

Thai Me



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October 12th 2020

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New York City is known as the melting pot of cultures from all over the world. Every neighborhood, in each of the five boroughs has its own distinct culture and foods to represent it, from the West Indian nations that reside in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn where you can get spicy escovitch fish, jerk chicken from the Jamaican restaurants or a filling shrimp roti from the Trinidadian roti spot. The vibrant, proud Puerto Rican and Dominican cultures of the South Bronx, where you can get delicious and savory *Pernil Asado* or a rich and sweet *Bizcocho Dominicano*. The bustling hub of Manhattan's Chinatown never disappoint with restaurants representing the various regions of China, from the spicy foods of southwest China's Sichuan to the sweet and sour profile of central China's Shanghai cuisine. My home borough of Brooklyn is the most populous of the five with hundreds of ethnic restaurants scattered throughout the borough.

I ordered take-out from a relatively new Thai restaurant that opened near my house called *Thai Me*. It was empty when I went in to order, because like all restaurants in the city, they have only been doing take out for the last few months. The decor was one of the most fascinating aspects of the restaurant, with eye-catching pieces everywhere. One wall had several rice winnowing baskets and steamers mounted on it, below that was a modern rickshaw. On the left-side of the bar was a white and gold kneeling statue of Teppanom, a Thai guardian according to the employee behind the bar. A statue of the Buddha sat on the shelf behind the bar between about two dozen bottles of various liquors and spirits. On the wall nearest the exit was a wall length mandala that looked to be carved out of iron, it was very intricate and bloomed from the center in a gorgeous flower motif. The lighting and interior decorations added to the warmth of the establishment; the tables, chairs and bar were all made of wood with iron accents, the walls and ceiling were also covered in wood as well.

There were also two small chandeliers hanging in the front and back of the restaurant that gave off a dim but warm yellow light. Two large flat screen televisions were mounted on the wall behind the bar, and a soccer match was playing on both screens. In between them was a large black and white photograph of a man in a military uniform, possibly one of the former monarchs of Thailand. From what I could see there was only one person working front-of-house, he was behind the bar and wore a simple uniform: a black dress shirt and black slacks. They greeted me in english and offered me the in-house menu as opposed to a paper one used for take-out.

The menu was written in english, with a description of each dish under its romanized name. *Thai Me* offers traditional Thai street food like *Pad Thai*, a rice noodle dish with bean sprouts, egg, scallion, and roasted peanuts; *Pad See Ew*, a sauteed bread rice noodle, with chinese broccoli, egg and a dark Thai soy sauce, and *Gai Kaur*, a glass noodle dish with chicken, napa cabbage, scallion and egg. *Thai Me* also offers a variety of Thai-style fried rice, Thai curry, including red, green, Massaman and Panang curries, Seafood and Duck based dishes are also on the menu. Though the names were quite odd, there weren't any truly unusual items on the menu, after taking a look at the dish's description. For example there is a dish on the menu called *Ka Nar Moo Krob*, the name is initially off putting but the dish itself would be considered normal to the average American palate, as it is described as "wok stir fried pork with chinese broccoli". I ordered *Pad Thai* and the mango with sticky rice.

A traditional salad is not offered but, there are several "salads" on offer like the papaya salad which has green (unripe) papaya, garlic, lime juice, chili, ground peanuts, tomato and green beans; A dish called *Larb Gai* is also on their salad menu and contains ground chicken, basil, red onion, tomato, cilantro and comes with a spicy chili lime dressing.

There were no breads on offer in the vein of breadsticks, naan or tortilla chips but dumplings made with ground chicken, pork, shrimp, shiitake mushrooms and Thai fish cakes made with white mackerel, green beans, red curry paste, kaffir lime leaves (an essential ingredient in Thai cuisine) and a peanut-cucumber relish dipping sauce were on the menu (Fredrickson, 2020). In the realm of desserts, they offer Mango with sweet sticky rice, Coconut pudding and Thai Custard with Sweet sticky rice. I ordered the Mango with sticky rice, the mango had a slight tartness that perfectly offset the sweetness of the sticky rice.

The drinks they had on offer were Thai iced tea, which is a very popular Thai drink in New York which you can get at many bubble tea stores or other Thai restaurants, Perrier, Hot Tea and your standard soft drink selection, Coca-cola, Sprite etc. For alcohol, they had imported Thai beers like Chang and Singha and your standard liquors found in other bars: Bacardi, Jose Cuervo, Captain Morgan, Ketel One and Patrón etc.

Most of the foods offered at *Thai Me* are traditional street food, and food of the Laos people of Southeast Asia. The colorful curries of Thailand are based on the ingredients/chilis mixed into them; Green curry has Cilantro, Kaffir Lime leaf, green chilis and basil; Red curry often has up to 20 spicy red chilis mixed in along with tomato paste to deepen the color and flavor; Yellow curry is similar to its Indian counterpart with the addition of turmeric but adds in coriander seeds, ginger and lemongrass. Two of other types of Thai curry are Massaman and Penang, Massaman is labeled as having a distinctly Persian influence because it includes spices and whole peanuts not found in other Thai curries. Penang curry is named after an island off the coast of Malaysia and is made with either fresh or dried chilis making it very spicy. Cultural diffusion is evident in Thai cuisine from the use of noodles, curry, and

peanuts in some of their staple dishes, but the flavor profile is distinctly Thai as they are made unique with the ingredients grown in the region (Schmidt, 2019).

Thai Me is an anomaly, sitting smack dab in the middle of Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn, where the Americanized Chinese restaurant has been a staple in the community for years, yet they have settled in and made a space for themselves. From their warm interior appearance to their eccentric decor, it is a delight to simply sit down in and absorb the atmosphere while inhaling the tantalizing smell of fried rice wafting from the kitchen. The staff, though sparse in these strange times, are still very friendly. The cook brings the street food of Bangkok to Brooklyn and does a pretty good job. Though the *Pad Thai* was a little sweet for my taste, it still had that exotic flavor that I couldn't get from a American Chinese restaurant and for around the same price I might add, my bill only came out to about \$23.77 w/ tax included. I will give *Thai Me* a **B** for service, authenticity, taste and price. I chose this rating because while I did enjoy going to the restaurant and ordering, the atmosphere was very welcoming, the *Pad Thai* was disappointing. Since I have never had the famous Thai dish, I was looking forward to trying it, but it wasn't what I was expecting.

From this experience I learned that even ingredients we are familiar with separately can be turned into something wholly new and exotic tasting. The *Pad Thai* I ate is a perfect example of that. The ingredients, rice noodle, bean sprouts, egg, scallion, and roasted peanuts are all familiar to me on their own, but when combined to make the dish, it becomes foreign and new.

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