



My Best Meal in Thailand: Bangkok's Soul Food

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[posted by [Dorothy](#)]

Back in May, I posted about a writer, Jarrett Wrisley, who was opening a restaurant in Bangkok and documenting the experience on [The Atlantic's blog](#), and [vowed I'd visit](#) the next time I was in town.

I'm pleased to report that I made good on my promise when I visited [Bangkok](#) on the second to last night of my honeymoon last month. And I wasn't disappointed - the meal, in fact, was the best I'd had in Thailand, and, for someone who loves Southeast Asian cuisine, that's saying quite a lot.

But then again, my experience eating in Bangkok on prior trips has pretty typically fallen into one of two camps: either I'd enjoy "authentic" Thai food from street stalls and more budget style restaurants, or I'd splurge on a

fancy meal at a "real" restaurant that had little to do with Thailand's everyday, traditional ingredients.

Not that I had a problem with either: you can be pretty much guaranteed that fried chicken with basil and cashews from a stall at the Chatuchak weekend market tastes worlds better than what you can find in most New York Thai takeout joints. In terms of more formal restaurants, dishes like the insanely good Peking Duck in the luxurious [China House](#) shouldn't be missed - really, the city has its fair share of fine dining establishments that can impress the most cosmopolitan of palates.

[Soul Food](#), on the other hand, sits somewhere in the middle of these two types of experiences. Originally planned as a place to enjoy Thai-style street eats in a comfortable setting, Jarrett has taken his original vision and elevated it higher. Now part cocktail bar and part restaurant, the menu at Soul Food offers up Thai food, yes, but Thai food that's a touch gourmet, created with fresh, local ingredients that are organic whenever possible, and sustainably sourced. The menu is constantly changing at the restaurant, with a substantial list of daily specials inspired by what-ever's best at the market.

So just how was the food on our visit?

Considering the restaurant had so recently opened, the food was outstanding. But, regardless of how new the restaurant was, the food was outstanding, period. We loved the Southern Thai Samosas (120 baht) so much that we finished our first order and had a second. Made with minced chicken, cumin, a spring roll wrapper, and lots of mint and yogurt dip, it was Bangkok meets Bangladesh in the best way. My personal favorite from the "drink snacks" menu, however, was the Mieng Kham (150 baht), butterhead lettuce leaves with fried garlic, herbs, limes, grilled pork jowl and tamarind jam.

Of course, my husband and I also had to try the Gai Tawt Hat Yai (140 baht), fried chicken served with spicy and sweet sauce and an amazing side of watermelon pickles, one of the dishes that surely inspired the name of the restaurant - [Jarrett has written](#) that he sees Thai street food

as being akin to Soul Food from the American South. After tasting the down home dish, I'd have to agree.

The curries were perhaps the best part of our meal. Forget the standard green, red, or Massaman styles traditionally served in Thai restaurants here. At Soul Food, curries get creative. Our favorite was a Burmese-style offering (150 baht) with ginger and braised pork belly. It was so good that it inspired us, despite being stuffed, to order another curry off the menu (a special being offered that night with grass-fed sirloin). Another friend who returned to the restaurant and had a curry with pork jowl couldn't stop raving about it. "I don't usually like curry," he confided, "but this had a seriously incredible flavor."

The comestibles, I should note, aren't the only things that stand out at Soul Food. A big part of dining at the restaurant is enjoying an artfully made cocktail or a hard to find glass of wine; unlike other places in Bangkok, the bartenders really know how to make a Manhattan or martini, or recommend the right kind of wine to go with your food.

The one downside of our visit? The service, though earnest and friendly, was rather slow. We suspected this was partially due to a private party happening on the second floor and in part due to the aforementioned newness of the restaurant. Regardless, we didn't mind that our meal took longer than it should have; we thoroughly enjoyed the people-watching we were afforded as we lingered over our dishes. Part of Soul Food's charm is its scene: it's a bit expat, a bit hipster local, and a whole lot of buzz, especially on a Friday night.

On that note, if you go to Soul Food (and you should go), make a reservation and ask for a seat at the bar, where service seemed to be swift and customers mingled. That's where I'll be sitting the next time I go back. Though a return trip might not happen for a few years, I have no doubt that Soul Food will still be around.

[All photos courtesy owner Jarrett Wrisley]