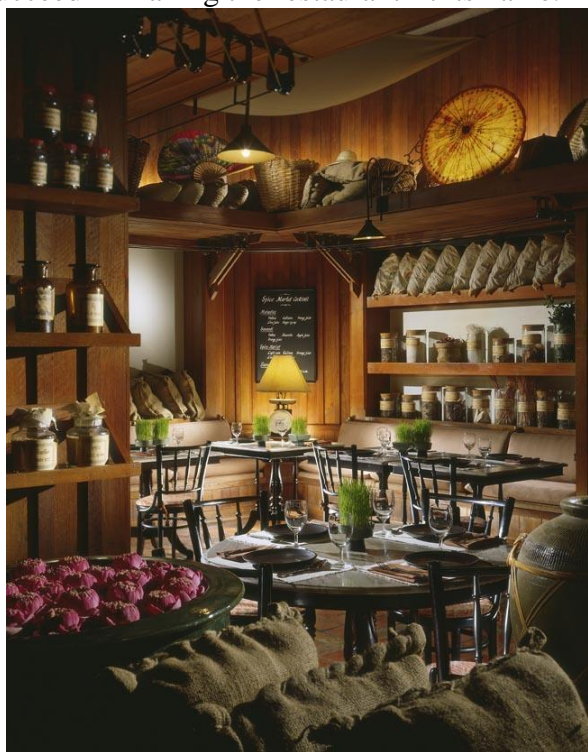


The Spice Market
Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok
Tel. 02-250-1000

Reviewed by the Wandering Gourmet

The Spice Market at the Four Seasons Hotel is one of the few hotel restaurants in town to have avoided the hammer and crowbars of reconstruction crews. Found in the hotel's Parichart Court, it serves a variety of Royal Thai and traditional dishes at both lunch and dinner, including comprehensive set menus. There is also a short 'Nouvelle Thai' section in the menu where Chef Supanut Kharanak presents some innovative dishes that use Thai techniques and spices, but ingredients not often seen in Thai cooking.

The restaurant feels like it comes from another era. Dark wooden tables with circular white marble tops like those in Chinese restaurants dot the room. Bottles and baskets filled with Thai spices line teak shelves, while earthenware urns and gunny sacks filled with rice and salt lean against the walls. The décor and atmosphere succeed in making the restaurant fit its name. The place does indeed feel like a spice market from long ago.



Meals begin with a complimentary *mian kham*, a plate of *chum plu* leaves into which diners drop dried shrimp, peanuts, shredded coconut, lime, chilies and a dollop of tamarind sauce. The leaf is then rolled and popped into the mouth, always a tart and tasty way to start a Thai meal.

The Spice Market seats 72 people and there are at least that many items on its large and comprehensive menu. Chef Supanut Kharanak is a master at her craft and I recently tried several of her dishes. Especially enjoyable was the B310 *Pomelo and Pork Salad with Grilled River Prawn*. Pomelo is a capital ingredient for salads and of all the prawns available in Thailand, river prawns seem to have the best flavor. The *Sautéed Beef with Tamarind Sauce* at B420 was another exceptional dish. It demonstrated the affinity beef has for the sweet tartness of tamarind sauce. It was superb and just edged out the pomelo salad as my favorite dish of the day.

The Spice Market's classic dishes remain as good as ever.

The B350 *Deep-fried Shrimp Cakes* haven't lost their appeal nor has the B270 *Banana Blossom Salad with Scallops and Chili Paste*. The shredded banana blossom is reminiscent of artichoke; and when combined with chili paste, a sour taste and seafood like scallops, it creates a salad that is unique, delicious and quintessentially Thai.

My last dish prior to dessert was an item from the 'Nouvelle Thai' section of the menu. Chef Supanut enjoys being creative and this section of the menu is where she introduces new dishes using ingredients not typically found in Thai cooking. Although these dishes are unique, they maintain their Thai character because of the spicing used. My B880 Grilled Lamb Chop served in Green, Red, and Yellow Curry Sauce was an excellent melding of 'Western' flavors from lamb with traditional Thai curry sauces.

The desserts at the Spice Market are always popular and rarely fail to please. The *Mango and Sticky Rice with Coconut Milk* is an excellent rendition of a Thai favorite and the Four Seasons takes special care to insure that its mangoes are the best available. The *Sago and Palm Sugar in Coconut Milk* was a new item and although I enjoyed it, I found the mango dish much more exciting.

I am pleased The Spice Market has endured while other restaurants have come and gone. Bangkok badly needs tradition and stability. The reason for the restaurant's longevity is simple: it's an excellent restaurant

that continues to attract large numbers of customers because of its excellent quality. Try it if you get a chance. If you are like the thousands of customers who have preceded you, you are bound to enjoy yourself.