

SIAM ELEPHANT

Fine Dining Thai Style

Siam Elephant, the signature Thai restaurant of Siam Bayshore Resort & Spa, has been on our list of "must visit" for quite a while now. We had received so many recommendations for this stylish patriotic restaurant that it was with high expectations that we found ourselves driving down South Pattaya Road to visit this iconic hotel. We were unprepared for the sheer size and lavishness of this resort. It is nestled into 20 acres of lush tropical gardens which straddle the verdant terrain between Second Road and the Bali Hai end of Walking Street. Built back in 1975 it was then one of only three hotels establishing themselves in the newly materializing Pattaya City. It is now recognised as one of the most outstanding properties boasting twelve low rise pavilions, restaurants, swimming pools, tennis courts, meeting

rooms, the Lotus Spa plus the unique Explorer Museum Bar (of which more later).

On entering the restaurant, the décor is a delightful juxtapose of luxurious ethnic and modern colonial. Silk wall hangings and antique ornaments glow in subdued lighting, the charming waiting staff are traditionally dressed and the whole ambiance is enchanting. Seating is either in the cool interior or al fresco on the terrace overlooking the sights and sounds of Bali Hai.

The menu spans the gamut of traditional Thai cuisine with emphasis on regional specialities and fresh produce. Veteran Chef Piroj Pleungtuk hails from Samut Songkram and his decades of experience shines through his distinctive dishes. When Mick and I visited recently chef graciously offered to prepare a selection of his signature recipes. We

commenced with a delightful selection of starters; namely ma hor (sliced pineapple topped with sauteed pork with ginger and fresh herbs), Liliputian golden fried parcels filled with shrimps and water chestnuts, served with a sweet plum sauce and a shrimp and vegetable soup. For me this was the star of the starters, a robust condensed stock redolent with shell fish proved the perfect dense liquor in which to float the plump prawns and vegetables.

The next dish to hit the table was another favourite of ours - pomelo salad. Chef's interpretation included shredded chicken with the customary roasted coconut shrimp for a meatier style. Massaman curry, deep fried fish and string bean patties served with sweet cucumber and peanut sauce (tod mun pla krai) plus an exceptional curried fried

salmon with herb sauce were also served. Presentation was Kodak perfect and the requisite Thai tastes of sweet, hot, sour, salty and bitter were executed to perfection. I am resisting the temptation to use shameless puns such as "Thai riffic" or "Thai tannic" but all these dishes were tip top examples of Thai cuisine and were so N'ThaiSing (sorry couldn't resist!)

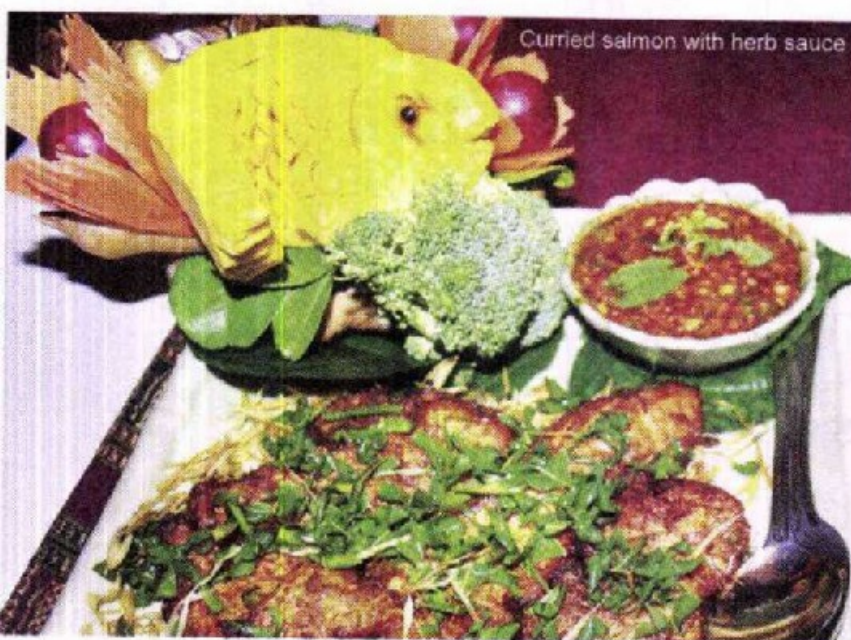
The a la carte menu is broad and exciting with more than reasonable prices for a 5-star restaurant. Dishes that caught our eye include crisp fried garoupa with chili and garlic in tamarind sauce, a spiced squid salad with shallots, chilli, fish sauce, lemon juice and ground rice and a medley of five fiery Thai dips known as nam prik. These include a sweet chili paste with dried shrimp and a river prawn dip with sweet coconut cream, shallots, lem-



ongrass and red chili. These are culinary creations from times past, known in Thai as "ahaan boran". (Boran translates as ancient while ahaan is food; together it means a dish prepared from tried and tested recipes of years gone by. Do try one if you get the chance. Appetisers range in price from B.100++, while the main courses are in the B.200++ to B.350++ range.

We declined dessert but accepted with pleasure the offer of a night-cap in their Explorer Museum Bar. It is a truly extraordinary lounge bar - we were both blown away by this veritable mini museum. Curios from a bygone time, sunken treasures from China, furniture and implements

from the 1920's Sino-Thai era, Burmese antique mah jong tables and much more are all artfully displayed to create a nostalgic bar from yesteryear. The décor and collectable wizard behind this enchanting time capsule is Krissada "Noi" Sukosol Clapp who painstakingly gathered these treasures together to create this remarkable enclave of fascinating pieces. Spectres of history's intrepid explorers exude the air and the perceived sound of repartee and their owners iced gin and tonics tinkling against sparkling glass rattle the imagination. Do visit, it's an extraordinary bar and with a happy hour from 5.30 pm to 7.30 pm (buy-one-get-one-free) it's pocket friendly too.



Siam Elephant is open daily from 6.00 pm to 11.00 pm and located in the Siam Bayshore Resort & Spa at the end of Walking Street and on Second Road. Vehicles only from Second Road. Tel: (038) 428678 or visit www.siamhotels.com. The Explorer Museum Bar is open daily from 10.00 am to 11.00 pm.