

REVIEW

Latitude Eight° Thai Grill

ADDING TO THE CHARM OF DOWNTOWN CHANDLER, LATITUDE EIGHT° IS RAISING THE BAR WHEN IT COMES TO TASTY THAI FOOD.

DOWNTOWN CHANDLER is shaping up to be quite the dining district, and Latitude Eight° Thai Grill is one of the new kids on the block giving the area its good reputation.

The interior is modern and minimalist, with dark wood floors and tables providing a stark contrast to the white walls. Despite the slick look, it feels warm – probably because owner David Fliger and his mother Nicha are gracious hosts, working the floor to greet guests and chat them up.

He hoped to have a soft opening over the summer, but the place is already a hit. It's easy to see why once you try it.

Spring rolls (\$6) with tofu rather than shrimp were fresh and lively; not a wilted mint leaf in the pile. Funky tamarind sauce was a welcome change from the usual, too.

Forget everything you've learned about chicken satay (\$7) – these succulent bites

were nothing like the petrified pieces of yore. Beef satay (\$7) was outstanding as well, with a hint of vinegary marinade.

Spongy fish cakes (\$8) weren't greasy, and scallions and spices gave them a kick. Yellow curry crab cakes (\$9 for three) were a study in balance, with a slow heat sneaking up while letting the seafood flavor seep through. Lightly breaded calamari rings (\$8) dusted with salt and pepper and kissed with a light sweet-and-sour sauce were springy but not rubbery.

Thai beef salad (\$9) was a four-alarm fire on the palate. The taste of the sliced flank steak got somewhat lost under all that heat, but the rest of it – cool cilantro leaves contrasted with searing spices – made for a rich and lovable dish if you can handle it. Same goes for green papaya salad (\$8) with an amazing but searing dressing. Two skewered shrimps on top were overcooked, however.

Slurp-worthy tom yum soup (\$8) was aromatic with a slow burn, but not a lot. We were told they were still toying with recipes to find the right balance in each, so let them know your heat tolerance and they'll tailor the dishes to your liking.

Pad kee mao (\$14), medallions of rare flank steak on a bed of wide noodles in musaman curry, was earthy and garlicky with a bit of zip on the finish. Loved the noodle flavors, but the flank steak needed something more. Seared ahi tuna (\$19) was stellar, with its buttery texture and mild flavor enhanced by a black pepper sesame crust and sweet-hot sauce.

Yellow curry chicken (\$11), ordered hot for the fiery one at the table, was fantastic – a complex blend of spices that did somersaults on the tongue before letting go. The potatoes and carrots needed more cooking time – they were still too hard – but that's a minor gripe and likely a one-time anomaly. Musaman short rib (\$16) on the next visit came with soft carrots and a fragrant sauce with cinnamon, cumin and cardamom coating the tender boneless beef chunks and peanuts. Even non-Thai food lovers would surely gobble this dish.

Garlic prawns (\$15) and green seafood curry (\$17) both had delicate sauces that enhanced, not overpowered, the ingredients. Though I bit into one musty mussel, most of the meat (including scallops, crab legs and fish) was flavorful but not fishy.

Pad Thai (\$13) was terrific, with a nutty sweetness and light chili flavor. The two huge shrimps perched on top tasted fresh, not out of a freezer bag.

Sesame-dusted sticky rice with mango (\$5), a perennial favorite of mine, was lovely – sublime slices of soft, ripe mango with subtly sweet rice drizzled with coconut milk and served with mango purée. But baby bites of piping hot fried plantain with a crisp coconut-studded skin and kaffir lime-coconut sauce (\$4) were even better.

At press time, the menu is still a work in progress. Some things will stay, some will go; others will be tweaked. But these visits indicate the bar already has been set pretty high and seems to keep rising. So set a course for Latitude Eight°.

— Geri Koeppele can be reached at phxmag@citieswestpub.com.



Green seafoam curry

DETAILS

Latitude Eight° Thai Grill

Cuisine: Thai

Address: 11 W. Boston St., Ste. 5, Chandler

Phone: 480-722-0560

Website: latitude-eight.com

Hours: 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Monday through Friday; 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., Tuesday through Thursday; 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., Friday; 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday

Recommendations: Thai beef salad; pad Thai; yellow chicken curry; Musaman short rib; green seafoam curry; tom yum soup; fried plantain and sweet rice with mango.