

Restaurant Review | Thai Square, St Albans

by Grace Cain / 8th September 2017

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No Comments



Grace Cain discovers contemporary Thai dining in the heart of historic St Albans

When **Thai Square** first opened on The Strand in 1996, it was with the aim of offering Londoners an unbeatable selection of Thai food in stylish Thai-inspired surroundings. This unique approach to modern Thai dining evidently tapped into a wider appeal – fast-forward 21 years, and the Thai Square empire has now expanded to include 10 restaurants across London and three outside of the city, as well as a popular night club and award-winning Thai spa.

Enticed by the promise of authentic flavours and modern twists on Thai culinary classics, I paid a visit to the restaurant's outpost in a Tudor Tavern on St Albans' George Street.



It's an unexpected combination; contemporary Thai dining in an original 15th Century timber-framed building. However, marrying the ancient with the modern is nothing new for the Roman city of St Albans, and Thai Square's artful refurbishment has none of the slightly musty, please-mind-your-head qualities that one might expect of such an old building. The restaurant group are known for their contemporary Thai interiors and decorative details, and in the case of their St Albans branch these have been tactfully selected to compliment – rather than fight against – the original architectural skeleton.

We were seated beside the window at one edge of the lower floor of the restaurant, which was already gently buzzing with diners. We're told that the St Albans branch is normally busy at dinner and often full at weekends, so it is advisable to book in advance.



ANYTHING TO DRINK?

To start with, some drinks; the wine menu at Thai Square is comprehensive, and is designed to offer a choice to enhance any meal. However, on this occasion, both my guest and I decided it might be more fun to sample the House Cocktails.

I went for the **One Night in Bangkok**, which has an alcoholic content similar to that of a classic Long Island Iced Tea, but is finished with a distinctive Thai Square twist in the form of vanilla syrup and Thai Iced Tea. My companion chose the **Crystal Ball**, which combined lychee juice with lemongrass and ginger infused vodkas. The result was a refreshing cocktail that led with a subtle sweetness, and finished with a warm kick of ginger.

There is nothing more annoying than finishing your drink before your meal has arrived, but that's almost definitely not going to be a problem at Thai Square. The cocktails are served long (and strong), and are so wonderfully mixed and presented that they are something to be savoured in their own right.

And it's a good thing too, because picking through the vast menu is a culinary mission in itself. From curries and noodles, to stir fry and seafood, the amount of choice is overwhelming – and I can attest that the selection of vegetarian dishes on offer is also much, much more varied and exciting than the usual half-hearted goat's cheese option.



Noodles Pad Thai

READY TO ORDER?

We began with the **Vegetarian Sharing Starter** for two, which takes away the pain that comes with having to pick just one dish from such an extensive selection. The giant plate with which we were presented was filled with Thai delicacies that included aromatic spring rolls, corn cakes and (my particular favourite) vegetable tempura. As is the case in the restaurant's 12 other branches, Thai Square St Albans uses fresh ingredients imported daily from Thailand, which is really quite impressive; and also explains why you can expect to pay slightly more here than you might in a standard restaurant chain.



Vegetarian Corn Cake

Then, it was onto the main event. My dining companion opted for the **Tofu with Ginger**. There is sometimes a risk with tofu that it is going to be bland, but that was never going to be a danger here; the shredded ginger packed a punch, complimented by stir fried bean curd in a soy sauce.

I went for the **Spicy Aubergine**, a dish combining stir fried aubergine and fresh chillies in an aromatic yellow bean sauce. On the menu, many dishes are helpfully signposted with little symbols of chillies to indicate their spice level (although, in the case of the 'Spicy Aubergine', there's a clue in the name). I was offered the chance to say how hot I would like the dish, and went for the option of just one chilli. As someone who is a bit of a coward when it comes to spice, this was still a brave choice – and although I did find this dish a little on the hot side, it wasn't at the expense of its flavour. I suspect that those who like their food on the spicy side would elect to try even more chillies in their Spicy Aubergine, and one of the best things about Thai Square is that it allows you the freedom to choose.



Red Prawn Curry

As an accompaniment, we chose sticky rice and **Pad Tang Tak** (stir fried noodles with bean sprouts and spring onions, all in a soy sauce), both of which were characteristically full of flavour. We were also recommended the **Pak Choy** (a type of cabbage) with Chef's Special Sauce, which had a wonderfully crispy texture and is definitely worth sampling.

Feeling incredibly full, we took a break from eating and instead moved onto a new set of cocktails; I went for another house special, the **Me2U**, a combination of rum and passionfruit that could transport you to a tropical island in a single sip. My guest went for a **Lychee Martini**, which was one of a selection of temptingly flavoured martinis on the cocktail menu. You can just drop into Thai Square for a drink, and the cocktail bar would be ideal for an evening with friends – however, I suspect once inside, it would be difficult to resist the delicious smells coming from the kitchen.



Mango & Sticky Rice

AND TO FINISH?

Refreshed and ready for something sweet, it was onto dessert. Thai desserts often revolve around coconut flavours and fruity dishes (such as mango sticky rice), but I couldn't resist Thai Square's special **chocolate bomb cake**. It was definitely the right decision – a melt in the mouth sphere of chocolate-hazelnut perfection presented on a crunchy biscuit base. Meanwhile, my guest tried the **Thai ice-cream**, which was creamy and deliciously sweet without feeling too sickly.

With such a vast menu, it would be easy to return to Thai Square over and over, and enjoy a completely different meal every time. Contemporary, sophisticated and full of flavour –who knew you could take a trip to Thailand in a Tudor tavern?

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