

**YUM**

Appetizers and desserts are worthy bookends to the menu at King and I, a Thai restaurant in Fairfield.

DINING/FAIRFIELD

Try the Appetizers, Along With Thai Beer

By STEPHANIE LYNES

WITH its muted color scheme, delicate tile flooring and dark wood wainscoting, Fairfield's King and I is as elegant as it is welcoming. The accommodating service at this small Thai restaurant on the Post Road (sister restaurant to one of the same name in Bridgeport) is diner-friendly, as are the prices. And some of the food is more than satisfactory, especially the appetizers, although there is a lack of consistency in quality and preparation.

One night, my dining companions and I enjoyed several very good appetizers, including crisp mouthfuls of deep-fried wontons stuffed with ground chicken that was tasty despite being dry. Even more pleasing were the coin-sized minced fish cakes (tod mun), with their wonderfully non-Western, gelatinous texture, colored red with curry paste and fragrant with lemongrass.

Larb, a mixture of ground chicken, chilis and toasted rice powder, was

moister than that dish sometimes is, dressed with a sauce that tasted appropriately (but not too assertively for this Western palate) of fish sauce. And the papaya salad (som tum) was as fresh and light as any I've eaten.

The squid yum (one can order it made with shrimp instead) was served on a bed of lettuce and seasoned with a blend of lemongrass and chili that was so addictive that I wolfed it down despite the squid being overcooked and overly chewy.

A plate of fried calamari, ordered at another meal, was just as tough, and the very sweet, jamlike sauce was not nearly as interesting as that on the yum.

At that same meal, I had the least successful entrée I tasted here: a whole deep-fried snapper (pla rama) coated with a sweet tamarind-based sauce and garnished with bell peppers. The fish was substantially overcooked and dry, the sauce cloying. That night, my companion had better luck with a special of mixed seafood served on a hot metal platter; the seafood was properly



cooked, and the mild sauce appealing.

I was surprised by the quantity of animal protein used at King and I in a cuisine justly known for its vegetables. In fact, there are very few vegetable preparations on the menu here. The delicious drunken noodles — wide, chewy rice noodles stir-fried with Thai basil, chili, and garlic — were garnished, as many of the entrees were, with shrimp, chicken and pork.

When vegetables played a more significant role, the results were, again, inconsistent. Thick stalks of beautifully cooked asparagus were sautéed with shrimp, scallops, squid and crab (which tasted like surimi) in a mild brown garlic sauce, but the dish was unexceptional, as was sautéed eggplant with shrimp, chicken, pork and basil (and the eggplant was oily). But in another entrée, scallops were delicately presented in a light, green curry sauce with peas and green bell peppers.

King and I served a very good sticky rice dessert, garnished with gloriously ripe mango slices and a scattering of sesame seeds. Some of my companions also liked the deep-fried banana in wonton skins, accompanied by a mountain of vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce.

King and I is a lovely place for a Thai beer accompanied by a handful of appetizers, particularly the papaya salad, the yum and the fish cake. Entrees are somewhat iffy, but if you're in the neighborhood, the price is right.

King and I

260 Post Road
Fairfield
(203) 256-1664
www.kingandict.com

GOOD

THE SPACE Attractive dark-wood bar just inside the door, leading into an adjoining dining room. Ample parking.

THE CROWD Quiet, adult crowd, dressed from casual to more formal.

THE BAR Cocktails, beer and wine, Thai iced tea and coffee.

THE BILL Dinner entrees, \$9.95 to \$18.95.

WHAT WE LIKE Yum, papaya salad (som tum), fish cake (tod mun), larb, wonton; scallops with green curry, drunken noodle;

sticky rice with fresh mango.

IF YOU GO Lunch: Tuesday to Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dinner: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday, 5 to 9:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5 to 10:30 p.m. Reservations recommended.

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