

A Step Into A Restaurant With EnTHAIsing Choices: *Lantern Thai Kitchen*
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Lantern Thai Kitchen, located in Downtown Brooklyn, is one of the few authentic Thai restaurants found in New York City. The restaurant has two locations, however this brick red restaurant as seen in Figure 1 is the perfect choice for those who are looking to eat in a more quiet location. Upon arrival, one will notice the large windows with wooden panels on them but the interior of the restaurant looks dark. This is because the restaurant is lit with candles on the tables and lanterns hanging from the ceiling, hence the name, *Lantern Thai Kitchen*. This dim lighting inside gives the restaurant a serene and romantic ambiance. It gives an overall feeling of comfort which together adds to the dining experience most people enjoy about this location. Reservations are not needed and one can be seated upon arrival, although it can get a little busy between lunch hours. At the door, the waiter/ waitress greets the customers with a bow and a smile, a tradition in most Thai restaurants, and then walks the customer to their table.



Figure 1. Photograph of the front of *Lantern Thai Kitchen* (Citi Tour NYC, 2018).

Upon entering the restaurant, one can distinguish the clash of the modern and traditional Thai interior design. The exposed brick walls gives the restaurant a vintage feeling which is used in a lot of contemporary designs (Smart, 2017). However, the rusted metal lanterns hanging from the ceiling, the panel room divider at the entrance, panelled cherry wood ceilings and wooden floors do not stray away from the traditional experience. The tables, the bar, and the decorated panels hanging on the walls are also made out of wood. Wood is used continuously throughout the restaurant to give it the vintage feeling found in a lot of American restaurants, however, it works well together with the traditional objects which makes the establishment traditional with a modern twist.



Figure 2. Photograph of Inside the Lantern Thai Kitchen (Aylee Bits, 2013).

When one walks into *Lantern Thai Kitchen*, one instantly feels the warmth that is emitted from the restaurant and it is inviting. The aroma in the atmosphere is earthy like vegetable soup, which goes well with the wooden decor, and there is a slight sweet scent of fruit, especially pineapple, which emanates from the kitchen wooden doors. The music is low and plays a soft

melodic tune of Thai music which a few of the workers sang along to. Being that the restaurant isn't loud, the guests were able to communicate without having to speak loudly. One will notice that there are a few smaller tables towards the entrance however the restaurant has mainly longer tables. In Thai tradition it is bad luck to eat alone and so they eat in a communal style by ordering a lot of food and sharing it with their table (Hays, 2013). This traditional communal style of seating is not often seen in American restaurants and so it differentiates the establishment and connects it to the culture it is representing.

Lantern Thai Kitchen Menu

The items on the menu varies from low to high prices with the highest priced meal costing about thirty dollars. If arrival to the restaurant is during lunch time which is Monday - Friday from 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM, one can order from the lunch special which is about ten dollars (Lantern Thai Kitchen, 2016). The lunch special provides an appetizer and meal with the choice of chicken, beef, shrimp, tofu or vegetable. The dinner section offer dishes that vary in prices starting at sixteen and twenty seven dollars and one can order chicken, duck, salmon, fish filet and red snapper (Lantern Thai Kitchen, 2016). These dishes, just like the lunch menu, offers rice, sauteed vegetables or salad as a side dish.

The menu is organized in a way that differentiates the meals by what is mild and spicy. The meals with an asterisk (*) next to it means that it is spicy and about seven of the eighteen lunch dishes are marked with the asterisk. Thai food are typically spicy and they use garlic and chiles liberally (Hays, 2013). The menu has options of soups, noodles, salads, *wok* or *wok* fried , curries, grills and fried rices (Lantern Thai Kitchen, 2016). Under each dish is a description of the ingredients in that meal in the English language.

An unusual item mentioned in the menu is *wok*. A wok is a bowl-shaped frying pan that is used in Chinese cooking (Dictionary.com, 2018). It is similar to stir frying or sauteing however the flavors in the ingredients are preserved and only a little bit of oil is used so the food does not stick to the pan, providing a healthier meal. One will also find other dishes that are written in Thai with their description written in English. One can order a dish called *Preaw Waan Fish* which the menu translates it as sweet and sour fish. The menu describes this dish as a crispy whole red snapper with sweet and sour sauce (The Lantern Thai Kitchen, 2016). Another dish is the *Kee Mao* in which the menu translates it as drunken noodles. This dish is sauteed broad rice noodle, fresh basil, chili, bell pepper onions, tomato and eggs (Lantern Thai Kitchen, 2016). Using the correct Thai dish name instead of the translated version allows the restaurant to keep the authenticity of the culture in which it is representing.

After ordering, one can expect an appetizer before their meal is prepared. Traditional salad, soup (one must ask for the soup of the day) and spring rolls are offered as an appetizer. The salad had traditional greens, carrots and tomatoes. The salad dressing tasted like it had cashews or peanuts in it and it was very sweet. The soup had a very strong herbal smell. It had steamed water and a few vegetables in it to give it some flavor. Bread was not offered at all but spring rolls were as a side order.

The usually beverages of water, soda and juice was offered at the restaurant. They also served alcoholic drinks such as beer, wine and cocktails. A few of the cocktails had the word ‘Thai’ or something associated with the country like ‘mandarin’ in the names of the drinks (Lantern Thai Kitchen, 2016). All of these are usually offered in an American Chain restaurant except the spring rolls and the chopsticks given to eat with. Also, a traditional American

restaurant offers desserts however, Lantern Thai Kitchen does not have a dessert section on the menu and do not offer any fortune cookies or anything after your meal.

The Pineapple Fried Rice was ordered and it is one of the main meal that usually attracts the customers to the restaurant. This meal contains eggs, cashews, raisins, onions, scallions and pineapples but what makes it special is that your dish is not on a regular plate but instead it is inside of a pineapple (Lantern Thai Kitchen, 2016). This gives the fried rice a very sweet a tropical taste which brings one's imagination back to the island. This very instagramable meal is not only sweet from the pineapples and raisins, but savory with the eggs and scallions. If allergic to the cashews, one can ask to have it removed. This dish is definitely a fan favorite from the restaurant.



Figure 3. Pineapple Fried Rice Dish (Lantern Thai Kitchen, 2016).

Food as a reflection of the cultural and the economic geography of Thailand

Thailand is heavily influenced by cultures surrounding the country and this is can be seen in the different types of seasonings used in the meals. A typical Thai meal consists of four seasonings; salty, sweet, sour, and spicy (Hays, 2013). Thailand is located in East Asia; Latitude and longitude coordinates are: 13.736717 N, 100.523186 E, which means that the country is in a

tropical area (Latlong.net, 2018). This allows the country to produce fruits which is often served in their meals and offers the sweet seasoning they often use (Hays, 2013). Thailand is surrounded by China, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam and this allows the country to be influenced by these countries through trade. The lower part of the country is surrounded by the Andaman sea and Gulf of Thailand which allows the people to have access to fish (Udon Thai Map, 2010). The fish and sea salt adds to the salty flavor added into their meals. The rice fields in the country also allow them to produce Jasmine white rice (The Beginners, 2018). This rice is a common side dish that is served with almost every dish no matter the seasoning.



Figure 4, Map of Thailand (Udon Thai Map, 2010).

Besides Thai food being sweet and spicy, is also known for being tangy and spicy. The tanginess is from their use of lemongrass, lime juice and *nam pla* (fish sauce) (Hays, 2018). With India being on the west side of Thailand, the spicy seasoning is heavily influenced by

Indian spices and curries. This can be seen in the *Lantern Thai Kitchen* menu. It has its own section of curry dishes and this is from the influence of Indian spices that Thailand has incorporated in their own way into their cuisines. Although their food is not comparable to Indian food, Thai curry incorporates Indian spices in its paste but adds its unique flavor by adding local spices and ingredients and this includes Thai holy basil, lemongrass, and *galangal* which is Thai ginger (Schmidt, 2013). This differentiates Thai spices from the Indian spices it was influenced by.



Figure 5, Spices used in Thailand (Herbs and Spices, 2017).

Thailand is an underdeveloped tropical country. Its GDP is \$1.2 trillion and with the imports and exports combined value equalling 123% of its GDP, which means trade is very important to the country (Heritage Foundation, 2018). Trade has influenced the Thailand culture and is the reason why they have incorporated Indian spices and the Chinese *wok*, noodles and chopsticks into their cuisine. Other than rice and fish, the Thais also incorporated a lot of fruits into their dishes which adds to the sweet taste in their dishes. Thailand has used the salt from

seafood, sweets from fruits, spices from India and tangy from lemongrass and lime juice to create traditional dishes in their culture (Schmidt, 2013).



Figure 6, Market traders in boats selling flowers and fruit (Hellier, 2009).

Observation of Dress in *Lantern Thai Kitchen*

Dress is defined as a “means of communication during social interaction, it influences peoples’ establishing identities of themselves and others,” and the body modification of the five senses (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). The culture of Thailand is a reflection of the tropical country from the colorful fruits, bright blue skies and oceans, neutral tone houses, markets and rice fields. The most casual costume for women is the *Ruean Ton* which is a vertical or horizontal stripe *sin* (tube skirt) with a collarless blouse and the skirt is usually ankle length. This is in silk material and can be worn to religious ceremonies and non official functions. The men’s national costume is known as the *Suea Phraratchathan*, “royally bestowed shirt”, and this is a jacket with a mandarin collar and is worn with trousers (Asian Inspiration, 2017). This however, is not seen in the *Lantern Thai Kitchen*. The waiters and waitresses wore all black attire and it

was a black shirt with black pants, very casual. They did not wear any jewelry and the makeup was natural or nothing at all. There is no smell of perfume because it is overpowered by the herbal scent coming from the food and candles.



Figure 7.1 and 7.2. Traditional Thai Costume (Asian Inspirations, 2017).

Rating and Experience

The overall experience at the *Lantern Thai Kitchen* was delightful and deserves an A for its food and service. Excellent service was received the moment one walked in and the waiter was very attentive to the table. One can also appreciate the price of the items on the menu which were not expensive. The restaurant offered a variety of dishes that one will surely find and enjoy. There was a great mixture of vegetarian, poultry, meats and seafood on the menu. One has the option to choose between spicy, sweet, tangy and salty dishes which are seasonings often used in Thailand. What is most enjoyed about the establishment is that it is not the typical fast food Asian cuisine but offered a certain authenticity to the culture of Thailand.

The ambiance and decor was appreciated, especially the candles on the table and the lantern pendants hanging from the ceiling. The dim lighting gives it a relaxing ambiance. One

can admire the wooden furniture and vintage decor. It is very clean and there were no stains on the tables or any damaged furniture in the restaurant. It is also welcoming and is the perfect place to catch up with friends, bring family, and have a business lunch or dinner.

Lantern Thai Kitchen is a great dine in restaurant and easy to get to for those who live in Brooklyn. It is a few minutes away from the Brooklyn Bridge Park and close to multiple train stations. This restaurant is worth the trip and one would recommend this restaurant after their first try.

The experience of trying a new culture's food can teach one to step out of one's comfort zone and be open to other cuisines other than the typical Americanized fast food. It is important to know about other cultures and learning from one's own experience instead of only researching online. By expanding one's horizons, one is able to form an opinion that connects to their experience rather than using someone else's. Learning about a different culture helps to expand one's knowledge and become more aware and sensitive to other traditions. The experience also teaches why a country has certain signature dishes based on its geographic location. This knowledge can be applied to school, work and other situations that may require knowing about different cultures.

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