

3 great dishes to try...

1. Chilli beef - lean strips of prime cut rump steak stir-fried in oyster sauce, strips of ginger, black mushrooms and spring onions

2. Pat Thai - lean strips of pork fried with Thai rice sticks, dried shrimp, egg, crushed peanuts and bean sprouts. "An everyday dish for Thai people", the menu says

3. Gang Pa Neau - "a typical village dish". Thai curry with rump steak cooked with red curry paste in chicken stock

Value for money?

From £5.75 to £6.95 for starters to £11.50 to roughly £17.00 for main courses

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It's the oldest Thai restaurant in Norwich, with more than three decades of history. **Lauren Cope** went to try Thailand, a hidden gem sitting right by the ring road.



About 10 weeks ago, I moved from the city centre to a house in the suburbs. I loved it - but missed the lack of wonderful eateries right on the doorstep.

So when I spotted Thailand on my drive home, it was an obvious one to try.

Having opened in 1986, it is the city's oldest Thai restaurant and has a clutch of AA rosettes, matching quality with history.

It's clear on arrival that it's not somewhere for a quick bite - Thailand is the place you come to for a birthday or anniversary, a slightly pricier options that quickly becomes a family favourite.

While the menu is vast, in the interests of indecision we opted for the set meal for two, a generous selection of two starters, five mains, dessert and coffee.

Up first, juicy skewers of chicken with a substantial portion of creamy, nutty satay sauce and salad, followed by gung chup pang tod - tempura fried king prawns and vegetables (cauliflower, mushroom, broccoli, courgette and others I've probably forgotten).

The chicken had a slight caramelisation, while the tempura was crispy, light and not oily. A good start. We were ready for more (I'd have taken a bowl of that delicious satay sauce, to be honest).

Five generous portions came next: Chilli beef, lean strips of rump steak with peppers and lime leaf, corn and cashew nut chicken, garlic king prawns and the Thailand selection of vegetables with oyster sauce.

Served with a portion of kow pat khai, egg fried rice with onion and tomatoes, it was more than enough (I pride myself on my eating stamina, but even I was flagging after two healthy platefuls).

Harsher critics than I would have found fault, I'm sure, but I enjoyed every dish - nothing felt oily, too heavy or tough. The vegetables had bite, the sauces were an umami punch and flavour different from dish to dish.

The chilli beef, tender, salty, sweet and spicy (with, in what I'm sure would be an offensive description to any chef, a flavour almost reminiscent of beef jerky - I mean that in the most complimentary sense), was the winner.

Plump, juicy, garlicky prawns were a very close second, though, and disappeared within minutes of



Food review

Thailand
9 Ring Road,
Thorpe St Andrew



being served.

My partner said, in hindsight, he wished he'd opted for the main menu - he's partial to sticky rice and a Thai curry. An excuse to go back, I say.

After we'd made a truly horrific

mess of the table, we were onto dessert. But, dear reader, we let ourselves down.

Full the brim, we reluctantly skipped the enticing flavours of green figs with liqueur and cream, and pineapple amaretto, and,

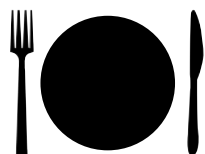
instead, opted for two ice-cream dishes.

Feeling like two children on a European summer holiday, we were happy - but next time I'd make room for something more authentic.

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How does it measure up?

Setting

On the ring road - convenient, and doesn't feel busy when inside. We went on a weeknight, not far after rush-hour, and it felt pretty peaceful.

Ambiance

Relaxed, but special. It feels like somewhere you'd go on a special occasion - a restaurant you'd remember fondly from childhood family meals. The price makes it somewhere I'm unlikely to visit every month, but I'd certainly take visiting friends and family there.

Service

Excellent - friendly and attentive but not pushy or rushed.

Drinks

It was a weeknight, so we played it simple and had soft drinks, but there's plenty to choose from.

Accessibility

Relatively - there's a slight step

to get in and tables are fairly close together.

Toilets

Clean, standard. As you'd expect.

Parking

Decent sized car park - might fill up on a Saturday evening but there's plenty of space.

Price

It is a more expensive choice - the meal for two was £82 without drinks. It was generous portions, though, lovely food and great service. Mains range from £11.50 for vegetarian dishes up to £16 and £17.

Highlight

The ambience. It made our Wednesday night memorable, but still felt like we could unwind after work. The food was also hard to fault. Also, the pretty cutlery and crockery (an odd thing to note, but you will too).



If you like that, try these

Baby Buddha, Ber Street in Norwich

Baby Bhudda has a similar feel of occasion dining - it's not pompous, but feels like a treat to be there. Its prices are just on the higher side, but portions incredibly generous and food excellent. Have a mixture of its dim sum and main dish menus.

The Ordnance Arms, A1067 at Guist

It's easy to drive right past the Ordnance Arms, but, tucked away on the corner, this has

the best of a Norfolk village pub and an authentic Thai restaurant. It's cosy, homely and has some of the best Thai food you'll find in Norfolk.

Thai Lanna, Bridewell Alley in Norwich

Hidden down the bottom of a hill in the Lanes, Thai Lanna is a cosy restaurant which feels somewhat reminiscent of someone's living room. It's a no-frills set up, but food is reasonably priced, delicious and authentic.



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