

The View review

Annie Bullen takes a bow and enjoys a sublime evening



**The Thai Sarocha • 71 New Street • Salisbury • SP1 2PH
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I learnt a lot from a recent visit to the Thai Sarocha restaurant in Salisbury. I came away realising that a good meal can be about more than well-cooked food.

The Thai experience engaged all the senses. We enjoyed the pleasant dining rooms and were captivated by the charm of the staff. The food smelt wonderful and looked and tasted even better. And we learnt to make a *wei*, a traditional Thai obeisance, given with hands held palm-to-palm as in prayer and a bow of the head to show respect and greeting.

I hope that Thai Sarocha owner Patchaxin Phungsuntonn will forgive me for calling her Aey – the nickname used by her family and friends when addressing her. She and her husband Preecha have been running the New Street restaurant for just one year and it's clearly popular.

The menu looks huge but you soon realise that there are many variations on basic ingredients, tempering the taste and the texture.

From a long list of starters we chose Goong Sabai – king prawns in a thin pastry, deep-fried and served with plum sauce, and Por Pia Sod – prawns and crabmeat mixed with fresh vegetables and wrapped into a spring roll, also with plum sauce. We munched on crispy prawn crackers, dipping



Starters were as pretty as a picture

into sweet chilli sauce, and drank Tiger beer while we waited.

Dishes like gondolas, pretty as a picture with cleverly carved vegetables, salad and an orchid flower each, arrived. Hunger overcame our aesthetic sensibilities and we tucked in, enjoying the subtle and different flavours.

Looking around we noticed images of lotus flowers and a bowl of the delicate blossom on display. Aey explained that the lotus is the flower that symbolises the restaurant, the name of which is pronounced 'Salosha' in Thai.

Meanwhile the chefs, husband and wife team Sanya and Rampai Chamnipa, were cooking our main courses; a traditional green Thai curry for me (Gaeng Kiew Wan) and Tamarind Duck – char grilled and topped with a tamarind and onion sauce. I'd asked for chicken with the green curry. I could have had pork, beef or prawn. The sauce, made with coconut milk, was just hot enough to be delicious without destroying all the many flavours. I could taste the aubergine and bamboo shoots and the piquant bite of sweet basil. There were green beans and peppers in there, too. Sticky rice must be the ultimate comfort food and mine, served in a small steamer, went perfectly with the curry. I tasted the duck and that was good, too, with a richly flavoured sauce, eaten with fried rice.

Main courses are divided into curries, duck, beef, pork, seafood or chicken dishes. There is a selection of noodle-based recipes and a good vegetarian choice, including mixed vegetables and bean curd cooked in red or green curry paste and coconut milk; stir-fried mixed vegetables with deep-fried bean curd and roasted cashew nuts; or stir-fried fresh aubergine with chilli, fresh soya beans and basil. There's a lot to tempt and, at around £8 or £9 for a main course, it's somewhere to go back time and again. If you really can't decide



Aey with a bowl of lotus blossom

what to eat, you can go for the set menus for two, which give a good choice of different dishes.

It was my duty to have a pudding and I found, although I'd had plenty to eat, I didn't feel uncomfortably full. So I had a banana that had been soaked in coconut milk, sprinkled with sesame seeds and deep-fried, served with a scoop of ice cream. It was delicious and was followed by a couple of tiny cups of delicate jasmine tea.

Perfect. I couldn't resist making a *wei* as we left and if the staff thought I was making a fool of myself they were far too nice and polite to giggle, simply bowing back.

What a lovely evening. 

Our meal, without drinks, came to around £42

The restaurant's signature dish is the evocatively named Crying Tiger, presumably so-named because its delicious flavours would make a tiger weep with joy. It's a traditional dish of marinated sirloin beef, grilled over a charcoal plate and served, sizzling, with a separate spicy sauce.