

Chaophraya

Is this the UK's worst named Restaurant? Is it in fact the worst restaurant? It's a traditional Thai restaurant - is it good, bad or indifferent? Win a meal on Gordo, read the story!

Chaophraya. Thai for 'Outstanding Right Proper Thai Food and Service. By Gum.'

'Chaophraya' to Gordo's mind is possibly the worst name that any restaurant could give itself. All because of marketing. Firstly, unless you speak Thai or indeed have visited Thailand, you will not have a clue what type of food it's all about; or whether it's a shop, a restaurant, or an STD.

Imagine, your friend calls you; 'So, we went to Chaophraya at the weekend, it's a fantastic Thai'. Wow, you think, then find yourself three days later on the phone to an Indian gentleman in Bangalor. 'I need the name of a restaurant in Manchester please, it's called CHOWFRYER'. Five minutes later: 'F*** it, gimme the Siam Orchid...'

You get the idea. Gordo has been watching the place for some time; it's the old Figaro, sat above Sam's Chophouse. Gordo first visited a week or so after it opened, for a quick lunch. Since, he has had a bar snack, a dinner for four and a dinner for 24, having decided to hold the Manchester Confidential Christmas party there. Which gives you an indication of what Gordo thinks about the place.

Lets start with the gaff. When you walk in, you are given a little bow of welcome and a great big smile. Let Gordo tell you, there is no waiting for that bow and a smile. The staff's feet set on fire trying to get to you. A big fuzzy warm feeling flows around you. They have a restaurant over in Leeds, of which The Yorkshire Post's food critic says 'Waitresses?..Chaophraya have personal assistants'. He isn't joking.

The room has been transformed from unfeeling to feeling. The stools are a bit high, and you find your bottom sliding off them (mind you, Gordo has a big one to start sliding - Ed) but the rest of the downstairs bar area is supremely welcoming, with fantastic looking bar snack menus. A good range of beer on tap along with some great Thai beers by the bottle.

Upstairs you find the restaurant 'proper'. Each chair fits two to three Thai girls or one Gordo in comfort. They are in fact big chunky armchairs. The staff float around the space, instantly ready to be of service yet not pushy; they scan the room constantly. Every single restaurant in Manchester should send their staff here for training. These girls and boys deserve a gold medal.

The menu is the size of the Manchester Central Library. Printing it off from the website swallowed sixteen pages. They list the name of the dish in Thai, a description in English and then do the usual stuff with the chillies, nothing to three. If you can't work that out, lick your fingers and stick them in the light socket, you'll find it improves your clarity no end.

If you don't know your Thai and there are two or more of you, try one of the set menus; it will save you a few bob and deliver a well balanced meal. Even Gordo gets

it wrong sometimes, ordering from the menu and finishing up with a cracking meal but feeling like stuffed walrus, with too much fried stuff.

The usual suspects are here, Satay Gai (chicken marinated in Thai herbs and honey on bamboo sticks grilled over charcoal served with a peanut sauce, £6.00) were outstanding. The chicken was breast sliced thinly, good quality, cooked over charcoal as stated but not dried out. Juicy. The peanut sauce is made fresh on the premises. Poh Pia Tod (crispy golden spring rolls stuffed with shredded chicken, vermicelli, sweet mushroom and carrots served with sweet and sour plum sauce £6.00) were a match for anything that Harry Yeung produces over at the Yang Sing. Crispy filo-type pastry taste bombs, the tightly wrapped ingredients steaming their flavours together, making extremely merry with the plum sauce once you have bitten into the little sweethearts. Can you tell Gordo liked them?

The salads as starters are a good choice to have with the fried and barbecued stuff. The Thai flavours spring through ready to turn sweet or sour in a moment, crisp leaves, shredded vegetables and a little something on top. Gordo's was a crisply fried soft shell crab. The third salad Gordo has had, they are an indicator of the kitchen's commitment to fresh and best. You finish with a palette that is ready for the main course.

Lets talk rice first. Khao Niew (Thai favourite sticky rice £2.60) was fantastic. The best sticky rice ever. If you can remember mopping up your gravy with spankily fresh bread your Gran had baked three hours ago you will understand when Gordo was using spoonfuls of the sticky, gooey mess to mop up a variety of sauces, not least the Gai Nutty (Chicken again marinated then stuck through with Lemon grass and grilled with other Thai herbs, served with another play on the peanut sauce, more runny and flavoured with a citrus tang £11.50). That sauce nearly got Gordo using his tongue on the plate.

Weeping Tiger (aka Crying Tiger, grilled sirloin steak marinated in black pepper and the aromatic Thai herbs this time, lots of chillies, £12.00) was slightly off the track; I can use fillet steak which takes the fiery sauce on board a little more lustily. Ka Gae Op Palow (braised lamb shank with, wait for it, special Thai herbs, £13.00) was a table-wide favourite. A bit like Jamie Oliver's but with personality. Stick a fork in, pull a chunk off. A world beater this. Gordo hasn't seen many sheep mucking about in rice paddies or dodging snakes in rain forests, so we will have to assume the Thai chefs took a detour to Wales on the way over and made merry with the sheep.

The Pad Thai (fried rice noodles, with prawns in this case, £8.00) were exemplary, a common dish cooked brilliantly. The difference between a Holland's steak and kidney pudding and your Gran's. No comparison.

On four occasions now this place has delivered class on a plate whilst arguably having the best service in Manchester. Only Bruno over at The French in the Midland Hotel has the edge. As for the ambience; really, really lovely. You simply relax here, your glasses never left empty unless you want them like that. It's a good time. In fact, it's a really great time. You name an occasion, come here, it's the right place.

Fancy a meal on Gordo? Email him by clicking [here](#) including your email, name, mobile number and the answer to the question 'what is Chaophraya', and he will pull

one of you out of his virtual hat for a £50 tab at the Restaurant. Closing date 13th January.

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Click [here](#) for contact details. Believe us, it will save you a lot of time ;-)

16.25/20, a very definite Gordo Go

Gordo