

On the menu

with

Andy Johnstone

Pacific Club
Spa Boutique
Resort

Having tired somewhat of eating out during the – as Louis Armstrong sang – “... dark sacred night”, I decided to take a leisurely lunch with my companions during what turned out to be a “... bright blessed day”.

Our destination was Pacific Club Spa Boutique Resort Phuket, which, for the purposes of brevity and to eschew prolixity, wordiness or even verbosity will henceforth be referred to as Pacific Club.

In fact, as I sit bashing at the computer keys, two hours have not yet passed since the feast and a guided tour of Pacific Club ended – and the tastes, sights and smells of the delightful place are still in my senses.

One of the sights I remember most is not, for once, an attractive young waitress (of which there are a number at Pacific Club) nor my equally attractive dining companions, but a right dog.

A young golden retriever to be precise, called Rascal. He may not be the typical maître d', but he greets us with a warmth and vitality (read: he gets as up close and personal to each of us as could best be expected on a first date) that makes us feel right at home.

But what is this “home” like? Eric Conger is the club's director, but he also takes more than a passing interest in the architecture and design of the establishment, as well as being something of a dab-handed autodidact in the kitchen.

Eric has, for Pacific Club, eschewed the quasi-Thai style of architecture and taken an altogether more restrained path.

The walls have a delicate wash of pink on them, and arches and windows abound, allowing a welcome breeze through the spacious restaurant. I am led – almost – into believing I'm walking into a casa in the mountains overlooking Acapulco.

But the views from the windows are of Karon's grand hills



Left, Fettucine Shrimp Alfredo with all the trimmings. Above, bhajis and naan bread.

pasta, Eric serves me some rather splendid white fish stuffed with seafood and herbs and topped with a delectable sherry cream sauce.

Delicious, actually, with the sauce revealing itself in stages as I eat. Too late, though – my companions have caught the scent too and help themselves.

But I'm already onto the Chicken Cordon Bleu, about which I could write chapter and verse – but I won't. Try it for yourself; the sauce especially is divine, and I would be quite content simply to eat that with chips or one of the delightful baked potatoes served here.

Eric wisely suggests a tour around the rest of the club, just to walk off lunch. By the way, a club it is, for that oft-forgotten group of people in Phuket: expatriates.

The concept behind Pacific Club is simple; full resort facilities – accommodation, spa, pool, fitness facilities, and a nightclub next year – that are open to everyone, tourist or expat, with accommodation for us lotus eaters here if the trek over the hill and back to reality seems too much.

Pacific Club has space, privacy and character by the bucketful. The restaurant serves all the usual favorites – and more – in generously-sized portions at reasonable prices, and the whole enterprise has a competent man, and his dog, at the helm.

I think I know where I'll be spending my days off from now on.

Pacific Club, 16 Patak Rd Soi 24, Karon Beach. Tel: 076-398350. Web: www.pacific-club-phuket.com

Pacific terrific

canopied in semi-tropical rain forest – and are even more impressive from the 8th-floor rooftop garden and swimming pool.

An equally impressive spread – of food – awaits us as we return to the table following Stage 1 of our grand tour of the Pacific Club.

First up is a crisp salad with hard-boiled eggs hard-boiled just right, that is, the center of the yolk is a just a tad more yellow and creamier than the rest of it. A scattering of olives, a choice of three dressings – I choose the blue cheese – and French bread.

My petite colleagues are already beginning to look full.

Obviously made of sterner stuff than I imagined, however, they leap into the rest of the cuisine offered with reckless abandon.

Authentic onion *bahjis* and a fragrant lamb curry with homemade *naan* – garlic and plain – make our eyes pop and our mouths water. Ignoring decorum – Western decorum, at least – I'm ripping up the *naan* and scooping up the lamb without the aid of cutlery. It's spot-on.

Alas, my colleagues do not eat lamb – “Chef can make you a shrimp or vegetarian one next time,” advises Eric – therefore it is up to me to more or less clear the bowl, which I do.

The Fettucine Shrimp Alfredo benefits from the addition of a dollop of pesto in the rich creamy sauce, and joy of joys, the large shrimps has been completely shelled. No need for the messy and annoying chore of doing it myself.

This goes down very well with the girls and while they are distracted by the pleasures of the