

Dig into Savory Soup

Pho Towson & Bar offers a wide variety of the satisfying Vietnamese dish.



At the left, a charbroiled pork chop served with grilled shrimp with rice; at the center, a nice, hot bowl of pho; at the right, pho is much more than just a bowl of noodle soup.

Photos courtesy of Kathy Wielech Patterson

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It's likely that quite a few drivers have seen the sign for Pho Towson & Bar while cruising past the Best Western on Cromwell Bridge Road and thought, "What's a Pho Towson?"

Aficionados of Vietnamese cuisine know that pho refers to a noodle soup, most familiarly made with beef and topped with various garnishes, such as Thai basil, chili peppers and lime wedges. Although it's often the first dish that comes to mind when thinking of Vietnamese cuisine, pho is a primarily a 20th-century invention that came to being shortly after the French occupation of Vietnam. The dish came to the United States in the '70s after the Fall of Saigon, when thousands of Vietnamese immigrated to America with their family recipes for pho.

Predictably, the menu at Pho Towson & Bar is pho-heavy, listing versions that include steak, brisket, tendon and tripe, singularly and in combination (try the P1, which offers all of the above). There are also chicken and shrimp versions available, but no matter what proteins are used, it's the rich, flavorful broth that is at the heart of Pho Towson's pho. Slowly developed over hours of low-heat cooking, the soul-satisfying broth is perfect for a cold, dreary day. Yet, because of the fresh herbs and citrus garnishes, pho can also serve as a light, refreshing dish for a summer's day. This isn't simply noodle soup with some meat; pho is an entree.

Before indulging in the pho, try something from the short list of appetizers. There are two types of rolls, a soft-wrapped

spring roll (which are called "summer rolls" elsewhere) and a crispy, fried version listed as an "egg roll." The latter has a flavorful stuffing of pork, shrimp and vegetables and are more delicate than egg rolls found in most Chinese restaurants. A nice start without spoiling your appetite.

As for the main course, if soup (several versions of mi and hu tieu are offered, as well as pho) is not striking your fancy, there are also bun (vermicelli-based) and com (rice-based) dishes. A simple yet tasty choice is the com suon tom nuong (C71), a charbroiled pork chop served with grilled shrimp with rice. The pork is slightly sweet with a hint of star anise flavor and a nice garlic aftertaste. Another tasty option is the com tom ga muc xao xa ot (C63) a stir-fry of shrimp, chicken and squid in a sweet-ish lemongrass sauce.

The beverage menu is as interesting as the food menu. There are several "natural shakes" that come in exotic flavors, such as jack fruit, avocado, taro and mango. Like a cross between a smoothie and a bubble tea, these shakes also work as dessert. Strong Vietnamese coffee and chilled drinks, such as Thai tea and preserved lemon drink, are available as well. And let's not ignore the word "bar" in the restaurant's name. The restaurant runs the bar in the hotel's lobby, from which a selection of exotic and not-so-exotic cocktails, beer and wine can be had.

About the restaurant

Pho Towson & Bar, Best Western Plus, 1100 Cromwell Bridge Road, Towson. 410-832-2788; photowsonbar.com.

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