

HASMITA
NAIR

Jozilicious

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MELVILLE used to be known for its grungy restaurants and standing-room only bars, but this quaint suburb seems to have shrugged off its reputation as a students' only hangout, with a multitude of quality restaurants popping up, particularly on 7th Street, drawing a crowd of business folk, socialites and foodies.

Join me as I guide you through Melville.

For the best croissants in Jozi (and quite possibly the world):

Café De La Crème

One of the oldest spots in Melville, this well-known bakery originally opened in 1987 in Joburg city centre. After relocating to Melville, it quickly developed a reputation for its delicious breads and pastries, along with an environment where waiters know your name and how you like your coffee.

While its signature items are lemon-baked cheesecake and gingerbread men, what gets me there at the crack of dawn are the croissants. These come out of the oven at about 7am, and its best to pick up your fix soon after. The almond croissant is the single best pastry I've ever had. It's soft and buttery inside and slightly crisp on the outside, with a sugary almond paste in the centre and roasted flaked almonds on top. Don't even try going after 9am on the weekends unless you've ordered in advance, they'll be sold out.

Open Monday 7am to 5pm, Tuesday to Saturday 7am to 7pm, Sunday 8am to 7pm. Address: Corner 4th Avenue and 7th Street, Melville. Contact: 011 726 7716.

For amazing pizza:

The Ant Café

If you're a lover of an ultra-thin, crispy crust, Ant Café, which has been around longer than any other restaurant on 7th Street, is the spot for you. A hole in the wall in the true sense of the phrase, it's unpretentious, rustic and slightly grubby, but very inviting and cosy.

The walls are covered in what appear to be random artefacts and pictures (I couldn't quite tell because the lighting was exceptionally dim), with the overall vibe striking me as Bohemian.

When I say the crust is thin, it's paper thin. The number of pizza slices you can eat will be double your usual amount because you aren't filling up on a thick crust. I'm a fan of the Focaccia Salads – all the pleasure of a pizza without as much guilt. Try the Republik, R65, biltong, feta, olives, avocado, tomato and caramelised onions. The pizza menu is traditional, with all the usual suspects like Mexicana, Regina and Hawaiian.

I've heard the pastas are good, gnocchi in particular, but I'm yet to try this for myself. Go on a Monday – all pizzas are on special at R55, but remember to take cash because the restaurant does not have card facilities (there's an ATM a few stores away, should you forget.)

Open Monday to Sunday: lunch and dinner. Address: 11 7th Street, Melville. Contact: 076 476 5671.

YOLO

If you're a good enough restaurant in Joburg, you don't need to publicise yourself. In this city, more



Lucky Bean in 7th Street, Melville

PICTURES: RISHAV NAIR

Melville has dropped its dingy, student vibe and now presents itself as a trendy spot to enjoy anything from a crispy croissant to a perfect pizza



Café De La Crème croissants.

PICTURE: SUPPLIED



YOLO vegetarian pizza on a sourdough base



Prawn Ravioli in lobster bisque at La Luna

than elsewhere in the country, word of mouth is the best marketing tool.

Joburgers love eating good food, and if you have a quality product, an okay location and a good ambience, you're almost guaranteed success. I had seen YOLO come up a few times on my Twitter feed, so decided to go and check it out for myself. Located on the not so trendy part of 7th Street, the restaurant is small and unassuming, with a simple chalkboard menu and glass-blown lights. The owner and chef, Percy Mosedi, is one of the few South Africans to have trained in Naples, Italy as a pizza master. In his words, "if it's round and you add tomato and cheese, it's not a pizza. What makes a pizza authentic is a wood-burning oven, organic yeast and a 'cornicione' – the raised edge of a pizza. You're meant to eat a pizza from the middle to the edge so that the crust can cleanse your palate and prepare you for the next slice."

I don't think I've ever met anyone this serious about pizza.

Percy even has a wood-burning pizza oven at his home, for when inspiration hits in the middle of the night. What's unique about YOLO, is the fact that you can choose from a variety of crusts – sundried tomato and rosemary, olive, sourdough or whole-wheat, as well as bases – peppadew, tomato and chilli or mushroom pesto. I cannot even properly explain how good this pizza is. I equate the crust to the pizza version of pastry – flaky, not chewy. Crisp, not soggy – even in the centre. I opted for the Pizza Boscondo "All" Lombardi, R84, coarsely chopped onions, mushrooms, fresh cream, parsley, thyme, ground black pepper, sea salt, smoked mozzarella shavings and grated parmigiano reggiano. I've been fantasising about it ever since and have already circulated the menu to my colleagues for our next Friday office lunch (YOLO delivers within a 5km radius of Melville).

Open: Monday to Sunday, lunch and dinner. Address: 2 7th Street, Melville. Contact: 011 482 7016. Visit

www.yolopizza.co.za

For upmarket Italian cuisine: La Luna

I firmly believe that the ambience of a restaurant is just as important as the food, and this is something La Luna has perfected. Large glass windows create an indoor/outdoor feel, complemented by soft lighting and perfectly spaced tables. Portions are relatively small, so you'll definitely be able to handle a three-course meal, which is all the better because the food is just sublime. The restaurant's two chefs, Claus and Linda, have travelled the world, cooking up a storm in fine dining establishments everywhere from London to Shanghai. Pasta is made in house, with ravioli, agnolotti and tortellini all being produced manually on a daily basis. To start, try the Panzanella, Tuscan-style bread salad with fresh fennel, tomato and fior di latte mozzarella, R85. The restaurant prides itself on its Pumpkin Ravioli, R85, served with brown butter, pine kernels and amorette. I

tried the Prawn Ravioli in lobster bisque, R160, the flavour of which was explosive. Dessert didn't disappoint, try the Tiramisu Semifreddo, R60, which is like tiramisu and ice cream in one – the best of both.

Open: Monday dinner only, Tuesday to Saturday: lunch and dinner. Closed Sunday Address: 9 7th Street, Melville. Contact: 011 482 7451. Visit www.laluna-melville.co.za

For quirky bistro-style dining:

Lucky Bean

In terms of ambience, this restaurant's large outdoor deck is a winner. We tried it out on a Friday night, and took the last table in sight. Clearly popular, I had high expectations and was left disappointed, but I think that may have been bad menu choices.

We devoured the soft, slightly sweet bread on the table, which was probably my favourite part of the meal. For starters, I had the salt and pepper calamari, deep fried and served with Japanese mayo, R50, while my husband went for the fresh salmon and lime cake, R60. I found my dish a bit chewy and lacking in flavour, while the salmon cake was surprisingly small. For mains, the springbok pie, R80, had potential, but was spoiled by the fact that it was drowned in gravy, which made the pastry soggy. The chickpea patty in whole-wheat pita, R70, was mushy and not enjoyable. That said, service was excellent and so was the vibe, so I'll definitely be back to try other dishes.

Open Tuesday to Sunday: lunch and dinner. Closed Mondays. Address: 16 7th Street, Melville. Contact 011 482 5572. Visit www.lucky-beantree.co.za

Hasmita was hosted by YOLO, La Luna and Lucky Bean for the purposes of this review

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