

Kitchen Queen

Chef Lamyai at **Siam Residence**
goes out of her way for **each guest**.



Tucked away on the west of the island lies a quiet, peaceful, deluxe boutique resort called Siam Residence. It turns out this resort has something very special - its head chef, Khun Lamyai.

For me personally, it was quite an honour to meet someone who has been a chef for more than half my lifetime, and I discovered Khun Lamyai has come a long way since her first days in the kitchen which were, incidentally, right here at Siam Residence.

Back then, more than 20 years ago, the head chef was an Austrian gentleman and, taking Khun Lamyai under his wing, he spent more than six years teaching her everything he knew, sharing his skills, tips and tricks about preparing European food. That's probably why you'll find things like Schnitzel on the menu along with other European dishes. You'll also find the menu is in both German and English. The resort is very popular with Austrian and German holidaymakers so it seems she has nailed the techniques of cooking authentic European food.

Khun Lamyai only started cooking when she was 22. There are no stories of her serving five-course meals to her family before her 10th birthday, but she does love her job now. In this day and age, it's wonderful to hear someone talk about their work with obvious love.

Her cooking passion hasn't been passed down to her daughter, who, although very proud of her mum and what she's capable of creating, is more than happy to let her mum cook for her and her family. Very spicy curries or fried noodles are usually what appear on the table at dinner times at home. She smiles as she says that although her daughter is also involved in the hotel industry, she can be found perfecting her English in customer relations rather than learning how lemongrass and coconut milk go together.

Back in the restaurant, Khun Lamyai and her team of six, start serving breakfast at 7:00 am. Guests can choose from English fry-up breakfasts to continental options or even healthy muesli and yoghurt. There are no Thai breakfast options unless there are Thai guests in the resort, in which case the traditional rice porridge is on offer.

Lunch starts at 12:00 pm and the restaurant remains open until around 11:00 pm. The chef's hours depend on how busy the resort is, but judging from Khun Lamyai's loyalty, she's not really concerned with how many hours she works as long as she has enough time to get home and complete her household chores.

There is an extensive seafood selection on the dinner menu which is bought fresh from the market every morning, ensuring you're getting the absolute best quality dishes. If you order seafood from the menu, you'll know that earlier on that day, it was alive and well and living in the Gulf of Thailand. Lobster, prawns, red snapper, white snapper and squid are all available to tempt you.

The restaurant's menu here is used as a rough guide. Khun Lamyai seems to act as a personal chef to each guest here. Yes, I'm sure you've heard that in most restaurants, you can ask for, for example, salad instead of chips, or more spice, or no mushrooms, but here, she will happily personalises anything (and I mean anything) for each guest. She checks with each guest how they like their food, if something needs to be added or taken away or if you have any special request, she will fulfil it for you. When I told her I quite fancied rambutan ice cream with pineapple sauce, without blinking an eye, she told me no problem. Maybe you want curried fish for breakfast, maybe you want fried fruit for lunch, or a chicken and cheese toasted sandwich for dinner. Just ask and you will receive. Now that's good customer service.

Being aware that her guests might not all enjoy spicy food, she will also change any dish to match the guest's 'spiciness' requirement - as long as they enjoy the food, she is happy. If the guests haven't been to Thailand before or perhaps have had no experience of Thai food, she will ask questions about their likes and dislikes, what meat they like, if they're a vegetarian, etc., and then create a personal dish just for them and yes, there's a good chance it won't be on the menu.

There's something extra special about Khun Lamyai and her relationship with the guests here and this is what makes her so different. Her personal touch, mentioned above, doesn't stop there. On request, in conjunction with the hotel, she will take guests in the hotel minivan to the local market in the mornings. Here she will introduce them to the many fruits and vegetables as well as various meat products on offer and will explain not only what everything is but how they're all cooked and what other ingredients they go well with when cooking. And if you've never been to a Thai market, you'll perhaps not understand how incredibly valuable this is. Language barriers, odd-shaped vegetables and still-wriggling creatures are sometimes a challenging combination. She will even help you barter for your souvenirs or clothes making sure you return home with some good deals.

So a boutique resort; a friendly, caring chef; great food and trips to the market - there's a lot on offer so get yourself down there and give it a try!

Colleen Setchell

For reservations or further information,
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www.siamresidence.com