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Suehada Tongpapipak watches her chicken roast at Manola's Thai Cuisine, located at 652 E. Broadway, on Monday.

Tim Kupsick
Freelance
Photographer

Manola's offers common decor, savory Thai food

The new Thai restaurant, located in the campus area, caters to a variety of tastes

By **Natasha Chilingierian**
Pulse Reporter

Until now, Mekala's was the only choice for tasty, near-campus Thai fare. Enter Manola's Thai Cuisine — a newly-opened East Asian restaurant that joins the existing string of Oriental dining choices on Franklin Boulevard/Broadway Street.

You'd think a new Thai restaurant established so close to Mekala's would arrive with a few secret weapons for a successful competition, but Manola's is as indistinguishable as a Starbucks in downtown Seattle.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Upon walking into Manola's, the words "family friendly" and "mainstream" come to mind. Basic decorations, such as golden dragons and leafy plants, are unmemorable and could belong in any neighborhood Chinese restaurant. Customers, many of them grandparents and children, sit in an open, bright room, which on one side holds a mirrored wall for the illusion of expansion. Window-side booths give the restaurant a diner feel.

Manola's scores points, however, for its wide selection of food, generous portions and rich flavors. Dishes arrive on serving plates to be shared among diners, which is great for sampling but tends to crowd the table. The Thom Kaa Ghai soup — which, like all soups, is big enough to be shared as an appetizer among four people — contains a smooth, slightly spicy tomato and coconut milk broth and is full of

vegetables. The chicken bits in the Ginger Chicken dish are powerful on the palate, but they arrive lost in sea of celery. The Pad Thai is traditional and satisfying, and is a safe choice if the menu looks overwhelming.

Vegetarian Pineapple Curry is exceptional — the yellow sauce comes filled with fried strips of tofu and an array of vegetables including carrots and bamboo shoots. When ordered mild, the creamy flavor stands above the spice, and sauce-drenched vegetables can even be eaten without sticky white rice as a spice-suppressor. There is much to explore in the extensive menu; other offerings include fried rice served in a pineapple shell and a flaming hen. Most entrees go for around \$10, with seafood dishes selling for about \$15.

Desserts are mostly banana, rice and coconut-based. The Banana Rolls sound enticing, but they come squishy and wrapped in crunchy phyllo dough. A mound of coconut ice cream, drizzled with chocolate syrup, turns the concoction into an American sundae. At \$5.95, the failed mixture of textures and tastes is not worth the price. You're better off sticking with plain coconut ice cream, which is a sweet counterbalance to spicy food but still racks in at \$3.95.

Mark down Manola's as a casual spot to explore flavorful Thai cuisine and fill up on explosive tastes. With such a wide variety, you're likely to discover something new each time you dine. But as a newcomer on a strip of Oriental food specialists, Manola's does a fine job of blending in. It's just another link on the Franklin Boulevard/Broadway Street Asian food chain.

Manola's Thai Cuisine is located at 652 E. Broadway.

Contact the Pulse reporter at natashachilingierian@dailyemerald.com.

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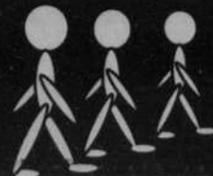
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