

HASMITA NAIR



Jozilicious

Twitter:@hasmita

UNTIL recently, the suburb with the highest concentration of good restaurants has undeniably been Parkhurst. Admittedly, I love the ambiance of sidewalk seating, so I may be biased, but Parkhurst has always been my go-to suburb when I'm hungry and want to be assured of a good meal.

However, with the increase in Parkhurst's popularity, parking has become scarce, so I've started exploring other suburbs and have been pleasantly surprised with Craighall's offering, in particular.

Some of the restaurants have been open for a while, while others are new.

The one thing they all have in common is that they are all hidden gems in their own right, and aren't very widely known, yet they have that wonderful neighbourhood feel. After your second or third visit, expect waiters to know your name, and how you like your coffee.

Here are my picks of the top eateries to try in Craighall.

1 BURNSIDES CAFÉ

You know when you walk into a restaurant and immediately feel relaxed? Burnside's Café's simple, classic decor leads to an inviting ambiance, complemented by delicious food and good service. I generally feel that owner-run restaurants are superior to the ones that are owner financed and manager run, and this spot is no exception.

Brother and sister duo, Jessica and Dillon du Plessis, always dreamed of opening a small family-run restaurant and started looking for a property about four years ago.

They converted a family home into a restaurant, taking advantage of the oversized patio and lush garden. The result is a tranquil, airy space which is part restaurant and soon to be part coffee roastery, and pizza and wine bar too (the latter two are opening on the property next year).

The menu is small and seasonal, driven by the type of food the owners love to cook and eat, rather than the latest trend. Try the chicken pot pie, made with mushrooms and garden herbs, served with salad or chips for R80, or the beef burger, served with cheddar cheese, pickles and hand cut chips for R86. Both are deliciously moreish.

6 Burnside's Avenue, Craighall. Call 011 326 3970. Open Tuesday to Friday: lunch and dinner, Saturday: breakfast, lunch, dinner, Sunday: breakfast and lunch only. Closed on Monday.

2 MODO MIO

The concept behind Modo Mio ("my style" in Italian) started two years ago as a dare – the owner was challenged to open up a restaurant in a parking lot, and three weeks later, a double carport was turned into a 32 seater eatery, with a pizza oven in the corner. It quickly grew to be one of Jozi's most popular Italian restaurants, serving up the best spinach cannelloni I've ever tasted. Rolled pasta is filled with spinach, ricotta and parmesan, while a creamy Napolitana sauce is layered over the pasta, before it is baked in the oven.

Prices are reasonable and so is corkage, at an affordable R40 a bottle. Modo Mio prides itself on its risotto, and offers six variants, the



Modio Mio is an Italian restaurant in a double carport space.

PICTURES: RISHAV NAIR

Is Craighall the new PARKHURST

Special dining experiences abound in Craighall and patrons do not have to deal with parking problems



Cnr Café is a classic bistro and a great place to hang out with friends.

signature being Risotto Porcini, R82. The most popular pasta is Spaghetti Mare, with fresh tomato, mussels, prawns, calamari and crab, R95. If your preference is pizza, go for the Pizza Contadina, Italian sausage, fontina, chilli, garlic, parmesan and caramelised onions, R88.

339 Jan Smuts Avenue, Craighall. Call 079 343 6729. Open Mon to Sunday, lunch and dinner.

3 CNR CAFÉ

This casual restaurant is a classic bistro, and a great place to hang out with friends over a light meal and a glass of wine. The open kitchen can get a bit noisy, but it's all part of the vibe. I usually opt to go for breakfast over a weekend, and I particularly enjoy sitting outside on the sidewalk patio, which gets great sun in the warmer seasons. I like to think of the menu as a composition of comfort food with

gourmet flair. Burgers, fish and chips, pizzas, salads – you'll find all of it on offer here, and the portion sizes are generous. I was impressed with the high quality of ingredients in the dishes: Norwegian salmon is used for the beer battered fish and chips, while free range eggs are used at breakfast.

Corner Buckingham and Rothesay Avenues. Call 011 880 2244. Open Monday to Saturday: breakfast, lunch and dinner, Sunday: breakfast and lunch only.

4 WARM & GLAD

This European-style coffee shop-cum-retail space has quickly become the place to be for yuppies who work from home, due to the free wi-fi and hip soundtrack. The idea was to create a space where locals meet and the creative network, with the shop stocking anything the owners think is cool – like books, sunglasses, vinyl records

and stationery.

Coffee is sourced from Deluxe Coffeeworks in Cape Town, while TWG tea is imported from Singapore – try the Jasmine Queen green tea. Warm & Glad likes to think it does one of the best scrambled eggs in town – its version, R35, is topped with crème fraiche. Other tempting meals include the gorgonzola, parma ham and preserved fig sandwich, served on Bolo De Caco bread, R55, and the Vietnamese hot beef sandwich with cabbage, carrot, beef fillet, cashews, sesame seeds and a fiery Vietnamese dressing, R80.

For dessert, try Paul Ballen's ice cream, R35. The history behind this ice cream is a story in itself. Wits student, Paul Ballen, received an ice cream maker for his birthday and soon realised he was passionate about making ice cream, so he bought two industrial machines. He started selling ice cream to his Twitter followers, and now supplies a number of restaurants in Jozi with decadent flavours such as Madagascan vanilla.

357 Jan Smuts Avenue, Craighall. Call 011 781 0455. Open Monday to Friday: breakfast, and lunch, Saturday: breakfast only. Closed on Sunday.

5 TONI'S FULLY FURNISHED PIZZA

Toni's is easily Pretoria's most popular pizza spot, and finally, Joburg has a branch of its own, which opened last month. Renowned for its innovative pizza toppings, Toni's pizza may just be my favourite pizza joint. The pizza has just the right combination of cheese (too much can get oily and overpowering), with flavour combinations that are just wonderful.

Pizzas come in two sizes – 15cm and 33cm. My favourites are Pizza Verdure, mozzarella, roasted peppers, aubergine, olives, baby marrow, capers, fennel seeds and lemon zest, R69, as well as Pizza Coscia D'Angello, roast leg of lamb, yoghurt, feta, olives, mozzarella and coriander, R96. The pastas look equally tempting, and according to the owner, are just as good as the pizzas. I like that you are given a selection of pastas, like gnocchi, penne and ravioli, as well as a selection of sauces.

Don't judge me, but after eating (most of) a large pizza, our waitress persuaded me to try the dessert pizza (okay, she asked once and I agreed). Call me old fashioned, but I was a bit sceptical about the idea



Chicken Pot Pie at Burnside's Café



Beef burger at Burnside's Café



Scrambled eggs at Warm & Glad
PICTURE: PRANAY DOOLABH



Toni's pizza is one of the best in Joburg
PICTURE: SUPPLIED

of a sweet pizza, and expected it to be dry. It was actually decadently delicious. The pizza arrived in the form of a calzone, with a hazelnut chocolate filling (similar to Nutella). Nutella crepes are one of my absolute favourite treats, and this was very similar – it tasted almost like a baked chocolate samosa. Needless to say, I demolished the entire thing.

Corner Lancaster and Clarence Avenues. Call 011 447 1318. Open Tuesday to Sunday: lunch and dinner. Closed on Monday.

Hasmita Nair was hosted by the restaurants above for the purposes of this review. For more ideas of things to do in and around Jozi, visit www.joziliciousblog.co.za.