local tradition has been raised to a wider context as an integral component of Lampung Province's cultural identity.

Seruit's Transformation Complies With Modern Trends

This study reveals that the transformation of Seruit in the modern setting comprises alterations in various critical characteristics, including preservation techniques, portion sizes, sambal varieties and ingredients, and consuming's locations. These modifications do not alter Seruit's fundamental identity; instead, they signify an adaptability to social dynamics and shifting consumer demands.

1. Transformation of preservation techniques

A notable transformation is observed in the packing dimension. Initially, Seruit was a dish served after the pijok-pijok process and consumed on-site without any packaging. The imperatives of modernity have positioned culinary products within a market framework that emphasizes shelf life and mobility as essential for competitiveness. A domestic tourist's response when asked if she had ever purchased frozen seruit:

"I've bought it several times to stock up. It has all the ingredients, and it's very convenient; just add lalapan."

The availability of frozen Seruit packaging enables Seruit to extend its reach beyond local geographic limits, allowing it to be bought as a traditional Lampung food souvenir. This is seen in Fig 5 below.

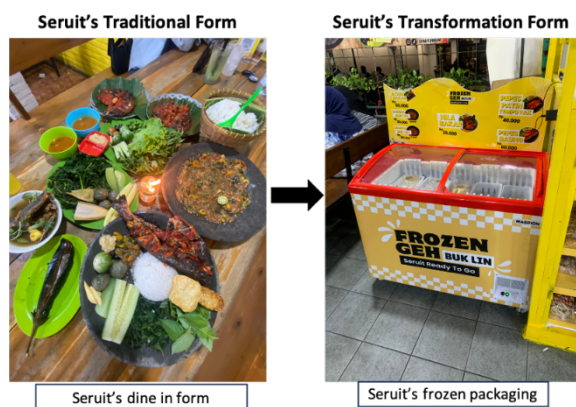


Fig 5. Transformation of Seruit

Typical regional food souvenirs serve as branding that can transform into a culinary tourist attraction for an area or operate as a pull factor for tourists to visit and enjoy the

cuisine at its source (Kusumawati et al., 2023). The sale of frozen packed Seruit as food souvenir is a strategic initiative to enhance local economic activity, as tourists prefer to purchase food souvenirs for friends and relatives (Aktaş-Polat & Polat, 2020; Suhartanto et al., 2018). The growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) associated with food souvenirs and culinary tourism would stimulate the development of diverse sectors, including agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, and plantations in these tourist locales (Suhartanto et al., 2018).

2. Transformation of portion sizes

Traditionally, Seruit is consumed communal as a fundamental component of the Lampung community's cultural identity. The transformation of contemporary consumption environments requires a more systematic, hygienic, and personalized presentation to satisfy the criteria of restaurants and culinary businesses. Observations at the famous Seruit Buk Lin restaurant in Lampung showed the utilization of individual dishes and separating of the Seruit sambal from other condiments. This is seen in Fig 6 below.

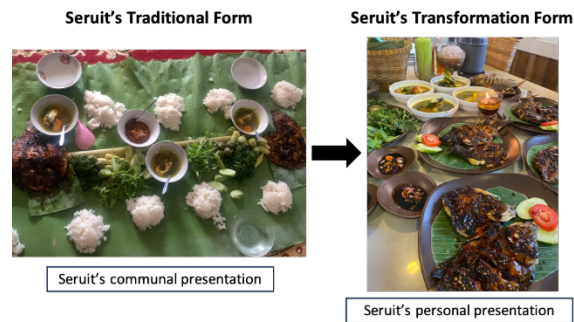


Fig 6. The transformation of Seruit

2. Transformation of sambal varieties and ingredients

Seruit has modified its sambal components by adding various sambal variants to align with contemporary taste preferences. This discovery was derived from field observations and interviews conducted at the Sambal Lalak restaurant, which asserts that it offered premium Seruit. These adjustments include variations in sambal beyond sambal rampai and variation to the ingredient mix. Additionally, there were options for varying amounts of sambal spiciness to accommodate different preferences. This strategy was implemented to expand market segmentation and increase Seruit's market share. This is illustrated in Fig 7.



Fig 7. The transformation of Seruit

Fig 7 shows that some Seruit vendors now offer sambal other than sambal rampai. These include young mango sambal, sambal terasi, sambal asam kumbang, and sambal garo.

4. Transformation of consuming's locations

Historically enjoyed in domestic and traditional environments, Seruit is popular in public and commercial venues, such as restaurants and cultural festivals. This is seen in Fig 8.

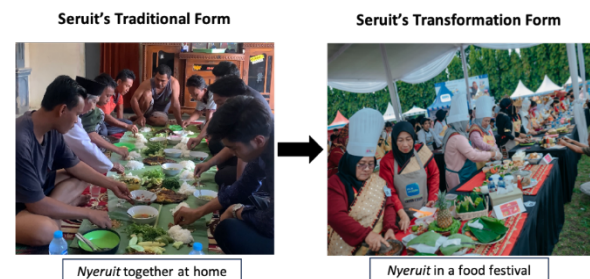


Fig 8. Seruit which was initially only consumed at home, now is consumed at food festivals

Fig 8 shows the changing reach of Seruit and its strengthening position as Lampung's culinary identity. Seruit has

become part of Lampung's authentic culture, something to be proud of and worthy of continued preservation.

CLOSING

This study showed that Seruit, an important part of Lampung culture, functions not merely as food but has also been influenced by ecological factors, cultural development, and communal social practices. Its beginnings was from the utilization of local ingredients, which then grew through adaptability while maintaining its fundamental principles as a mixed dish. The authenticity of Seruit is attributed to its local ingredients, pijok-pijok (mixing process of Seruit's ingredients), and nyeruit (Seruit's serving and eating styles).

Seruit has evolved its preservation techniques, portion sizes, sambal varieties and ingredients, and consuming's locations to meet contemporary demands. This process expanded Seruit's visibility in public and commercial domains, while strengthening its status as Lampung's culinary identity. The preservation of Seruit depends on local communities' capacity to balance innovation with the authenticity of materials and the socio-cultural values forming its fundamental basis.

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