

Thai Bistro Cuisine by GUSTAVO ARELLANO

So which Orange County Thai restaurant offers the most curries? Almost all feature at least three—mild green, spicy yellow and hellacious red. Some include a fourth called panang, an even hotter version containing bell peppers and a smattering of peanuts. I know one place that offers masman, a Thai Muslim curry with peanuts, onions, potatoes and pineapple—but that eatery is Laotian.

Orange County's Thai curry king will surprise you: Thai Bistro Cuisine in Yorba Linda, a saffron-colored, porcelain-plated place about to double its seating capacity from 10 tables to 20, offers an incredible eight. No other celebrated local Thai restaurant comes close—not Royal Thai Cuisine, not Bangkok Taste Restaurant, not the dives in Anaheim's Thai Corner.

Some might accuse Thai Bistro of fudging a bit to capture the curry crown since red chili paste is the basis for four of their curries. Calm down, Encyclopedia Brown: the paste functions as masa does in a tamale, guiding each curry to a unique, sumptuous flavor. The red curry gently engulfs the crustaceans in the scallops and shrimp curry while adding a jolt to the otherwise unmitigated sweetness of the pineapple curry, a swamp of thick coconut milk and massive, juicy chunks of the fruit. The fascinating interplay between red chili paste and pineapple also dominates the duck curry, further freshened with basil leaves to transform the greasy, gamy bird into a memorable feast.

Thai Bistro is rightly famous for its specialty curries. While panang makes appearances at other restaurants, few make it so nuanced: a judicious amount of bittersweet red and green bell peppers burnished by crunchy, unsalted peanuts and the brimstone that is panang paste. The masman curry combines Buddhist cuisine's austerity with the heartiness of Islamic food to create the best interreligious mixer since the Nicene Council. My favorite curry is the gang kiew wan, a smoky selection that's almost purple thanks to roasted eggplant lengths snaking in and out of string beans, basil and crunchy bamboo shoots.

Thai Bistro cooks more than curries, yes, but really: if you're going to brave the auto mart that is the 91 freeway to eat in *Yorba Linda*, why would you order pad Thai or pineapple fried rice, even if it's yummy? Go to Thai Bistro for the curries—and a sip of their transcendent Thai iced tea.

THAI BISTRO CUISINE, 21560 YORBA LINDA BLVD., YORBA LINDA, (714) 693-2888.



Good beef, too
Photo by Matt Otto