

Dining Out

by Miss Terry Diner

Amari buffet lunch

A weekly pilgrimage for many

The Amari Rincome Hotel is not one of the new hotels springing up all over Chiang Mai and surrounding hillsides. In fact, in many ways, it is almost the 'Grande Dame' amongst the hostleries in the North. It is very well established and the La Gritta Restaurant seems to reflect this. The people know where everything is, they know what to do, the service staff carry out their job quietly and without fuss or panic. Nothing seems out of place. The total ambience is one of being cocooned in a welcoming and very relaxed venue. This style only comes of years of experience, and it shows in the Amari Rincome.

I must admit that I have always enjoyed the La Gritta ambience, at night it is warm and cosy, with all the wood panelling and soft carpets, but in the middle of the day, with the windows on three sides there is a wonderfully 'airy' atmosphere. The gentle playing of the traditional 'Khim' as the background music is also just enough to remind you that we are in a traditional region in northern Thailand.

The large round tables invite you to bring a few people for a buffet lunch, though there are smaller tables for intimate dining 'a deux'. Comfortable chairs, quality linen tablecloths and napkins, and a high standard of cutlery and glassware also remind you that this is not a cafeteria but a dedicated restaurant. In fact, the warmth of it all makes you want to linger over lunch. There are few buffets that can impart that kind of influence!

The buffet items change daily and I was reliably informed by GM Wim Fagel

that on "National Days" they include some of the ethnic items into the regular buffet as additional choices. The buffet also is all-inclusive at B. 280 net (not the usual hotel plus-plus) with coffee or tea and even an orchid in the saucer. Nice touch.

With a large buffet such as this one at the Amari, it is worthwhile just walking around slowly to take in what there is on offer that day. Even then, you will find other items later and curse yourself for not having seen them earlier. And take another tip; do not miss the roast meat carvery which was on the pool side of the room on its own.

Madame and I went our separate ways and moved towards some of our more favourite items. I began with some cold items for starters and noted that the salad vegetables were very fresh. This was almost 'home' supplies, not the picked over items often seen from commercial kitchens. There was also enough choice in the cheese items, which I went back to later rather than the desserts, though Madame went up more than once at the end to sample the many dessert choices.

What I really like about buffets is that you can try just so many items, and if you can be disciplined, and not load your plate with the first items you come across, a buffet can be a wonderfully satisfying culinary experience. In this way I could sample the sautéed red snapper which came with a champagne sauce and the roast loin of pork with a different tropical fruit sauce. I also had the choice of Lyonnaise potatoes or mashed with spring onion. I chose both!

On that day I really felt like the European style cooking,



but Madame was also very well catered for with some Thai choices in large clay pots with candles to keep everything hot.

It is hard to fault the Amari buffet. The surroundings are elegant and relaxed and the food was excellent. With the daily changes of buffet items, I can see why many Chiang Mai residents will go for the buffet more than once in any week. In all respects, the buffet represents excellent value for money. Highly recommended.

The Amari Rincome Hotel, La Gritta Restaurant, 1 Nimmanhaeminda Road, T. Suthep, Chiang Mai, telephone 053 221 130, fax 053 221 915, email rincome@amari.com, website www.amari.com. Secure parking in hotel park. Buffet 11.30 a.m. until 2 p.m. Monday to Saturday. (Sunday is B. 350 Brunch.)