

Cheers!



dining out with Merrill Shindler

I GOT a note the other day from someone named Martin, suggesting I get myself to a restaurant called La Blae, where he says, "apparently they make their own curries and coconut milk." Now, what struck me as curious here is what seemed to be an Indian (or perhaps an Indonesian) restaurant named La Blae. The word seems to have no meaning in any known language. And, sucker that I am for a mystery, I drove out to Rosemead one evening to see what all this was about. It was a case of purest serendipity — I wound up having a wonderful meal at a terrific restaurant, that's neither named La Blae, nor serves the cooking of India or Indonesia.

The name of the restaurant is Lublae, and it's a Thai joint of exceptional and wondrous quality. It's also completely hidden from the street. Lublae sits just north of the San Bernardino Freeway at the Rosemead Boulevard exit, in a mall dominated by a Montgomery Ward and a video shop.

There's no sign for Lublae on Rosemead Boulevard, which is why I drove several blocks north before I noticed the numbers were heading in the wrong direction. When I got back to where Lublae was supposed to be, I saw nothing but other stores. But drive around for a bit, and you'll find it — just look for the Thai restaurant with the jumbo projection screen TV that shows either Thai music videos or a Yanni concert at the Taj Mahal. I've never eaten Thai toast while listening to Yanni build to one of his relentless crescendos before (his music is all crescendo). But then, I've never been to anything like Lublae.

As a page in the menu explains, Lublae is the "Thai Garden of Eden." Read further, and you'll discover that "Lublae serves authentic Thai food in the Royal Thai Style ... The chef has been educated and certified by the Thai Ministry of Education." It then goes on to use terms like "magnificent secret recipes," "cleanliness and freshness," "a touch of loving and caring ..." Whatever — the place is quite stylish (check out the curved metal hostess station), and the food's delicious. And it ain't the same old same old.

Probably the best way to eat at Lublae is to begin with the Appetizer Sampler, a significant platter of Thai toast (and very good Thai toast at that!), fried tofu, minced chicken in flour cups, crispy rice with a pork and peanut dipping sauce, chicken satay, and Thai-style tempuraed vegetables with peanut sauce. It's a lot of food, not just for one, but for two. For most, the sampler is a meal in itself.



Photo by L.J. McALLISTER

DANUSCHA MA owns Lublae Thai Restaurant in Rosemead.

REVIEW

What: Lublae Thai Restaurant

Where: 3684 Rosemead Blvd., Rosemead

When: 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, till midnight Friday and Saturday

The Food: One of the best Thai restaurants

How Much: \$10 per person, MC, V

Beverages: Soft drinks

Info: (626) 572-7711, reservations helpful

Rating: ★ ★ ★

As the weather begins to cool (which hereabouts means dropping from 86 to 85), Thai soups go from being a good way to raise a sweat, to something that warms the system from head to toe. There are more choices than usual at Lublae, several of which are served in hot pots with a fire burning in the middle, out of which you ladle bowls of broth, trying not to burn your fingers on the metal walls of the pot — one of the best of them is the classic tom yum koong, spicy hot & sour soup with shrimp and mushrooms, as sure a cure for the common cold as Jewish chicken soup. There's a broth on the menu called 2,000 Pound Soup, described as "shrimp and ground pork wonton soup." I suspect the name is a play on the "ton" in wonton, but then I have a colorful imagination.

Those who show up with enough of a group to get deep into the curries and house specials will find, in the case of the former, curries that are red, yellow and green, along with something called a Weight Watcher Curry (though I can't imagine who would want to count calories surrounded by such good food),

each mixed various with chicken, beef, pork, shrimp, eggplant, bamboo shoots and/or fish balls. You can vary the level of spice as you wish, from One to Ten on the Lublae Spice Scale. I wanted 10. My wife wanted One. We compromised, as always, at One.

There's a world of dishes not oft found at Thai restaurant on the menu here, situated under the label of specials. This is one of the few Thai eateries I've been to that tries its hand at salmon, in a dish called nam prik ka pi, where a salmon filet is deepfried and flavored with shrimp paste.

Deepfried catfish is flavored with tamarind sauce. Ground pork is flavored with salted beans. Pork is flavored with what's described as "young peppers." To wash it all down, there's a "Slush Bar," where they make Thai iced tea flavored with cream or lime, and the wonderfully named Syrup Soda with Flake Ice. Which sounds very much like the sort of thing one would drink in the Thai Garden of Eden.

LUBLAE



Thai Food in Rosemead
3684 Rosemead Blvd.

626-572-7711

no msg