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A Member's Guide on How to Pronounce Thai Words for Ordering Food (updated)

For those of you who are new to Thailand and maybe some who are old hands, it's nice to know how to order some good Thai food. Just because McDonalds, Burger King and KFC are available, please don't miss out on the really great taste of Thai food.

It's really not that hard to order good things. Can you say **cow pod guy** or **pod see you moo**? If you were speaking to a server, you would have just ordered two of my favorite Thai dishes. Want to know what they are? Read on.

Since most of us cannot read Thai and often menu translations are not very useful, it's good to be able to order what you want by just speaking a few words or sounds you already know like those above. The following are some easy ways to pronounce common Thai dishes. The spelling and sometimes rhymes I suggest will be close enough to every day spoken Thai to get your order across. This is not the official anglicized spelling of the Thai words. Official English spelling and published pronunciation guides are often as confusing as trying to read Thai writing.

To my ear, anglicized Thai words written with K are pronounced as a G sound. Words starting with P are pronounced as a B sound and words starting with T are pronounced as a D, but more on T and D later. Of course, there are always exceptions. Also be aware that Thais generally have a difficult time pronouncing the R sound. Sometimes L is substituted such as saying falang for farang (foreigner) or layo layo (faster) for rayo rayo. Sometimes they leave it out completely, thus, the expression "no problem" becomes, for many Thais, "no pompem".

Using this guide, you don't have to look at the menu. Just think of what you want to eat and say the suggested words or sounds as we say them in English. When you order, the server will usually read back your order so listen up. Is that what you want? As you use this system you may be able to refine your pronunciation. If things don't work out you can always say my pen rye (it doesn't matter or no big deal), and order something else.

Remember food workers are very low paid and generally the food is inexpensive so just smile, try something else and don't be stingy when the check comes. Also, don't get upset if the food arrives in a seemingly random order. From my experience, only at the really top end restaurants will the food arrive in the order a westerner would expect.

Please don't forget that sign language can be a very simple and effective form of communication. This works well for food or directions as well as other things. So if all of the following fails, you can point to a dish someone at the next table has and then point at your self. You might add same same. However be aware that Thais like very spicy food so if you are pointing at something a Thai is eating, you may want to add my pet for not hot.

One of my favorite dishes is chicken fried rice. To order this, say **cow pod guy**. Decoded as cow = rice, pod, pot, or phad (rhymes with cod) = fried, and guy = chicken. If you are concerned about food causing you stomach problems, one advantage of pod dishes is that they are cooked at very high temperature. Another one of my favorite dishes is **guy pod king** which is stir fried chicken and ginger. So, king = ginger. I like it with lots of ginger so I add mach mach king and pet nit noy (noy rhymes with toy) and means a little spicy (pet means spicy). You usually order some cow with this. That's rice not the 4 legged animal.

Other types of fried rice are: **moo** (it rhymes with shoe)= pork; **gung** or goong (the u sound is like the oe part of shoe)= shrimp; **blah**=fish; **blah mook**(like book) = squid; **ped**=duck; **new-ah**=meat but is usually understood to be beef or you could say **new-ah woo-ah** which is meat beef and as we just learned **guy = chicken**. The type of rice you get with the above would be white jasmine rice. But there are many other kinds of rice. A common one favored by people from the Northeast or Esan (e-sahn) is **cow neel** which is sticky rice, sometimes called sweet rice. It is usually steamed and comes in a small basket. Thais often roll it into little balls about half the size of a golf ball and then dip it in a hot curry paste. There is also brown rice, red rice and black rice and mixtures of different kinds.

Next are noodle dishes. There are many kinds. You may have heard of **Pod Thai**. Sounds like the Thai national dish and maybe it is. It is really good and normally made with flat narrow noodles but other kinds are sometimes used. If you do not ask for something else, it will probably be made with fresh shrimp and maybe some dried shrimp. Another dish I like is **pod see you**. It is a wide white noodle stir fried with some vegetables and whatever meat or seafood you order with it. If you want an egg mixed in you add **sai kai** (like the first sounds of science and kite). A more soup like version of this would be called **lad nah**.

Other types of noodles include **sen me** (small noodle) and **bah me** (round yellow noodles). A different type of noodle is **Pod Key Mow**. Pod (remember it rhymes with cod) means stir fry, but this dish is a little different. Key Mow is the Thai word for drunken, so the noodles come out quite differently. I believe they are deep fried rather than pan fried. Again you say what you want with the noodles. For example, **phad key mow guy** would be drunken noodles with chicken.

Another favorite of mine is **kow soy**. It's a combination of noodles and Thai curry with coconut milk. There is usually a side dish with shallots, garlic, pickled cabbage and other things you can add. I suggest the first time you have it just go for it all. Usually it's made with a chicken leg in it, but you could order something else. This can be quite spicy. So if you like it hot, OK. If you don't, you can add "**my pet**" (not spicy) or, if you want it only a little spicy say "**pet nit noy**" (spicy little) or **medium spicy pet paw dee**. The way I would order it would sound like this. **Kow soi guy pet nit noy**, this is the chicken version. No matter what you tell the wait staff, the cook decides how hot it is-good luck.

Thai curry is very different than India curry and also, I think, much better. When spoken, the Thai word for curry is **gang**. On a menu you might see it spelled as kaeng. There is green curry which is not so spicy. There is also red curry which is quite spicy. The green curry is called **gang kill wan** or green sweet curry. Red curry is called **gang pet**. For either one you then say what you want in it such as **guy** or **moo**. Thai curries are very tasty and usually come with one or two types of round eggplants in them. Some places will under cook the vegetables so they are quite crunchy. That's not my favorite way to have them but I'm still working on how to tell the server to cook them more.

If you like sweet and sour dishes that is called **beer ah wan** and then your choice of something from the list at the end such as **moo**. The Thais make it a little differently than the Chinese version you may know about, and every cook makes it a little differently so enjoy. Order **cow** if you want rice with this.

There is a nice little snack we usually call fish cake. The Thai word for it sounds like **tawd mun blah**. It is essentially mashed fish with some other ingredients and then it is deep fried. It's hard to tell the resulting taste is really fish. To me it's more like an interesting chicken flavor, but it probably depends on the cook and you. You can also get shrimp cake which is **tawd mun gung**. Another nice snack is satay. I like **satay guy** (chicken) best. It is a thin strip of chicken on a stick which is then grilled and served with a peanut sauce. **Satay moo** (pork) is also sometimes available.

The Thai's have a unique way of serving something that I'll just call Thai salad. It has two names based on how the meat is cut. **Lob** (like a high return shot in tennis) and **yum** (like something that tastes good). It usually comes with some large lettuce leaves and other herbs and the meat of your choice. This can be a snack or a main dish. Normally the meat will be marinated in a spicy mixture. The normal Thailand version of this is too hot for me so my order would be something like "**yum new ah my pet**" (sliced beef not hot) or **lob moo pet nit noi** (ground pork a little spicy). Hopefully the waiter will put in the order that way and the cook, after laughing, will not put too many peppers in it. I'd probably only order this in a restaurant where I had confidence in the way they washed the vegetables and herbs. One of the herbs will be a basil called **ga pow**. This is something like sweet Italian basil. You might see lob spelled larb, but spoken it sounds like lob.

An interesting place to eat in Pattaya is the Blue Sky restaurant on the 27th floor of the Markland Condo Hotel. It is located beach road Soi 1 in Pattaya and accessed by the front glass elevator which you enter from the lobby. I eat there often since I live in the building. It has the best view in Pattaya, very reasonable prices, really great Thai food and the view is free. They also have western food, but I've never tried it there. It's not a fancy place; just a condo restaurant open to the public.

Since I could understand what was in every dish, and with the help of this guide, I could modify the menu choices to get exactly the dish that I wanted. The two dishes I was interested in were squid (**blah muck**) with basil and chili, and squid with garlic and chili. Chili in Thailand means the really hot Thai pepper which I did not want (**my owe**). By pointing and using my owe I was able to modify the order to just what I wanted, squid with garlic and basil. It was great. Of course, like in many places, by the time you read this, the menu will probably have been changed.

I like calamari but, be advised, most places will over cook the squid and it might be tough. Saying "my sook mach", might get them to not overcook it, but I still have to fully test those words. See the chart at the end for some things that you might want to use to make up your own order.

SOUPS. Building a soup order. First, the word Thais use for soup really means to boil. Pronouncing it is a little tricky. Remember the T and D discussion earlier. There is a sound in Thai that sounds to me about 90%D with a little t sound first. Some translation guides write it as tDom. Try putting your tongue behind or on your upper front teeth and saying **Dom** (like the rounded top of a building).

So far we have dom, next we say **yum** (like in yummy) for a clear soup or **kah** (like car without the r) for soup with coconut milk in it. Finally we go back to the things you want in it like **guy** (chicken) or **gung** (shrimp) or **blah** (fish), **blah muck** (squid) or **talay** (seafood). For vegetable soup, it's **dom puck** (puck, like in hockey puck). Mixed vegetable soup would be **dom puck rue**. How spicy do you want your soup? Coconut soup (**dom kah**) is usually not or at least less spicy than clear soup (**dom yum**), but to make sure you get what you want do you remember how to say no spicy? It's **my pet**, or a little spicy is **pet nit noi** and **my pet** is no spicy. **Yum** type soups are usually very spicy and so are **dom pucks**. Dom puck usually comes with noodles like **woon sen** or glass noodle. You can also order to usual things to be added like guy, moo etc. My first Thai meal started with **dom yum gung** at an up country airport snack bar. After a few spoonfuls mouth was so hot I could not taste the rest of the meal. At that time, I did not know to say my pet.

Perhaps my favorite Thai soup is **dom Kai guy** (soup with coconut milk and chicken). At a good Thai restaurant it will have several other ingredients like mushrooms, onion, and **galangka**. Galangka is related to ginger but different. If it young and fresh, it is almost crispy and can be easily chewed and has a wonderful deep pungent flavor, and easily swallowed. If it is not young, just chew it for the flavor and put it back in you spoon and set aside. You probably will have lemon grass in your soup, which just set aside or chew very lightly.

BREAKFAST: Would you believe that a popular Thai breakfast is rice soup? It's true, and it's called **cow dom**. The server will place some extra things at your table to adjust the flavor and you can order it with the usual extras like guy, mo, gung (shrimp), blah (fish), blah muck (squid). The Thais like their rice so it should be no surprise that they have rice potage. It's called **jok** and that's no joke. Really, it's pronounced about the same joke. Jok is rather thick and will usually come with thinly sliced ginger (**king**). and you can ask for the other usual things. If you like ginger try asking for **king mach mach** (much ginger). My all time Thai favorite breakfast dish is **Kai Yut Sai** (kai like the first part of Kai ser, yut like but, only starting with a y, and Sai like the first part of Saigon. It is basically an omelet stuffed with vegetables and ground pork. I order it with rice (cow). Each cook makes it a little differently, but it is great. A non stuffed omelet would be kai geo and a fried egg is kai dom. I'm normally not a great egg fan so I have some Sriraja pronounced Sirijaw sauce with it. It's a vegetarian milder chili sauce something like a lightly spiced catsup, but a little thinner and I think better. It goes great with eggs. You may see signs advertising something called **ABF**. This is short for American Breakfast. It usually has eggs as you like, toast, sausage or ham, and coffee (ca fay) or tea and maybe some fruit juice or fruit. If they offer an English breakfast, it will probably have beans in the order. Being American, I thought this was a little strange until I tried it. The beans are in a light tomato sauce and are very tasty. If the restaurant is capable of making pan cakes or French toast, they will probably be spelled out on the menu. If you want some fruit just look at the list on the last page.

Thirsty? Water = **nahm** or **nam**, like in Viet Nam. As far as I can figure out, **nam blau** is a plastic or glass bottle of ordinary water. Cold water is **nam yen**. Ice is **nam kang**. If you want soda water, say **nam so dah**. When your water arrives, usually there will be a glass with ice, and the water will be poured over the ice in the blink of an eye. If you do not want this or if you do not trust that the glass or the ice are clean, point to the glass and say **my ow**. We never drink tap water in Thailand. Some type of bottled water is available almost everywhere. If it's your first time to Thailand, you will be surprised how many 7-11s and Family food marts there are. Of course many little mom and pop stores will also have it.

The many beers available in Thailand are reasonably priced. Beer is usually ordered by the brand such as **Singha, Heineken, Chang** or **Tiger** and is always available in bottles. Draft beer is sometimes available. Wine is also available, but imported wine is a lot more expensive in Thailand than in America or Europe. Thai wine is also available, but the industry has not yet hit international standards. In Pattaya, I've found that the Best Supermarket near the Dolphin roundabout at Pattaya Nua and 2nd road and the Friendship market on Pattaya Thai (south) road have about the most reasonable prices for wine. According to Thai law, beer, wine, and spirits can only be sold for take away at certain times of the day. However, this is not universally enforced.

Ice (**nam kang**) quality has improved greatly in Thailand. Machine made ice cubes and crushed ice are usually safe. However, if you are up country really be careful. You don't want to drink anything with chipped ice. Many times large blocks of ice are made only for cooling things, not for human consumption. The hand chipped ice may come from one of these blocks. The locals might be able to handle this type of chipped ice without getting sick, but you probably will not. Getting stomach problems from bad water or ice is not like food poisoning which may only last a day or two. Bad water or ice could make you sick for weeks. Some up country places may pour beer over ice. Watch out for this one also. I'd rather drink warm beer or warm soda water than be sick for

three or four weeks with dysentery. Cramps and many urgent visits to the toilet (**hong nam**), are not fun. I speak from experience. I'm told that a product called **Disento** is good for food poisoning, but I don't know if it would work for dysentery. It's available at most pharmacies at low cost and might be good to carry if you are uncertain about availability of medical care.

If you should be unfortunate enough to get sick to your stomach and especially if it is combined with a high fever, it's best to go to the hospital and see a doctor. Medical care in Thailand is good and not expensive. Why try to tough it out while on vacation when a visit to the doctor and prescribed medication may only cost \$30 to \$50. Many people without medical insurance or with below standard medical care in their home countries go to Thailand to get medical and dental work done. I usually have my teeth cleaned at the best and most expensive hospital. The cost is about \$50 and is done by a dentist no a technician.

When you have a drink with someone in the US it's common to say something like cheers or to your health. Almost every county has their expression for this. Thailand is no different. According to my wife, who is a certified translator, if you want to toast someone in Thailand the proper phrase should be "**Yin dee krub (cob)** = glad you're back or more loosely translated good to see you again." However the one that I hear most often around Pattaya is **chuck dee cob** which means "lots of luck".

Cob is what a man says in this expression a woman would use cah. Of course a man adds cob to many expressions as does a woman with cah. Sometimes these just mean yes, but also adds politeness like check bin cob (the check please). **Krub** is the usual way I see what a man says spelled, but when spoken I think it comes closer to cob or cup. It should not be surprising that Thais have regional accents and sometimes use different words depending on where you grew up. For example if you want to say that a meal was delicious, you normally would **aroy mach**. A person from Northeastern Thailand would probably say **sap mach mach** for delicious.

Here are a few modifier words that might help. **My**=no, **my ow** (like the first part of owl)=no want. **dang**=red; **cow**=white and also rice plus a few other things, **vine**=wine **pet**=hot, **my pet**=no hot, **pet nit noi** (like the first part of noise)=a little hot. Of course pet varies with each cook. **Wan** = sweet, **dee**=good, **aroy**=tastes good, **mach**=very or much, such as **aroy mach mach** = tastes very good. As you'll see below lots of things are made as stir fry, but there is also grilled food. Grilled is **bing**.

Chuck dee cob (good luck), hope this helps and happy eating

HELPFUL EXPRESSIONS		MAIN FOOD ITEMS		ADDITIONAL ITEMS	
no	my	rice	cow cow	ginger	king
no want it doesn't matter red rice, white	my owe my pen rye dang cow	sweet rice chicken pork shrimp	neel guy moo gung	Italian like basil garlic onion chili	ga pow ga tiem wa hom prik ma cooa tate
wine	vine	fish	blah blah	tomato	
spicy Not spicy	pet my pet pet nit	squid duck	mook ped	cauliflower bell peper	galam dok pak yah
a little spicy	noi	beef	new ah	baby corn	cow poot on really is
Cold (temp)	yen			carrot	carrot
Hot (temp) is it good? good	larn dee my? dee	SOME DISHES cow pod.... pod thai.... beer a wan....	Add item	pineapple water cold water	sha ba lowt nam Nam yen nam yen quart
no good delicious sweet	my dee aroy wan Nam daan	pod see you.... lad na.... cow soi....		Cold bottled water ice Soda water	nam kang nam so dah
Sugar no sugar very or much	daan my ow nam daan			To toast someone:	
stir fry	pod yang or	gang....		a man says	
grilled	bing lay o,lay	satay.... tad mun	fish	chok dee kob	good luck
faster	o cha	blah	cake	a lady says	
slower	chaaa			chok dee ca	good luck