

Sept. 15, 2004, 8:30PM

## Food for thought

### Be adventurous: Treat your taste buds to new local dishes

By GIG GWIN  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch



St. Louis Post-Dispatch  
GOOD GRUB: Gig Gwin enjoys a traditional Thai meal in Bangkok.

One of the joys of traveling around the world is the opportunity to try new food. Thanks to my parents, who taught me to be adventurous at the dinner table, I can appreciate a plate of haggis in Scotland, sea eels in Tonga or roasted rooster comb in Portugal.

I have to admit, however, that my courage was tested in Mongolia when the guide I had hired pulled the car off a road and asked if I'd like to visit some nomads. I mustered a smile and was escorted into a tent in which one family lived.

As my guide and the bearded elder talked, it became clear that my presence was causing a good deal of excitement. The conversation became animated as the elder discussed the problems he was having with mountain lions attacking his cattle and yak. I sat on a low stool, observing a pot of bubbling white liquid covered by an unappetizing yellow film. Black flies converged on the surface.

Soon my worst fear was realized as the elder motioned toward the pot. I was being offered a bowl of yak soup.

I can't recall ever being less attracted to food, but I couldn't refuse my hosts' hospitality. The first sip went down the hatch, and it wasn't that bad, although my lips began to numb. As I took more sips, the numbing expanded to my chin and cheeks, for reasons I never understood.

I looked the elder in the eyes, held up my bowl and said, "You know, I might have another bowl of that white stuff."

The second bowl went down more smoothly, although I developed a twitch in my right eye. Trying to be sympathetic to my host, I suggested we start a hunting safari to eliminate the lion menace. Wisely, my guide gently intervened and led me back to the car and my hotel.

#### AWAY FROM HOME

Dining abroad can be a whole different style of eating.