

A little bit of Italy

Just when you think you know it all... Horsham reveals another gem which is worth investigating.

Run by the Raciti family, the new Italian restaurant Carmela offers an authentic Italian dining experience for all the family. Carmela opened its doors just six weeks ago on Denne Road. Some of us may remember the original Pizza eaterie which closed some years ago - leaving the building empty and lifeless. Now it is once again a delight as the 16th century listed building has been completely renovated from top to toe in a contemporary yet charming style which is both warm and inviting. 'A little touch of Italy' is how Francesco describes it. And it does feel just like that - with an Italian mural on one wall, lit lime candles, dark table linen rustic wooden floors and a little bit of Italian chatter in the background. Personally I relish

the fact that there is no humming air conditioning - nothing to blast you away with when it's time for you 'to go.' You genuinely feel like a welcome guest in their family run business and not hurried in any way.

As you would expect, the menu offers the traditional Italian breads, pizzas and pastas dishes but there is also a range of other dishes to delight including: Swordfish and pan fried Calf's liver with creamy mashed potato. Cooked to perfection by the way. All of the dishes are homemade on the premises and the dough is specially made to an authentic family recipe. We also ordered a pizza, with a choice of our own favourite toppings - so in our case lots of chilli, capers, anchovies and a touch of swordfish too! Delicious. Interestingly, the pizza arrived on a bread board already cut - an absolute invitation to ditch the knife and fork and eat with your fingers. Some people would say it tastes better that way.

As well as the main restaurant downstairs - upstairs reveals another large dining room which accommodates up to 50 diners (*perfect for a private party!*) and also a small private meeting room complete with a sofa for just a handful of people. The building is fully 'wifi-ed' and anyone is welcome to drop by at any time of day with their laptop - or indeed book some private space for meetings - or just so they can work in peace. You won't be getting in anyone's way if you are still there at 4pm in the afternoon with a cup of coffee - all the Raciti family are sitting around the bar downstairs and getting ready for evening service. Mama Carmela is there - as are other family members including: your host Francesco, his sister Rossella - and chef Alessandro as much a part of the business as ever.

Carmela also boasts a comfortable sheltered garden - so weather permitting you can enjoy the authentic Italian dining experience 'al fresco.'

Or even just indulge in a glass of wine with a plate of olives.

The Carmela restaurant is open six days a week from 8 am. (*Closed on a Monday*). Why so early...? You might wonder - its because you can also order a sumptuous full English breakfast - or even book a private breakfast meeting. The breakfast service is proving to be very popular for those in the know - particularly on a Saturday.

The Italians are known to be great hosts and one of the things that sets Carmela apart for me - from perhaps some of the major chains - is the very personal service you receive. It is just so nice to be properly greeted by your host with a warm handshake and on leaving a personal goodbye. Once you have been to Carmela - you know you will be back again. The relaxed family style at Carmela offers an authentic Italian restaurant experience - and a little bit of 'Italy' too.

