

Ten to Thai

By Michaela Goertzen

I discovered Taste of Thai one Saturday afternoon while trolling for the nearest take-out, having just arrived back home from my morning errands and wanting something quick and close. Taste of Thai, near O'Malley and Old Seward, is my neighborhood Thai restaurant, and, knowing nothing of its reputation, I just hoped for the best and placed an order for pad Thai. I was told 10 minutes to pick up—which was speedy enough for me to get it while it was still hot, while also allowing enough time for my roommate to download the latest House episode on Hulu by the time I got back. I couldn't have coordinated it better. What a great day already.

I have no complaints about any of the Thai food I've eaten around town, but I've seen very cramped spaces, primarily to-go kitchens, or wide open and sparse. For atmosphere and food, I think Taste of Thai offers the best of both worlds. Traditional Thai artifacts and fountains fill the walls and corners and calming Eastern instrumentals play on surround sound. The single open room is upbeat with bustle during the evening hours and keeps the place casual enough for family dining. But it is no less refined for not being a private, dim, adults-only establishment.

The service, for one, is exemplary. My to-go orders were prompt and my in-restaurant experience was attentive and courteous. All the staff is formally outfitted in native dress.

Most importantly, I found the food beyond expectation. I was impressed with their extra effort to use fresh ingredients (even pumpkin and pineapple!) and to pair them so creatively with curries and rice. Everything was somehow extra special and beautifully presented.

My first test of any Thai restaurant is its pad Thai. The dish is both a favorite and a fallback, and is elemental Thai cuisine. Taste of Thai's version (\$9.95) was classic: the signature peanut sauce was subtle, not overpowering; it came with chicken and shrimp for no extra charge; and the portion was sizeable. And I became confident about the rest of their menu knowing the pad Thai was a keeper.

Another time, going in with a definite item in mind, I ended up being swayed by one of the specials: deep fried bananas and sweet potatoes coated with coconut and sesame seeds and served with Thai peanut sauce on the side (\$9.95). Neither the bananas nor potatoes were saturated with oil, but had been fried just enough to crisp the coating. The plate was so good and the pieces and sauce were so complementary that with each bite I was smiling to myself in happy disbelief: “Who comes up with food like this?”

On my most recent visit, I was intrigued by another special—red curry with fresh pumpkin and my choice of meat (\$9.95). The entrée came with rice, an egg roll and house soup—a zesty, amplified egg drop version with bits of chicken and vegetable. For the curry, the combination of coconut milk, pumpkin and pork was something praiseworthy, and I don’t have enough good things to say about the recipe or its preparation. The meat was lean and tender, the sauce was smooth and spicy (from plenty of Thai basil), the color a creamy orange. I would order it again and again, except that the other version was made with fresh pineapple instead of pumpkin, and I’d rather just pick something else than have to choose between the two a second time.

There are lots of good options for Thai food in Anchorage, but Taste of Thai is distinguished by its impeccably decorated interior and custom specials. And, for me, I’m thrilled that it’s never more than 10 minutes away.

Taste of Thai

11109 Old Seward Hwy.

349-THAI

www.alaskatasteofthai.com

Mon. – Thurs. 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Fri. – Sat. 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sun. 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.