

***International Palette:
A Multi-Sensory Experience as a Food Critique***

- a. How were you addressed when you entered into the restaurant? Did you need to make reservations? How long was the wait before you were seated?

When I walked into the restaurant Lemongrass Grill I was immediately greeted with an Hello and how are you. There was no need for me to make reservations and I was seated in less than two minutes from entering. What I observed when I first walked into the restaurant was it was slightly empty this day, maybe because it was a week day and not a weekend but they serve a lunch special from 5pm-10pm where you can buy one drink and get the other free and the food is a few dollars cheaper as well, due to this I assumed it would be a little more packed.

- b. What are the cultural differences you notice? Using your five senses of taste, touch, sight, smell, & sound describe some of the cultural differences that you are not accustomed to in comparison to All-American restaurant or restaurant chains. For example, one can describe but not limited to the sights in the restaurant décor, odors from unusual foods, and sounds from music. One should use all five-senses in this cultural experience.

The moment I walked into the restaurant I smelt the fried rice along with a scent that may have been grilled chicken or beef, I also smelt the fresh crispy vegetable rolls that one waiter brought out to serve to customers. The restaurant was filled with enough light for anyone to be able to read the menu without squinting but also slightly dimmed creating a relaxing and intimate setting. There was music playing but I could not catch the words of the songs, it did not sound like English. The restaurant wasn't lively but the few that were dining in were loud enough with chatter and laughter amongst one another that I couldn't hear the music playing clearly. I listened for a split second of them discussing the cheap flights due to the corona virus then the waitress welcomed me and showed me to my seat. She went away for a few minutes giving me enough time to look at the menu. Before I look on to the menu I looked around the restaurant and noticed tall bamboo sticks placed to separate the back section from the front section of the store. I then noticed that the restaurant had décor of several large bells hanging from the ceiling and a few smaller ones on the bamboo sticks. By the bar the counter and along the walls were filled with cymbal bells. What caught my eyes next was the large statue in the center back wall of the restaurant. Once the waitress approached me to take my order I asked what statue was placed at the back, she told me it was a statue of Buddha and explained that a lot of people from Thailand, prayed to Buddha. Beside each side of the larger statue there were two smaller statues, two on each side. The waitress told me those were other gods they prayed to but was unable to tell me what each one was called. After the waitress was finished explaining the meaning behind the statue I ordered my food then my drink and waited for maybe less than 10 minutes before my appetizer was served to me. They were well cooked, crispy on the outer layer and soft inside filled with what tasted like cabbage and carrots. Before I got finished the eight crispy vegetable rolls my food was brought out. I could see the steam rising up from the fried rice all compacted in a pineapple. As I took my first bite trying to be careful not to burn my tongue, my taste buds were triggered by the smell and my mouth was instantly filled with saliva. From that first bite I could taste the juicy pineapples, the scallions and

peas as well as the scrambled eggs. The taste was a combination of sweet and a bit of sour once I squeezed a freshly sliced lime over my rice, nevertheless it was very savory.

- c. Look at the menu. What are the types of foods they offer? What are some unusual items? Do they describe the ingredients in the food? List various food items from the menu. What menu items did you order? Is there more than one language used to describe the foods on the menu?

On the menu they offered Crispy Golden Wonton, Vegetarian Crispy Rolls and Fried Tofu as an appetizer. Calamari, Duck and Thai Grilled Beef salads, Chiang Mai Mee and Pad Thai Rice Noodles, Thai Fried and Spicy Fresh Mint Fried Rice as well as side orders of Peanut Sauce and Thai Sticky Rice if you'd like, (*Lemongrass Grill, 2020*). From the menu I ordered Vegetarian Crispy Rolls for an appetizer and the Thai Fried Rice as my entree. Out of the various items listed on the menu the ones that seemed unusual to me was the Thai Sticky Rice which was explained as a long grain of Thai rice or sweet rice and because of the type of rice and their method of steaming the rice it causes the rice to stick. The Chiang Mai Mee, that is chiang mai style egg noodle topped with coconut yellow curry gravy, broccoli, green mustard, bean sprout and dry shallots, (*2020*). The next item that didn't seem unusual at first, than once it was served to me caught me off guard was the Thai Fried Rice. It was served inside of a half cut open pineapple, which I was not expecting at all. The Thai fried rice is served with jasmine rice, chicken, pineapples, onions, mixed peas and scrambled egg (*2020*), mixed together inside of a actual pineapple fruit. There is no other language offered on the menu besides English, but most of the names of the food what was offered was not an English name but more of a Thailand name just using English alphabet.

- d. Is a traditional salad offered? If not, describe what is offered. What types of breads are offered (flat, pita, tortilla chips)? What type of desserts (cheesecake, fortune cookie, coffee)? What are they like?

Of the choice of salads, they offer Green, Green Papaya, Calamari, Shrimp, Duck salad in addition to their traditional salad that is the Thai Grilled Beef Salad. This is served with grilled beef, tossed with dressing of lime juice, chili, sweet onion, scallion and bell pepper, (*Lemongrass Grill, 2020*) For desserts they offer Icd Cream in Coconut or Green Tea, Fried Banana with Honey, Coconut Cup Cake Thai Pudding and Coconut Sticky Rice with Fresh Mango. I did not have desert the combination of the eight vegetable rolls and the fried rice was too filling, so there was no room for desert unfortunately. How ever I did ask the waitress what she would recommend.....

- e. What types of beverages are offered? Do they have an alcohol menu? What is not typically offered in an American chain restaurant?

Lemongrass Grill offers alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. You have the option of drinking beverages such as sodas, Coke, Diet Coke, Sprite, Ginger Ale. They also offer more traditional drinks

such as Thai Iced Tea or Thai Iced Coffee. They serve beer, Singha and Chang a Thailand original and Sapporo a Japanese original. (*Lemongrass Grill, 2020*). They serve Blush/ Sake, White wine, Red wine and cocktail drinks such as margaritas, mojitos and martinis. I had the.....

- f. How is the food reflective of the cultural geography and the economic geography? (i.e. spices are abundant in India which is rich in spices & fish (sushi) is popular in Japan & it is part of the G8). Describe approximately where in the world (continent & location) and from country this culture's food is best known.

Based on the menu, the food listed is a reflective of the cultural geography of Thailand because they have soups which is known to them as Tom Yum listed on the menu. In America many may only drink soup in the winter or if one is sick but in Thailand it is normal for them to have soup no matter the year or season. Another plate that was listed on the menu and is popular in Thailand is Pad Thai as the waitress pointed out to me under their noodle options. It is Stir-Fried with dried bean curd, bean sprouts, egg, Chinese chive, and sweet and sour turnip topped with fresh toasted peanuts, (*Lemongrass Grill, 2020*). One thing I picked up on myself that I have seen before in other Thai food restaurants as well as this one was the extra ingredient of nuts. Listed under sides they have peanut sauce as an option to order as well as in their Duck Salad they serve cashew nuts mixed in. Other items listed on the menu that reflects the economic geography of Thailand is the price points of their whole menu. The Vegetable rolls were \$7.95 and their Thai fried rice was \$13.95. Everything was at an very reasonable price point compared to an American restaurant that may price their food higher.

- g. Describe the dress? (Dress is inclusive of all five senses – you smell perfume, hear jewelry, see make-up, etc....) What are the employees, such as hostesses or wait staff wearing?

The waitress was dressed in normal clothes, she wore a denim button up top along with denim jeans and black sketchers. Another waitress wore a white T-shirt, denim jeans as well and non slip croc shoes. Neither of them wore jewelry such as earrings, necklace and rings or watches. Based on their appearance I could tell their services were more important than what they wore, as their just here to get the job done. Although they were not in uniform or coordinated each persons appearance was still clean and neat. Everyone had their hair up in a high bun or push back out of their face, along with the clothes they wore it was also clean and free of any stains.

- h. Rate your experience as a food critic (as in the *LA Times* or *Houston Chronicle*). Ratings should be dependent on taste, service, décor, cleanliness, authenticity, quality and price and should range from A-F (“A” being the best). Explain why you chose this rating. Be thorough and detailed in your explanations.

Based on my experience eating at Lemongrass Grill, I would rate them an A-. From the beginning when I walked into the restaurant I was welcomed immediately. Within the restaurant the aroma was of fresh food being cooked in the back which reassured me that everything was made fresh and from scratch. Once I was seated the waitress gave me enough time to look at the menu and remembered to place a glass of water on my table although I did not ask. She was polite and did not mind me asking questions about the menu, where the food was originated from, what was most popular and what the statue meant that was placed in the back. When I ordered my appetizer and entree they were all served to me in a timely manner as well as my drink. The food was viable fresh as you could see the steam rising from everything that come from the kitchen and has a fresh and pleasantly vibrant taste as well. The restaurant was very clean as I looked around I observed that each table were wiped down with only the menus neatly placed in the center of each one. I also enjoyed that interior design of the restaurant and how they related everything back to Thailand with the bamboo sticks, the large bells and the Buddha statue. Over all I enjoyed the food, services, and ambience of the restaurant. The reason I chose this rate instead of a A, is because when I was served my drink there was a crack in the glass that caused my drink to leak and instead of changing the glass the waitress just kept coming over to wipe it up. So I felt I had to drink my drink fast before it was all wasted. Besides that the service was very good.

- i. What did you learn from this experience that you could contribute to a multi-cultural experience in a class discussion?

Firstly I would like to express that I have dined at this restaurant in the past and my experience then compared to my experience now have changed. Because of this assignment I have been more observant to the cultural differences of a Thai restaurant is comparison to an American restaurant. From the interior decor of the different bells placed all around the restaurant which is significant in Thailand because bells are usually placed in their temples where they pray. In addition the religious statues placed in the back where everyone can see. In most of not all American restaurants, owners will not place religious symbols around the store or even hang them up because this country is so diverse one may not want to offend a customer or chase away customers. In Lemongrass Grill they did not shy away from their religion for that reason it truly showed me how much the people of Thailand value their gods to the point where they will still place a Buddha statue in the restaurant where everyone can visibly see it. I also think they did it in a well mannered way and not all in your face for customers who don't pray to the same gods as they do. I've also learn that you don't have to travel across the world to experience someone culture by the choice of food, music, drinks and decor.

