

# MALAI THAI

Dive in and find something delicious at this new Long Beach restaurant

I stumbled across Malai Thai rather by accident. Driving through Long Beach, I noticed the sign. “Wait a minute,” I muttered, “what’s that?” It hadn’t appeared in any of my research. I thought: Maybe they’re new?; or, maybe they’re just not online? Either way, Thai sounded good, and I was up for some blind exploration.

It was around 7 p.m. on a slow Sunday evening. I opened the door to a small room with a service window to the kitchen, a cash register and a small table or two. My companion and I were greeted by a sweet, diminutive woman of perhaps 60 or 70, who I can only assume was Thai. She said “hello,” smiled ear to ear, and led us gently to the adjacent dining room.

Or, should I say, dining rooms. There were three of them. Each was small and sparsely decorated, save for a few cross hatch wall hangings and a traditional fan. The tables and chairs were so unadorned they might as well have been found at a conference center yard sale. My companion and I were the only diners, and a few moments after we sat down a mystical flute music cued up on the stereo. The temperature inside was brisk, and the place settings without knives. I looked across the table at my companion and raised my eyebrows, as if to say: What are we in for?

The menu was numbered and voluminous. It included appetizers; soups; salads; two pages of specials (18, incorporating mostly seafood and duck); a page of 13 fried rices (available with fried tofu, chicken, pork, beef or seafood); and a page of noodles (nine) and curries (five), also with choice of protein. Deciding was difficult.

I asked the host/waitress what she might recommend and quickly it became clear: She spoke little English and understood less. “This very good,” she said, pointing to the “Seafood Lover” special, the one dish on the menu with a large, color photograph corresponding. It showed a smorgasbord of calamari, shrimp, scallops and more. She said again, “Yes, very good.” I still needed a moment, and happily she shuffled off.

After pouring feckless over the multitude, I finally had to just settle on something. And I did: the Roasted Duck Curry (\$17). My companion went with the aforementioned Seafood Lover (\$18), and we added a calamari appetizer (\$8).

A few short minutes later the deep fried calamari arrived, stacked on a small plate, drizzled with a sweet and sour cream sauce and looking more like onion rings. They were heavily breaded and peppered, and the meat inside was ample. The meat was also suspiciously uniform, and I wondered if it came processed and frozen.

The same couldn’t be said for the abundance of stir-fried oceanica on the Seafood Lover plate. It was teeming with vegetables and fresh-tasting scallops, swollen clams and shrimp, all covered in a salty, savory clam sauce, and topped with a small cut of breaded salmon, which was lightly crispy, almost candied on the outside, with soft pink innards. It was a fine, careful crown.

The Roasted Duck Curry was served steaming hot. It was sweet, with a very manageable spice. The duck was slow cooked and extremely tender. Succulent and thick, the texture was almost beef-like. The duck was rich, satisfying, and there was loads of it — some with the skin on, and some with it mostly separated. Mixing in the bowl were bell peppers and pineapples, which were welcome explosions of tropical sweetness. Being recently chopped and added to the broth on order — rather than included in the slow cooking — enabled the fruits and

Our main courses, served with white rice, were enough for two full meals apiece.



Photo by Mouth of the Columbia

The Seafood Lover special at Malai Thai teems with vegetables and seafood.

veggies — particularly the peppers — to retain their utmost character and crunch.

To our order I added Phad Thai to go, not so much because I yearned for it — our main courses, served with white rice, were enough for two full meals apiece. I got the Phad Thai because I feel like it is often a go-to order for the uninitiated or less-adventurous. I got it with chicken (\$11) and when it came to open the styrofoam container the next day I was staggered by the weight: It must’ve been a pound and a half, minimum. Most of that was noodles, with a good helping of

chicken, some eggs, a few bean sprouts, peanut crumbles and a scallion or three. It looked rather monochromatic, and tasted much the same: a very simple, bland Phad Thai. As much of it still sits in the refrigerator, it feels like enough for at least three meals. Were there a college in Long Beach, it’d make perfect dorm room chow. The rest of us, though, would be better served by the curries, whose taste, variety, complexity and look will be surer to please.

And really, that’s about all I can tell you about Malai Thai without procuring a translator. Well, OK, I can take a few shots in the dark:

I recon the place is new. A scant presence online, including recent inclusion by the aggregators seems to suggest as much. It seems to be a family business — I witnessed what looked like three generations at work (or being babysat). A member of what appeared the middle generation helped run our food (which appeared promptly), but spoke no better English than the host. Despite the language barrier, graciousness prevailed. And to that end: Intent goes a long way.

I suppose the same goes for the perspective diner: If you’re looking to be taken on a hand-held tour of Thai food or need to make a complicated order, Malai Thai might not be the place. But if you’re willing to take a chance on discovering something delicious — as I did with the Duck Curry — then dive right in.

## mouth OF THE COLUMBIA

### COAST WEEKEND’S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • [mouth@coastweekend.com](mailto:mouth@coastweekend.com)

#### Malai Thai

Rating: ★ ★ ★

509 Pacific Ave. S, Long Beach, WA

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**HOURS:** Open from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day.

**PRICE:** \$\$ — Entrées range from \$10 to \$18, portions are ample to extreme.

**SERVICE:** Gracious but, with little English, not able to explain/understand much

**VEGETARIAN OPTIONS:** Vast, with tofu options and myriad of dishes.

**DRINKS:** Coffee, tea, soda, no spirits.

#### KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region