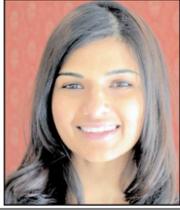


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Three of the finer tapas-serving restaurants offer a flavourful feast for the senses

AHEAD of a recent trip to Spain, I was most looking forward to the food. Tapas originated in Spain, and I imagined spending leisurely evenings drinking sangria and digging into an array of Spanish snacks.

In retrospect, while I loved some of the dishes, others took a bit of getting used to – for example, in Spain, prawns aren't deveined and are simply blanched in water before being served. It's safe to say I much prefer the South African way of preparing seafood.

Locally, we have only a handful of tapas bars – which is a pity, because the idea of sharing really appeals to me – I love tasting a variety of food and I also like nibbling throughout the evening, especially if I'm with a group of friends.

Here are the three spots in Jozi where you can do just that:

1. Crazy Horse

I had to make sure I had the address right when visiting this "hole in the wall" spot in Parktown North, after driving up and down 4th Avenue several times and missing it.

I walked into a dimly lit restaurant with no hostess or waitress in sight, but something about the restaurant felt welcoming. With no one else inside, we took a seat at a table, after which the waitress emerged from the open kitchen and greeted us.

The restaurant exudes a casual, homely atmosphere, complemented by a unique menu. We were a party of four, so decided to order the an-



Jalapeno poppers at the Grazing Room.

PICTURES: RISHAV NAIR



Fish tacos at the Grazing Room



Madagascar prawns at Rocket Lolita's

tipasti platter to start – cappa parma, pickles, parmeggiano and crispy sour dough (R70), then moved on to fresh crumbed sardines with lemon and mayo (R40), arancini risotto balls with a mozzarella centre (R40) and Spanish meatballs with blackened peppers, red onion and tomatoes (R60).

Soon our arms were outstretched across the table, dipping into each other's plates – the way tapas is meant to be enjoyed. All the food was excellent, and most importantly, different. I haven't seen

many of the dishes replicated at other restaurants.

This spot is a far stretch from its more pretentious neighbours; I loved being able to sit cross-legged at the table, and to walk up to the chefs at the open kitchen and place my order.

Open for lunch and dinner Tuesdays to Saturday, lunch only Sunday. Address: 4th Avenue, Parktown North. Call 011 880 7924.

2. Rocket Lolita's

After spending 20 minutes looking for parking (I never learn and

continue to frequent Parkhurst on Friday nights), we arrived at a restaurant bursting with people. Joined to Rocket restaurant, Rocket Lolita's is a sushi, cocktail and tapas bar extension.

Most of the people around us appeared to be having only drinks. I was surprised to see some of my favourite authentically Spanish dishes on the menu, like patatas bravas, roasted potato cubes topped with homemade spicy tomato sauce (R40) and tortilla espanola, served Spanish style – with potato, onion

and egg (R42). I later discovered that the Spanish influence is due to the owner's wife being from Malaga.

I expected the food to be good, but I didn't expect it to be spectacular, which it was. The mushroom and cranberry ragout rosti (R44) goes down as one of my all-time favourite meals – the flavour combination was sublime. We also loved the Madagascan prawns (R62) and the home-made fishcakes (R48). Wine and beer lovers will enjoy the fact that there is a suggested wine and craft beer pairing for every food item.

Open Tuesdays to Thursdays 4pm-11pm, Fridays to Sundays noon-11pm. Address: 24, 4th Avenue, Parkhurst.

Call 011 880 6012

3. The Grazing Room

If you like the idea of tapas in a fine dining setting, head to the Grazing Room. Joined to the well-known DW11-13, this is tapas done the classy way.

The ambience is sedate, service is top notch and you'll marvel at how quickly the two chefs in the open kitchen prepare dishes.

As expected, presentation of all the dishes was jaw-dropping, with four or five tapas being more than sufficient for a couple.

I loved the spicy beer-battered jalapeno poppers, stuffed with Danish feta and blue cheese mayo (R50), and the fish tacos – whisky and orange-cured Scottish salmon with orange segments, green peppercorn crumble and dill mayo (R60).

Also try the seared tuna salad – smoked yellowfin tuna with pickled ginger, seaweed and microherb salad, ponzu mayo, Thai dressing and vuzu caviar (R70), or the mushrooms on toast – porcini, shiitake and king oyster mushrooms with rocket, caramelised red onion, pecorino and pickled shimeji mushrooms (R60). For dessert, go for the pistachio ice cream with honey nougat (R60).

Open for lunch and dinner Tuesdays to Saturdays, lunch only Sundays. Address: Dunkeld West Shopping Centre, c/o Jan Smuts and Bompas Street, Dunkeld West. Call 011 341 0663. Visit www.dw11-13.co.za

Hasmita was hosted by the restaurants for this review.

For more restaurant ideas in and around Jozi, visit Hasmita's blog: www.joziliciousblog.co.za.

Making the most of some marvellous local markets

I'M THE first to admit that when Neighbourgoods and Market on Main opened, I thought that this was the start and end of the market fad in Jozi. I think the interest these markets have drawn to the inner city is great, but after visiting each three or four times I soon grew bored with them. Just when I thought my market fetish had dried up, I did a little scouting around and found three fabulous, lesser known markets – some right on my doorstep.

Here are Jozi's three most underrated markets:

1. Fourways Farmers' Market

Yes, you read right. The suburb previously known only for its horrendous traffic, now has its own market which is simply divine. In Jozi, we're blessed with amazing weather, and too few of us take advantage of that. Fourways Farmers' Market allows you to do just that. Situated in a nursery, the completely outdoor market has a hay bale picnic lawn, a Pine Tree canopy and a pretty rose and lavender garden, making you feel as if

you're miles away from suburbia. Food options are great, my favourites are Baha Taco, Mexican street food using only organic ingredients and hand-rolled tacos, plus the best burgers ever from Balkan Burgers. Enjoy some coffee or a glass of wine while listening to live music in the sunshine – I can't think of a better way to spend a Sunday.

Open every Sunday 9am to 3pm. Address: Cnr Montecasino Boulevard and William Nicol Road, Fourways. www.fffmarket.co.za

2. Hazel Food Market

It's not often that something warrants a drive to Pretoria, but my visit to Hazel Food Market was completely worth it. Occupying a massive space in Menlo Park, this market boasts more than 60 vendors selling everything from pot plants to gourmet boerie rolls. I noticed people coming early and setting up tables with their own decorations, while others set up board games on the floor. It's clear that this market is a whole day affair for the entire family.

I found the food far cheaper than other markets, and enjoyed an old fashioned pannekoek, a black forest cupcake from Minkie's Cupcakes, plus a pasteis de nata from Taska's Portuguese Foods.

Open every Saturday 8am to 2pm with a special night market (5pm to 9pm) on the first Saturday of the month. Address: Greenlyn Village Centre, Thomas Edison Street, Menlo Park. www.hazelfoodmarket.co.za

3. Blubird Wholefood Market

With a focus on organic fare, this market is the one to visit if you're health conscious. Most vendors stock food that is additive, preservative and colourant free. You'll find fresh breads, Italian pestos, designer cupcakes and delicious curries. In addition, avid chefs will love the selection of organic seedlings and vegetables on offer. There are even earthworms available for you to turn your kitchen waste into compost.

Open every Sunday 9am to 2pm. Address: Blubird Shopping Centre, Athol Oaklands Drive, Birnam.



Hazel Food Market

PICTURE: HASMITA NAIR