

Sri-Thai a tasty oasis in a sea of chain restaurants

By Chad Jones
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STAFF WRITERS

SRI-THAI Restaurant in Dublin's Hacienda Crossings shopping center is a bright spot of originality in a mall dominated by chain restaurants and stores.

Entrees on the daily lunch menu are all \$6.95, and include the soup of the day, salad and rice. You get a reasonable portion — not large by American standards — that's a satisfying mid-day meal.

With its pleasant interior, low noise level, white tablecloths and speedy service, Sri-Thai is a step up from the normal lunchtime hustle and bustle. The restaurant is elegant without being fussy, nice without being too formal.

After several lunch visits, we can say Sri-Thai has some real strengths. The kitchen turns out consistently satisfying meals, and the vegetables are always fresh and never overcooked.

What the restaurant lacks in authenticity — lunch dishes seem as inspired by popular American-Chinese cuisine as by traditional Thai recipes — it more than makes up for in flavor.

Immediately after ordering your meal, the soup of the day,

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usually hot-and-sour soup, arrives at the table. The soup whets your appetite, but is a little too sweet.

Meals arrive with equal efficiency. A mound of rice, orange slices and a small salad accompany the entrée. The salad is your basic iceberg lettuce with a creamy, mayonnaise-based dressing. It's nothing remarkable, but is fine as a starter.

One of the best lunch plates is the Bangkok Pepper Steak, which consists of sliced beef sautéed with Bell peppers in a brown sauce. The high-quality beef is always tender and the cuts are carefully chosen. When paired with the slightly crunchy peppers and spicy sauce, the combination is irresistible.

For vegetarians, a good option is the Spicy Organic Tofu Basil. Deep-fried cubes of tofu are sautéed with eggplant, onion, basil and chili-garlic sauce. The dish is well-prepared with generous amounts of eggplant that are soft but not mushy and tofu that's not greasy. Diners are free to regulate the spiciness of their meals, which proves helpful because

this dish could stand to turn up the heat.

The curry dishes in general tend to be mild and could be kicked up a notch or two. Yellow Curry brings slices of

chicken with potatoes onions and carrots, and the Red Curry with beef is slightly sweet. The Green Curry comes with zucchini, green peas, basil and seafood. The dish could benefit from a better balance as our entrée featured one scallop, one shrimp and a whole boatload of calamari.

Other seafood dishes were more to our liking. A Father's Day special (\$7.95) combines shrimp, scallops and asparagus in a spicy basil-garlic sauce. The tasty sauce does not overwhelm and the asparagus is cooked to perfection. While portions of seafood — 2½ scallops and three medium shrimp — were on the skimpy side, the meat is tender and succulent.

A great place for an affordable meal, Sri-Thai is a welcome alternative to the usual lunchtime fare.

► Sri-Thai Restaurant is at 4930 Dublin Blvd., Suite 620, Hacienda Crossings. Open daily, lunch is served from 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.; dinner is served from 5-9:30 p.m. (925) 828-2281.



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ANNE MEENAKIT serves Bangkok Pepper Steak at Sri-Thai Restaurant in Dublin.