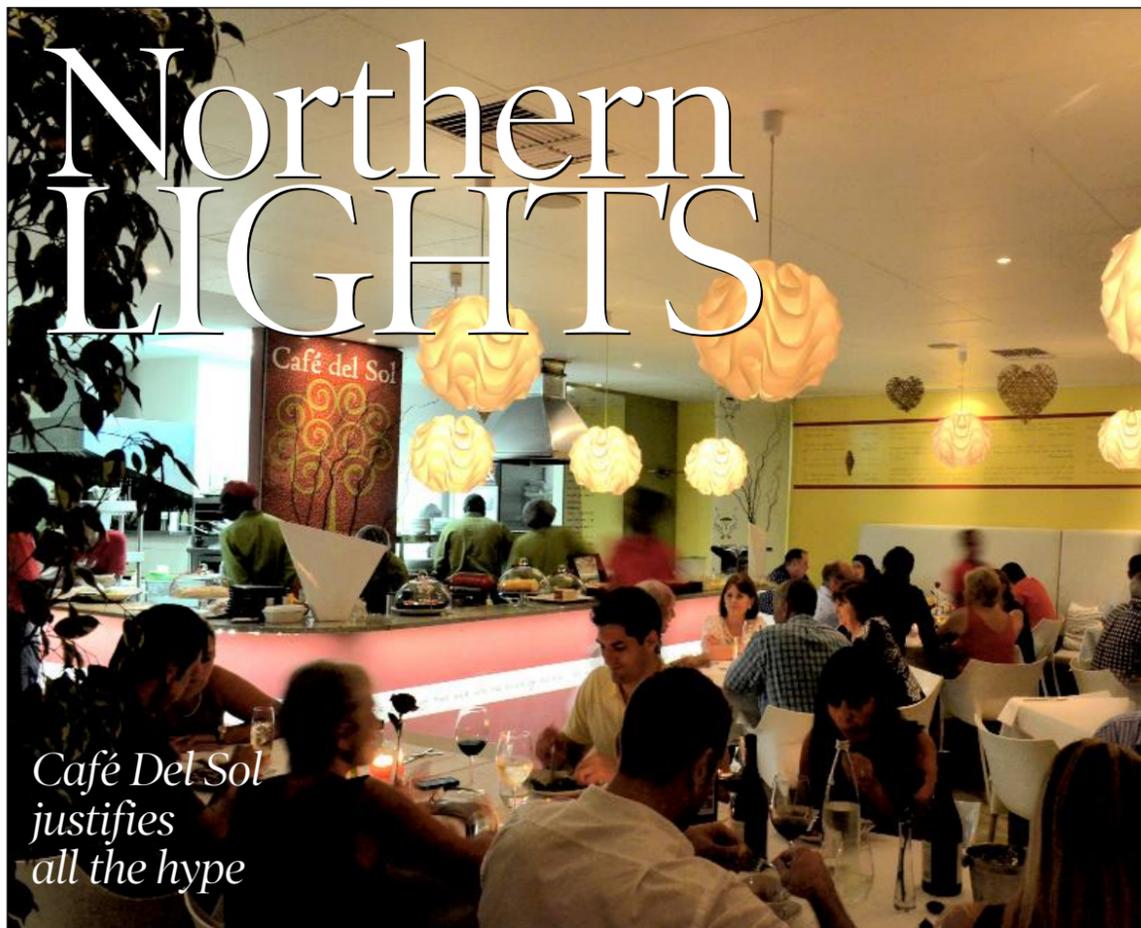


IF YOU want good food in Northern Jozi, it's easy to know where to go, Parkhurst for pavement style bistros, Sandton for fine dining and Illovo for everything in-between. Before Café Del Sol opened its doors in June 2007, I don't think anyone not residing in Olivedale had any reason to go there.

In fact, I don't know anything else about Olivedale apart from the fact that Café Del Sol, South Africa's best Italian restaurant in 2012 (as awarded by EatOut) is situated there.

Upon driving into the dark, isolated Olivedale Corner Shopping Centre, you'll be forgiven for thinking you're in the wrong place. Surely such a highly acclaimed restaurant wouldn't be situated in a centre where practically nothing else is open? However, once you enter the restaurant, the chock-a-block parking lot and long waiting list all make sense – Café del Mar is playing in the background with the ambiance bright and airy, softened by hues of perfectly adjusted lighting and well placed candles. The interior of the restaurant has been designed in consultation with a feng shui expert, aiming to ensure that energy is well placed. Adding to that is the buzz a good restaurant emits – people are chilling on couches outside having drinks, waiters are efficiently weaving through tables and the Italian "Mamma" is dashing in and out of the kitchen.

Owner and Chef, Mamma Luciana, together with her two children, Ryan and Chiara, were inspired to open the restaurant after people started coming over for dinner at the family home more and more frequently, with guests begging for a restaurant where they could have Luciana's food every day. They aimed to create a restaurant that would bring light and inspiration into people's lives through food, atmosphere and service. The walls are adorned with meaningful quotes from the likes of Buddha and Mandela – great food for thought when dinner conversation gets a bit dry.



Café Del Sol justifies all the hype

The restaurant has beautiful decorations and a superb atmosphere.

HASMITA NAIR

Jozilicious



The menu is more sophisticated than most Italian restaurants; you can expect to find some of Mamma Luciana's signature dishes, as well as more traditional Italian fare. I was quite refreshed to see that there is no pizza or focaccia on of-



Prawn tempura starter.

fer. To start, try the "Avocado Al-Ritz", R68, – pan-fried queen prawns, dressed in homemade basil pesto mayonnaise, served with avocado, rosa tomatoes, and rocket salad with parmesan. For mains, I had the stuffed calamari, R115, which I have been fantasising about



Stuffed calamari.

ever since. Falkland's calamari tubes are stuffed with red peppers, green Sevilliano olives, capers, ricotta cheese, parmesan and a touch of chilli. Served with Cappellini pasta mixed with seasonal stir-fried veg and a beurre blanc sauce, this dish is exquisite and unlike any-



Tomato and Mozzarella tart.

thing I've tasted before.

Another option for mains is the "Porcini Roasted Chicken" (R110) – roasted free-range chicken breasts with a crispy skin, served on a bed of porcini mushrooms with green peas and truffle oil risotto. There's plenty on the menu for vegetarians, including fresh gnocchi or ravioli, R89, both of which are made fresh every day. I found the prawn ravioli I tasted to be a bit heavy on the pasta and light on the filling, but the browned butter and sage sauce it was served in was sublime.

The dessert options are equally as enticing as the rest of the menu. I was torn between the "Crespelle Suzette" – Italian crepes with Nutella, covered in a Grand Marnier liqueur and fresh orange sauce and the "Dark Chocolate Tart". I opted for the latter and was not disappointed. I wouldn't be surprised if an entire slab of dark chocolate went into the tartlet-sized dessert, every bite was pure decadence.

Most of the staff have been around since the restaurant's inception, and carry the owners' passion through with their impeccable service. The restaurant has enjoyed its success over the past few years and is now in a state of growth, with many proposals for expansion on the table (see what I did there). Café Del Sol is situated at Olivedale Corner Shopping Centre, cnr Olive and President Fouché Roads, Olivedale. Bookings absolutely essential – call 011 704 6493. Open for lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch only on Sun. Closed Mon.

For more restaurant ideas around JHB, visit Hasmita's blog: www.joziliciousblog.co.za or follow her on Twitter, @hasmita

Joburg tea houses have art of tea down to a tee

HASMITA NAIR

TEA, GLORIOUS tea. Nothing is as fitting an accompaniment to a good book, or more comforting after a long day. If you're looking for something a bit more exotic than Five Roses, here's where to go:

1 Contessa Tea Connoisseur and Bistro, Shop 2a, Cnr Rivonia Blvd and 11th Ave.

Stocking over 150 different teas, including 28 imported loose leaf teas and the entire Twinings range, this sidewalk cafe is the place to go if you've tasted tea overseas that you're struggling to find locally.

The menu is simple but wholesome and fresh, offering a range of homemade cakes baked on the premises daily. The coconut and chocolate cake – a layered lamington in cake form – is to die for. Tea tastings cost R75 per person and allow you to taste six variants.

Call 011 234 6641. Open Mon-Fri 7.30am-4.30pm; Sat 8am-3pm.

2 Enmasse, 14 Illovo Junction, 1 Corlett Drive, Illovo.

Some may be surprised to see a Thai massage spot on this list, but Enmasse is no normal spa.

With branches in Joburg and



Contessa tea tasting

Cape Town, this slick, Hong Kong style massage concept is basically a large room partitioned into massage areas. The tea lounge acts as a bridge between leaving your massage space and getting into your car, encouraging people to extend their relaxation experience.

Enmasse produces its own range of loose leaf teas and enables you to blend a variety of teas depending on what your palate is craving. For example, the Hot Cross Bun Chai tea blends well with their ginger blend, while their Cape



54 on Bath

Queen (a blend of green bush and Jasmine) blends nicely with their peppermint and spearmint option.

Enmasse is currently running a great special – until the end of this month you can exchange a used or expired massage voucher from any other spa for a massage at a cost of R100. Call 011 880 3020. Open Mon-Sun 8am-10pm.

3 54 on Bath, 54 Bath Avenue, Rosebank.

This art deco hotel offers a traditional afternoon tea in its mod-



Crabtree and Evelyn Tea Room

ern and opulent lobby. In addition to a selection of sweet and savoury treats, guests can enjoy a variety of Dilmah teas, including the first black tea in history – Lapsang Souchang, sourced from China's Fujian province.

You will be presented with a choice of flavour enhancements to add to your tea, including star aniseed, orange zest, mint and lemongrass.

Call 011 344 8500. Tea is served every day from 3.30pm-5pm and costs R160pp including snacks.

4 The Tea Merchant, 7th Avenue, Parktown North.

Specialising in sourcing teas from around the world, The Tea Merchant stocks green, white, fruity and traditional black teas. It is the perfect place to source exotic, rare teas and tea accessories.

It is not a sitdown café, but it does offer tea tastings. You can also purchase teapots, which are available in glass, cast iron, porcelain and stainless steel. Teas can be sourced on request for customers.

Call 011 447 9307. Open Mon-Fri 8.30am-4pm.

5 Crabtree & Evelyn Tea Room, Design Quarter, Fourways.

Quaint and eclectic, the Tea Room, situated a floor above the C&E retail store, is a quiet haven that offers expertly blended herbal infusions and black teas. Reminiscent of a traditional English country kitchen, it is warm and cosy with board games and magazines, so you needn't be in a hurry to leave. Their scones with C&E strawberry jam and clotted cream are undoubtedly the best in Joburg.

Call 011 465 8276. Open Mon-Sat 9am-5pm; Sun and holidays 9am-4pm.