

Food+Chef

MAGAZINE

New Monthly Section:

PLANT-BASED PERFECTION

A Toast to
THE HARVESTER

Senza Glutine
in Italy

PARADISE
VALLEY
FARMS

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Inside!

80 cent Pad Thai

By Nikko Pendleton



I love Thai food. Despite the fact that I'm half Japanese and live in Korea, it is easily my favorite kind of Asian cuisine. And I absolutely love Pad Thai. I know it's not the most daring or unique dish, it's basically everyone's favorite, but I can't help ordering it at any Thai restaurant I go to. And I've been to them all over. Thai restaurants have become almost as trendy as sushi and fancy as well. But the best Pad Thai I have ever had I paid only about eighty

cents for.

It was at one of the many street food carts that litter the ever-crowded Koh San Road in Bangkok. The notoriously famous backpacker's heaven is packed with naughty t-shirt stands, knock-off designer sunglasses, cheap Thai clothes, and outdoor bars and restaurants with names like, "Golf Bar Cocktails Very Strong We Do Not Check ID's and Restaurant." I kid you not, that was the

official name. Not that you would need a real ID as you can buy anything from a university degree to a disabled parking permit from forgers working off of milk cartons. You can also buy fresh, ice-cold coconuts to drink from, mangosteen fruit, which has a hard purple shell and a soft, sweet, white center, and any tropical fruit you can think of. If you are brave you can get the fruit covered in a salt and chili mixture that hits all your taste buds.

I spent last New Year's Eve on Koh San Road. It was packed with expats, locals, backpackers, and tourists from all over the world. Each outdoor bar had a different theme from Bob Marley to Polka and patrons of the bars sat at small plastic chairs drinking Chang Beer or dancing in the streets. If beer is too tame you can always try the famous 'bucket.' This is literally a plastic bucket that is filled with a bottle of liquor and your choice of mixer, which you slurp from a bevy of brightly colored straws. But be warned, that clear liquid coming out of that Smirnoff bottle is actually more akin to straight grain rubbing alcohol. So on that beautifully warm night I wandered through the laughing, dancing people, brightly colored lanterns strung above my head, a fresh plate of Pad Thai in my hand, and ushered in the New Year. Is there any better way?

But I diverge from the Pad Thai. Small carts are laden with heaps of noodles, egg, meats, and bean sprouts on big metal platters. Plastic bags hang off the side of the cart holding peanuts and

spices. No, there are no food regulations here. But if you dare to look past that you will not be disappointed. Little shriveled old women, brown from the scorching heat, toss the ingredients into a hotly oiled wok on the cart and pile it all on a plastic plate. The simplicity of it makes you wonder how a far less superior dish of the same name could be sold for fifteen dollars-plus at a restaurant. Here each stand is slightly different. The spices are changed or the size of the noodles. But they are all amazing. The flavors of chili, spices, peanuts, and tangy lime are not overwhelmed but stand out with delicious clarity. I ate big plates of this multiple times a day while I was in Thailand and still often dream of it with great yearning.

