

Thai Derm mixes foreign flare with friendliness

Local restaurant is overlooked, one-of-a-kind experience

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Away from the hubbub of downtown Silver Spring, there lies a quiet spot off of Colesville and Georgia where you can relax from a hectic day and soak in the light, amicable ambiance of Thai Derm. From the moment you enter the small, dimly-lit restaurant, tucked between several nondescript buildings on Bonifant Street, you're welcomed into a new cultural experience from which you will not want to escape.

As soon as you cross the threshold of Thai Derm, a waitress is waiting to seat you and your party. You are led into a larger room in which mirrors adorn one side of the wall, and several pieces of native artwork dot a white wall. Metallic peacocks and intricate images of religious figures are carefully framed around the room for wandering eyes to behold.

Even beneath the glass of each table, four separate scenic images of a serene Thai landscape make you feel as if you were eating in Thailand itself. The menus add to the experience since they name the dinner and lunch dishes in Thai with an English description. Waitresses speak in their native tongue and light background music fills the air making you feel as if you were in a different country. At Thai Derm, waitresses are always on-call to aid customers in any way. Before you are seated, menus are placed and a waitress is already making the rounds filling water glasses.

For dinner, appetizers are offered, ranging from \$2.95 for two crispy spring rolls to \$7.95 for a salad topped with barbecue beef and an unnamed, juicy sauce. Soup is also an appetizer option, though if you want the true Thai flavor, the chicken with lemon grass, herbs and coconut milk is highly suggested, if not mandatory. The soup can be served for up to four people and comes in a metal bowl over a small flame, that ensures every time you come back for seconds, thirds and fourths, each delectable bite will not lose its original, pungent flavor.

The average price of a dinner meal is \$7.75. There are over 20 noodle entrees, such as Guew Teow Neou Sub, which includes rice noodles topped with fried chopped beef, tomato and onion all covered in a succulent gravy. Look Shin Neou Poey is also an excellent choice. It's a rice noodle dish with tender beef and meatballs mixed with bean sprouts in a soup.

Other selections on the menu include various chicken, shrimp and beef dishes topped with coconut milk or oyster sauce or basil, all of which seem mouth-watering even before ordering. Choices range from your basic Kaow Pad Moo Dang, which is fried rice with roast pork, to a more complicated dish of Kaow Rad Pik, which is steamed rice topped with onions, hot peppers, and fried marinated beef, chicken, shrimp or pork.

There are nine vegetarian supplements of which only one entrée has tofu. This dish, known as Pad Thai, is a typical noodle, mushroom and bean sprout Thai meal. However, don't hesitate to ask the waitresses to add tofu to any already-vegetarian meal or substitute tofu for chicken, beef, pork or seafood in a meat dish.

In terms of drinks, the choice is between Thai flair and American boredom. Beer, wine and soft drinks are offered at Thai Derm, but much more exciting is the Jasmine iced tea, Thai iced tea and Thai coffee. Cha Yen, the Thai tea, is more than you could wish for. Cream sits on top of the large chunks of ice. After stirring in the milky-white substance into the orange-red tea, the first sip is the best and most unexpected. At first it seems watery and tasteless even, but patience is a virtue after all. The after-taste is what counts. The flavor is indescribable; it can be said that Cha Yen will put a smile on anyone's face. Simply put: if you want the entire Thai experience, ask for the drink in addition to the meal. Just be forewarned: it can be very easy to drink all

of the tea in a few minutes before the meal arrives.

The lunch special is also an option earlier in the day, though choices are much more limited. A Monday through Friday listing of four entrees each day is offered, each meal served with rice and a spring roll for \$5.45.

There is only one problem with the place. Some dishes seem fairly bland and limited, despite the scrumptious descriptions on the menu. The Pad Thai, for instance, desperately needs more spices. However, in lieu of a sauce for the dish, two lemon slices offered on the side add a pleasant, sharper taste to the at first disappointing entrée.

Thai Derm provides customers with what they need, ranging from meat substitutes to seating arrangements. The fairly inexpensive food adds, cultural experience and quick service leaves a patron feeling content and in cheery moods.

Thai Derm is located at 939 Bonifant Street off of Georgia Avenue and Fenton Street in downtown Silver Spring. It is open Monday through Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.; Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.; Saturday from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.; and Sunday from 5:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. For more information or for a carryout order, call 301-589-5341.
