

Sunday Business Post

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On the Thai Trail through Dublin

There aren't many Sundays you would be happy to kick-start with a bowl of watery fish and rice in a bowl, but the Fabulous Food Trails Thai Day provides the perfect exception to that rule.

Conchi is a traditional Thai and Vietnamese breakfast, and is surprisingly appetising at an early hour of the day. Which is a good thing as this day-long Thai food event is certainly not short on food. A rough estimate at the end of the day was that our group had eaten about 18 or 19 different dishes, from soups to stir-fries, and from starters to desserts.

The Fabulous Food Trails event begins at 9.30 am when the group meets in Saba, Clarendon Street, the latest Thai restaurant making waves in the Dublin food scene. They are greeted warmly by trail hosts Eveleen and Pamela Coyle, and introduced to each other.

It is always a bit of a gamble on these day-long events whether you will like your group mates, but luckily the common thread of food tends to attract interesting people, and there is always plenty to talk about. While you guzzle your Conchi, you can chat to Thai chef Taweesak Trakoolwattana (luckily he is also known as Tao, so you can concentrate on the food, not pronouncing his name). He then runs through the basic Thai larder essentials, and introduces some ingredients you might never have tasted before, such as wing beans and tiny Thai aubergines.

There is plenty of practical advice, too. Tao explains the uses of different types of noodles, the grading of fish sauce (like olive oil, there are different types depending on length of fermentation) and the different uses for various types of soya sauce and coconut milk. Even the most familiar ingredients take on a new level of sophistication.

Then it's into the kitchen of Saba to put some of the theory into practice. It sounds like a mammoth task to cook and sample six dishes in just over an hour, but this is one of the revelations of the day - when they say these things cook quickly, they really meant it.

The chicken soups below cooks in ten minutes at the most, and the only challenging part is getting the right balance of hot, sour, salty and sweet; that Thai standard.

Suitably fired up, with enthusiasm as well as chilli – the group heads off to jostle through the aisles of the Asia Market (Drury Street) for a master class in Thai shopping, then to Fallon & Byrne (Exchequer Street), whose shelves are stocked with quality ingredients as suggested and sometimes supplied by Tao.

Finally, head back to the restaurant for an outstanding lunch and glass of beer or wine.

Stylishly run by Eveleen and Pamela Coyle, Fabulous Food Trails had hit on a real winner. Tao is warm and friendly, and above all a great teacher. He will patiently answer endless questions, never minding if the group is distracted by some delicious morsel and asks the same questions over and over.

This one hits any food fan's 'must have' list for Christmas presents, birthday presents or sheer indulgence. It is a wonderful treat for the right person.

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