

WHENEVER I travel internationally, I always come home to South Africa with a newfound appreciation for the wide variety of good food we have here.

Whether you like Indian, Portuguese or Italian food – we've got it all, and the quality of our restaurants is exceptionally high. Italian food seems to be a firm favourite among Joburgers, with pizzerias and old-school Italian spots dotted all over the city.

If, however, you're after a traditional Italian meal, with an Italian cook in the kitchen, here are the top three classiest Italian restaurants around, with simple but delicious food to match the authentic ambience.

1. Tortellino d'Oro

Established in 1986, this restaurant has grown from 35m² to 500m². Attributing its success to the passion of the owners, a Bolognese family, Tortellino d'Oro has now evolved into a restaurant and a delicatessen, offering a huge array of premade pasta sauces, homemade pastas, breads and desserts. Stock up on extra-virgin olive oil, or choose from the wide range of antipasti.

Ice creams are made on site, using the freshest produce available. I tried a couple and was very impressed – my favourite flavour was definitely Nutella. You'll also find Italy's best panettone, a rich Italian bread made with eggs, fruit and butter, imported directly from the Italian producers.

The signature dish on the menu, hence the name, is homemade tortellino, R110. It is the shape of a belly button with a filling of Parma ham, mortadella, chicken and Parmesan. The story of how this pasta originated is interesting – according to legend, a beautiful dame was travelling to Bologna in her coach and stopped at a simple lodge. The host peeped through the front door's keyhole and caught a glimpse of her belly button, then went to the kitchen to reproduce it in the shape of a pasta.

Open Mon to Sat: 9am to 10pm, Sun: 9am to 3pm. Address: Oaklands Shopping Centre, corner Kruger and Pretoria streets, Oak-



SMORGASBORD: Selection of antipasti at Tortellino d'Oro.

Pictures: Rishav Nair

Joburg's top three trattorias

*Traditional Italian cooking is right on your doorstep, with simple but delicious food, writes **Hasmita Nair***

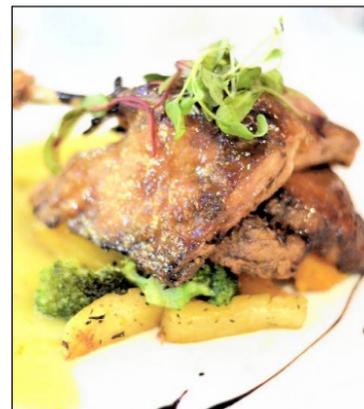
lands. Contact: 011 483 1249. www.tortellino.co.za

2. Amarcord Osteria Italiana da Luciana e Mario

Offering predominately northern Italian cuisine from the Romagna region, this upmarket restaurant never fails to delight the senses. As per the name, the restaurant is run by two Italian cooks, Lu-

ciana and Mario. If you enjoy Italian food, there's no doubt you'll be familiar with Assaggi. The successful restaurant was opened by Luciana in 2001, and later sold last year, which led to the opening of Amarcord.

As with all the restaurants on the list, the menu is pricey, but you can be assured of quality. For starters, try the Calamari Fritti,



RECOMMENDED: Crispy duck at La Cucina di Ciro

R84, fried calamari with zucchini chips and tartar sauce.

You won't go wrong with any of the pasta choices for mains, but the Cannelloni Ricotta e Spinaci, R94, homemade pasta filled with ricotta cheese and spinach, served with a tomato, Parmesan and white sauce, is scrumptious. My second favourite is the Gnocchetti Verdial Gorgonzola, R92, spinach potato dumplings with Gorgonzola sauce – deliciously decadent. Can't make up your mind? The Tris di pasta, R140, is a platter consisting of your choice of any three of the pasta

HASMITA NAIR

Jozilicious

Twitter: @Hasmita



dishes on the menu.

Open Tues to Sat: lunch and dinner. Sun: lunch only. Address: Thrupps Centre, 204 Oxford Road, Illovo. Contact: 011 268 2287. www.amacordosteria.com

3. La Cucina di Ciro

With a menu that changes monthly, La Cucina is renowned for its seasonal produce, resulting in dishes that are innovative and different. I love the indoor/outdoor layout, resulting in an airy, welcoming space. Upon arrival, Ciro himself will take you through the day's specials. The duck is highly recommended and Ciro changes the preparation method regularly, the only constant being that the duck is crispy and not fatty. The summer menu is akin to the season – fresh and light.

For starters, try the phyllo pastry calzone filled with roasted vegetables and buffalo mozzarella, garnished with deep-fried basil leaves and olive oil, R70. For mains, the fresh herb fettuccine tossed with lightly poached prawns in white wine, farm butter, fresh mint, basil and lemon, R125, is sublime. I wasn't able to taste any of the desserts, but I'll be sure to return for the chocolate and almond torte served with an almond praline ice cream, R45, or the terrine of papino and coconut ice cream served with flambéed pineapples and coconut biscotti, R55.

La Cucina di Ciro also has a wonderful courtyard extension called The Pudding Shop, which is a daytime restaurant with a vegetarian focus, serving light meals throughout the day.

Open Tues to Sat: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Sun: breakfast and lunch only. Address: 43 7th Avenue, Parktown North. Contact: 011 442 5187. www.lacucinadiciro.co.za

Nair was hosted by the restaurants above for the purposes of this review. For more restaurant ideas in and around Jozi, visit Hasmita's blog: www.joziliciousblog.co.za

Fiery performance by the Imperial Ice Stars

HASMITA NAIR

JUST as I took my seat in the Teatro at Montecasino, about to watch the Imperial Ice Stars perform their rendition of *Sleeping Beauty on Ice*, I began trying to recollect the story of Sleeping Beauty.

It's taken for granted that we all know the story behind the most popular fairy tales, but I found myself getting confused between my Prince Charmings and Wicked Witches.

I didn't quite have time to reconcile the story, because right on time, the curtains opened to a breathtaking palace scene, accompanied by the enchanting sounds of Tchaikovsky.

The first thing that struck me

was the lavish costumes. A renowned costume designer, Russian Svetlana Murzak, was asked to create costumes reflecting life and fashions during the Tsarist period between 1910-1912, and the costumes are designed so that they give a more realistic and human look to the characters.

Before I knew it, the performers were floating across the stage, twirling and twisting in ways I didn't think possible on solid ground, let alone on ice.

I focused on the skating, rather than trying to figure out the story, which admittedly I couldn't work out until I read the glossy programme during the interval.

The story of *Sleeping Beauty* is



Skaters in action for a *Sleeping Beauty on Ice* performance.

told through acrobatic dance moves and special effects, including dancers holding each other up with just one hand, and spinning in circles while doing so.

At times, the dancers' high-speed stunts, including leaps, throws and aerial gymnastics, were beyond the level I've seen even at Cirque du Soleil performances.

I later found out that this is the result of nine hours of rehearsals a day, six days a week, and a constant desire to add exciting new elements to the show, inevitably resulting in broken bones, muscle damage and dislocations.

The use of pyrotechnics on ice was a huge crowd-pleaser and definitely something I didn't expect.

With enough ice to equal the weight of three elephants, it's no surprise that the stage takes 140 man-hours to build.

The show constantly pushes boundaries in terms of the stunts performed, with the best left for the finale. Without giving too much away, I'll simply say that this was my "high"-light (pun intended).

Sleeping Beauty on Ice runs until January 12 at Montecasino, Fourways. Tickets cost between R150 and R400. Book at www.computicket.com.