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Lamorinda's Specialties of the House

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Amarin Thai Cuisine Photos A.K. Carroll

Had your fill of stuffed mushrooms and fried calamari? Fine dining and fancy chocolates not really your thing? Looking for something spicy to jazz up your Valentine's Day? Lamorinda has lots to offer when it comes to non-traditional dining. If you're into the edible and exotic, check out one of these ethnic eateries.

With its bamboo elephant placemats, lavender-hued napkins and soft simple music, the gentle ambiance of Amarin Thai Cuisine plays in contrast to its Spicy Pork Eggplant and Firecracker Prawns cooked in lobster-chili sauce. Opened in 1997, Amarin has been perfecting its popular pad thai, Himapan tofu and Massaman chicken for nearly 20 years, earning awards of distinction from both Diablo Magazine and Lamorinda Moms. Colorful plates come out trailing steam and sweet and savory aromas. In addition to traditional favorites, Amarin also offers weekly specials such as grilled

lamb and pumpkin curry. Owner Tom Karmonphet says that something special will be on the menu for Valentine's Day, but you may need to wait until Friday to find out. Karmonphet's personal favorites include Amarin's Basil Supreme stir-fry and the Pad Kee Mow (drunken noodles). Amarin Thai Cuisine is located at 3555 Mount Diablo Blvd., Lafayette. For information, call (925) 283-8883 or visit amarinlafayette.com.

From the refreshing rainbow array of a fermented tea leaf salad to the hearty creamy broth of the Ono Kaw Swe (coconut chicken soup), the national dishes of The Refined Palate are sure to give your taste buds something to talk about. Unlike other ethnic menus, this Burmese venue organizes its menu around exotic types of produce, rather than major proteins. With Indian, Chinese and Thai influences, Burmese cuisine has a flavor all its own, characterized by the use of fish products and ngapi (fermented seafood paste), with a wide array of condiments and seasonings. Co-owner and chef William Lue is no stranger to the industry, with over 25 years of restaurant experience and new ideas always on the horizon. This Valentine's Day he plans to offer each of his guests a complimentary Rainbow Noodle Salad, a traditional Burmese dish featuring over 20 ingredients including kefir lime, bean thread noodles and green papaya. Located at 19 Orinda Way, Orinda, for info call (925) 566-4877 or visit www.refinedpalateorinda.com.

"Fresh" may not be the first word you associate with a buffet, unless you're discussing the flavorful array of authentic dishes and spicy sauces prepared each day at Swad India in Lafayette. From their savory Keema Kulcha, (a flatbread stuffed with fresh ground lamb and seasoned with herbs), to their creamy Chicken Korma or spiced Lahsooni Spinach (i.e., Saag Paneer), all of Swad's dishes are prepared with fresh, all natural ingredients. You're sure to find something to love from their crispy curried vegetable samosas (the best I've ever had) to their full offering of North Indian entrees, including the sultry chicken tikka masala and sizzling tandoori chicken, both served with cardamom-flecked basmati and recommended by owner Pardeep Singh. For those who can't make up their minds (or who prefer to sample broadly), there's Swad's richly-varied lunch buffet, available from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., seven days a week. It may be just the thing to savor when you're out this Valentine's weekend. Located at 3602 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette. For info, call (925) 962-9575 or go to www.theswadindia.com.

Not up for a night out? Why not opt to stay in, and to bring a bit of Eastern Asia with you?

Online ordering from Moraga's Golden Palace allows for easy pickup or delivery, giving you a cozy night at home with a couple of cartons and a set of chopsticks. If you're in the mood for Chinese, you'll find a number of favorites, including, spicy Szechwan beef and savory mango chicken. If sushi's more your style, Golden Palace has a wide array to offer, from a Lion King Roll filled with a crab-cucumber combo and topped with soft baked salmon, to the crispy tempura shrimp and unagi of the Dragon Roll. Jay's Special Roll tops the list of Golden's special sushi, and there are suggested combinations for sushi and sashimi dinners. Golden Palace offers dine-in eating, and when spontaneity is key, accommodates for walk-in take away orders. Located at 581 Moraga Road, Moraga, for info call (925) 631-0284 or visit www.goldenpalacechinesemoraga.com.



Burmese curried chicken and noodle chowder at The Refined Palate



Swad India's Tandoori Chicken



Golden Palace

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