

FALLS CHURCH NEWS-PRESS

Restaurant Spotlight: Manee Thai

By Natalie Bedell

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Manee Thai Restaurant is an equal mix of flavor and flair.

Located on Arlington's heavily-driven Columbia Pike, Manee is a reason to pull over and de-stress over a wide variety of appetizers, curries and Thai favorites.

From this reporter's go-to Panang Curry (\$9.95) to the tongue-twister Pla Dook Pad Ped (\$11.95, that's deep-fried Thai cat fish for those curious), the menu has got something for everyone. Yes, that includes the vegetarians — arguably one of the largest menu sections. And let's face it, nothing sounds quite as happy to be animal-friendly than Manee's Bean Sprouts Delight (\$8.95).



Manee Thai Restaurant (Photo: News-Press)

Kidding aside, one thing all palettes can agree on is the restaurant's quirky — or what some crafters would call decoupage-chic — décor. The first wall customers see (above, right) is a collection of what look to be black and white magazine clippings glued directly onto the wall as a collage-turned-conversation starter. Manee's interior-design scheme is where stock modern meets, well, imaginative. From the random rainbow brush strokes on the bar's countertop to the out-of-nowhere purple hallway leading to the bathroom, there's enough eye candy to fill in the gaps until customers' drinks arrive.

Lest we not forget the real draw — the food.

Call it boring, but once a diner finds something he or she likes, they tend to stick to it. The Panang Curry, with a spice score of one out of three peppers, hits the spot every time. Chicken is recommended, but there's also a beef option. This peanut-based curry is good for the spicy-food phobics, yet still manages to offer a bit of a kick for the flavor snobs with kaffir lime leaves, landing happily in the center of crowd-pleaser picks.

Now, for those looking to jump off the bandwagon, a little Seafood Phuket (\$11.95) may do the trick. No, that's not a fancy way to spin a commonly-known slur. The Phuket Province of Thailand is known for its exotic spread of seafood, hence the name. At Manee, shrimp, squid and scallops arrive sautéed in chili sauce, scallions, onions, mushrooms and sweet basil leaves. Picky eaters, beware; that's a whole lot of flavor packed into one dish. Not to mention, it's rated with two peppers to boot.

Keep in mind, however, customers are able to customize their order to a lower-pepper rating to tame the spice of a dish.

Feel free to cool down that fired-up feast with an array of beverages ranging from Thai Iced Tea (\$2.75), Jasmine Tea (\$1.75) or one of Manee's many margaritas or mixed drinks. There's a full bar waiting to entertain, not to mention it's where most of the hustle and bustle can be found on any given night.

Manee claims to have the one and only Thai Hot Pot (the fondue of Asian cuisine) in Virginia via a 15-percent-off coupon on its Web site, though this reporter hasn't done the proper research and therefore cannot confirm or deny. However, the dine-in weekday lunch specials at \$6.95 a piece, including a choice of one of two soups and spring roll, do exist. And they are a steal.

What Manee lacks in foot traffic, the never-crowded, best-kept secret makes up for by being one of the few restaurants on a busy street where customers can find a prompt table, low-key environment and great food without the added soundtrack of deafening chatter.

Manee Thai Restaurant

2500 Columbia Pike, Arlington, VA

703-920-2033 • maneethai.com

Hours:

Sunday – Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.; Thursday – Saturday, 11:30 a.m. – 11 p.m.