

## Awesome meal in Thailand



Karen holding her improvised tin sippy cup (it came with a straw), waiting for dinner.

After several days with a tour group you realize (which happened at breakfast this morning) that you've pretty much come to the end of the line with hotel buffets. They're all varying degrees of... what exactly? Unadventurous? Sure, it's not the same buffet food you'd have at home, but it doesn't take long before it's the same, but in a different way. And you start thinking the wrong things about what Thai food is really like, just like a visitor to the US would if they ate at hotel buffets.



This is one fantastic bowl of soup, noodles & chicken... and those big round balls that one could easily believe to be something eaten with great trepidation on an episode of survivor.

But that came to an end today. As we split from our main group of 17 and ventured north to Chaing Mai, we suddenly found ourselves largely on our own, with no full-time tour guide, no other travelers on the same itin, no itinerary at all really. Just an older woman named Noi, who picked us up at the airport, showed us some tour options in a binder and asked if we'd like to do any of them. No more communal meals, no more gameplan.



Karen gives a Thumbs Up to this place!

No more buffets! Well, almost. I'm sure we'll continue to use the hotel's included breakfast buffet option, and Karen and I came darned close to having to suffer through some more hotel food of some sort as we passed up street food vendor after street food vendor, with her turning each down because she was worried they were going to be too spicy. It was like traveling with my son (Kevin) in France, and getting pretty frustrating until finally she broke down.

I'm not sure what it was about this place that did the trick; maybe the fact that they looked to have half a dozen chicken options (chicken's pretty safe) and I told her we could order two different things and she could eat whichever was least-spicy? Or maybe she just got worn down and tired. Whatever it was, who cares, I was getting hungry and it was going to be something other than hotel food.



What we avoided... yet another buffet. Which, at 300 baht (\$9), doesn't seem too expensive. Except that we spend 60 baht (\$2), for both of us together. Likely on a better meal.

And who knew that it would be, I think, our best meal in Thailand? By a long shot? With a street setting straight out of an eclectic Anthony Bourdain piece, water poured into tin cups (seriously!), and ohmygoodness the most-fantastic noodles ever, as in who knew that I could really like noodles? I don't know what was in that bowl beyond noodles and chicken; I think there were some pieces of peanuts and something that could pass for testicles being served up on Survivor. But it was really, really good. I later figured out that they were actually fish balls, and, to tell you the truth, a bit disappointed about that. I ate them thinking they could have been something much different, and what does it matter what they actually were when you had yourself believing at the time they were something far more adventurous? Daring even?

And what did this meal cost? 30 baht each, 60 for the two of us. As in, \$2? Much less than a single bottled water would have run from the buffet?



Besides cheap roadside food, you can also get a tooth filled for as long as \$17. I'm going to have to have a talk with my dentist about

this!

It was one of those situations where, when you looked over the "menu" of offerings written on a wall, you weren't sure if the decimal point was off a place and the 30 was actually 300 baht, which would have seemed reasonable to someone from the US. You were pretty sure it really couldn't have been 30. How could it be? \$1 for dinner? But that's what it was. I gave him 20 extra, not sure whether that would be appropriate or not but felt like he was owed much more than that for such a fine meal.

That meal certainly put this morning into context-

I was quite proud of myself, finding this coffee place at the Bangkok airport that served up drinks resembling what I'm used to. I was so happy with my "find" of a decent coffee shop at the Bangkok airport, the "decent" finding coming from its ability to mimic what I'm used to back home.

That being a mocha with the right mix of coffee and milk, not too sweet, and available in small, medium, or large (I think it's a reasonable frustration that nearly every other coffee place I've tried here in Thailand has had just one size available, it's what would pass for "small" in the US, and it's only 2/3rds filled).



I was quite proud of myself this morning, finding this coffee place at the Bangkok airport that served up drinks resembling what I'm used to. As if!

But I've long said that it's dumb to be frustrated by things unlike what you'd find at home; what's the point to travel if not to find something different? Except when it's coffee. That, apparently, should be the same everywhere, made exactly as I would find it back home. "Damn fine coffee" I remarked, in my best impression of Agent Cooper from Twin Peaks. Thank goodness dinner put that in perspective.