



HEART & SOUL

At Souvlaki Greek Grill, Bangkokians and homesick Greeks have the rare opportunity of enjoying authentic cuisine in a relaxed, taverna-style setting. Ellen Boonstra reports

Photos: SANSITH KORAVIYOTIN

ONE COULD QUESTION THE SANITY OF THE MAGAZINE editor for sending a straight, vegetarian reporter to the depths of Silom Soi 4 to sample the delicacies of a restaurant where you are greeted by a gyro machine roasting huge slabs of meat, but it's not always an easy job to stomach.

Souvlaki Greek Grill, as it turns out, offers an extensive menu to keep all dietary persuasions happy in an area that's increasingly becoming as varied as the menu itself, attracting a mix of local Thai residents, expat professionals and tourists.

Fotini Loumbardia was the first to brave the storm of change, boldly stepping into this gay bastion and opening a Greek restaurant and soon others followed suit. Now the lively soi has become home to Thai, Italian and Spanish eateries.

For as long as she can remember, Fotini has been whipping up meals for family and friends to great grins of contentment. Three

years ago, she left a high-flying career in the Foreign Service – lastly serving as cultural attaché to the Embassy of Greece in Thailand for eight years – to combine her two biggest loves: her passion for cooking and her adopted Thai daughter Manolia, now seven, for whom she wanted to create a permanent home in Thailand.

The diplomatic life proved an equally valuable training ground for a career switch to chef, as Fotini found herself frequently in charge of official dinners for heads of state and foreign dignitaries. Her baptism of fire came when she was asked to cook for a party of 60 VIPs, including a visiting Minister of Foreign Affairs. She recalls the experience, an affair that lasted until the wee hours of the morning, as both nerve-wracking and rewarding.

Fotini brings to Bangkok a slice of the famed Greek hospitality of never letting a guest go hungry. “By opening this restaurant I’d like to give Thai people the opportunity of experiencing Greek food,” she says with a smile.”

Mediterranean blue walls, crisp white tablecloths and paintings of faraway Aegean islands create an inviting, homey ambience. While the downstairs area is ideal for those wanting a quick souvlaki (skewered meat) sandwich, upstairs a casual dining area awaits, presenting taverna favorites like Greek Salad, (“the jewel of Greek cuisine”), Spanakopita (spinach and feta cheese pie) Tzatziki, Hummus, Moussaka, and Pastitsio (thick pasta topped with creamy béchamel sauce), as well as a range of grilled meats and seafood.

Portions are often generous enough to share. While some may be disappointed to find out there's no smashing of plates after dinner, everyone will agree it's as close as you can come to the real McCoy 8,000 kilometres away from Greece. ■

*Souvlaki Greek Grill, 114/14 Soi Silom 4 Surawong, Bangkok
Open daily 5pm–12am (until 2am on weekends)
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