

food



OLD GOLD

Reviews of classic cafes and restaurants that have stood the test of time

IL FORNO

273A Hampton St, Hampton
9521 9104; ilfornorestaurant.com.au

FOOD
Italian

HOURS
Tuesday-Saturday 5-10pm,
Sunday 5-9pm

‘SAVE room for the tiramisu,’ my friend says when I tell her we are heading to Il Forno that evening. It’s a Wednesday night in the quiet bayside ‘burbs, but this popular little Italian local is bustling.

Almost every table is full and the happy hum of dinner conversations fills the air when we arrive.

Il Forno means “oven” in Italian and the mouth-watering doughy aroma of pizza draws us into the restaurant as soon as we open the door.

The friendly staff usher us through the cosy dining room with walls covered in black-and-white family photographs, snapshots of an Italian childhood and promise of a family-friendly affair.

The traditional southern Italian menu reveals an inviting choice of pizzas, pastas, and entrees, such as cauliflower fritters topped with gorgonzola and poached veal and chicken meatballs served with polenta and gremolata.

The pizzas follow the Italian tradition of simplicity and quality when it comes to toppings and the bases are made from house-milled organic wheat.

We choose a prosciutto pizza (\$19/\$24) to share, which is topped with marscapone, prosciutto, rocket and parmigiana on a tomato base.

My pick of the menu is the Moreton Bay bug pasta (Maccaruna Calabrese, \$32). Chunks of tender bug meat are tossed through ribbons of housemade pasta with artichokes, semi-dried tomatoes, fresh basil, chilli and garlic.

The Filea Calabrese (\$27.50) is also popular with diners — traditional Calabrian pasta served with a rich pork ragu.

The helpful wait staff are on hand to offer freshly shaved parmesan or pepper from a comically enormous metre-long pepper grinder named “Stanley”.

We wash it all down with glasses of Montepulciano d’Abruzzo from the well-balanced Aussie/Italian wine list.

With bursting bellies, we turn to the dessert list. There are six desserts to choose from, including a chocolate and hazelnut tart (\$14.50) and a vanilla panna cotta with a hint of licorice (\$12.50), but, remembering my friend’s suggestion, we opt for the tiramisu (\$14.50).

Creamy and indulgent with layers of espresso- and amaretto-soaked sponge and topped with crunchy candied pistachios, we agree that this is the best tiramisu we’ve ever had.

ISA JUDSON



Spoiled for choice

‘O WYAGOIN?’ In they come, out of the paddocks and into the front bar of Gippsland’s Tinamba Hotel. It’s

Boags all round here and *Home and Away* on the wide screen ... Just another country watering hole, you might think, until you step into Tinamba’s restaurant next door.

Suddenly, you’re in a more genteel place. A dining room of pleated lamps and linen napkins where a log heater glows in one corner and a black grand piano awaits some ivory tinkling in the other.

What connects the two spaces is a go-ahead management team — led by owners Damien Gannon and Brad Neilson — and a very able kitchen brigade. They have put tiny Tinamba (population 500) on Victoria’s culinary map. And whether you’re in the mood for a twice-baked Maffra blue cheese soufflé in the restaurant or a chicken parma in the front bar, this hotel is going to please.

FOOD

For a little place in “the middle of nowhere” (Gannon’s expression), the Tinamba sure offers plenty of choice.

The main menu is supported by a rotating slate of “specials” that can have you cruising between just-shucked Tassie oysters, pan-fried ricotta gnocchi and a bouillabaisse. “Soup of the day” is my pick and if Maffra Tanjil Blue and potato with

garlic oil and croutons (\$15) is on, snap it up. Deeply aromatic and well balanced, this was almost a meal in itself.

Tinamba chefs source plenty of local produce and their entree tasting plate is a handy platform for it: smoked beef and couscous here, sweet potato and capsicum arancini there.

But there’s a tendency here to over decorate. A carefully cooked (230gm) slab of Gippsland porterhouse (\$38, above) came attended by (cold) pickled cauliflower, potato mustard noisette and a cheese croquette when all it really needed was the shiraz jus and a cos lettuce salad.

Elsewhere, baked pork loin comes with potato chickpea “smash” (\$36), beef cheek with stir-fried Asian greens and sesame carrot puree (\$36).

Tinamba offers half a dozen desserts and the best way to sample them is to order the Quartet for One (\$18, right). Expect treats such as strawberry sorbet, blueberry bavarois and a peach tea meringue.

DRINKS

Not just Boags. The Tinamba keeps a good cellar, well stocked with top drops from Gippsland. A Blue Gables moscato

from Upper Maffra comes by the glass (\$9). So does a Nicholson River rose from Bairnsdale and a Glenmaggie sav blanc from Tinamba. But there are bubbles from France as well and some handily priced “small bottles” to go with your local cheeses.

SERVICE

On a quietish midweek evening, staff are personable and well informed. But, please, let’s see wines by the glass poured at the table.

X-FACTOR

Gannon and Neilson have put a lot of effort into gentrifying this dining room, with good napery, comfortable chairs and dinky lamps. Somehow, it’s not twee.

BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

No wonder they come from far and wide to the Tinamba. The hotel’s two-course \$30 lunch special (with a glass of beer, wine or soft drink) is pretty well unbeatable.

VERDICT

If ambition sometimes gets the better of the Tinamba team, there’s no doubting their enthusiasm.

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If you like this you’ll like these ...

NORTH TANI EAT AND DRINK

100 Gavan St, Bright
Destination dish Harrietville trout and coal potatoes

WEST PICKLED PIG

78 Liebig St, Warrnambool
Destination dish Pork belly, nashi flakes and caramelised fennel

SOUTH BARN & CO

238 Myers Rd, Balnarring
Destination dish Beef cheek, almond, heirloom carrots

TINAMBA HOTEL RESTAURANT

4-6 Tinamba-
Seaton Rd,
Tinamba
5145 1484

FOOD
Modern
Australian

HOURS
Lunch Wed-Sun,
dinner Wed-Sat

CHEF
Daniel Keck

BOOKINGS
Yes

PERFECT FOR
Midweek lunches,
elegant dinners

**DESTINATION
DISH**
Eye fillet with
fondant potato

NOISE FACTOR
Very pleasing

ONLINE
tinambahotel.
com.au

REVIEW BY
Simon Plant

PICTURES
Andrew Tauber

REVIEWS ARE
UNANNOUNCED AND
PAID FOR BY
WEEKEND.
RESTAURANTS ARE
NOT REVIEWED IN
THE FIRST MONTH
OF OPENING