

italian picks

As Italian as it Gets

A little guide to eight very-Italian things when it comes to food and where you can get these as close to authentic as you can find them here.

— Gianantonio Candiani

Being an Italian resident in Nepal and quite acquainted with food preparation and restaurant hospitality, it is sometimes a challenge to find what my taste buds really need. A major task for any chef wanting to replicate Italian cuisine in Kathmandu is finding quality ingredients. Freshness of food is a very important affair given that a great deal of Italian recipes are prepared with fresh vegetables and herbs, dairy products and high quality meat cuts. Nevertheless, Kathmandu is a cosmopolitan city that can supply, if you know where to look, everything you need to feel at home. Home, for me and my colleagues, is Lalitpur and there isn't much to do if you wake up in the middle of the night crying for a *panino al prosciutto crudo* (raw and matured ham sandwich) or a piece of 36 months aged *Parmigiano Reggiano* dipped in authentic Modena's balsamic vinegar. There is a solution, though, for your craving for Italian delicacies in town and that's what we'll try to address with this little guide:



Pizza: There are many *pizzerie* in Kathmandu that compete for first place in the podium. One technical aspect to underline is that latitude and altitude do have some effects on dough preparation and rising. Hence, you will not find the exact taste you expect in the Gulf of Naples. Wood brick *pizza* ovens are more and more common in town and that ensures crispiness and the typical burnt crust that we love. Personally, I love *black olives and pesto pizza* of "Road House Cafe" but ambience,

staff courtesy and quality are unbeaten at the Italian owned and managed "Fire and Ice Pizzeria". If the season allows it, ask your pizza to be topped with basil, you won't be disappointed.



Pasta: It is worth every kilometer of the dusty and busy highway, because you won't find such attention to details and care in the presentation like the one you get in the "Pasta al Pesto Siciliano" that Monica Gentile prepares at "Cafè Concerto" in Pokhara. Finding decent ingredients in Kathmandu is hard, in Pokhara it's impossible. Hence, Gentile makes her own *ricotta* cheese and dries her own tomatoes grown in the backyard garden. Touch of class: abundant fresh basil leaves.



Prosecco: Some say that our mothers used to put *Prosecco* in our bottles when we were toddlers. I can't really tell, but I am sure that since few months ago Kathmandu was as dry as the desert. Fortunately, *Prosecco*, a bubbly and dry champagne-like wine, is now available at the Vesper House in Pulchowk. At the Vesper they are serious about their wines and their *Prosecco*, of excellent producers, doesn't disappoint connoisseurs like me! It doesn't cost a fortune,

it's light (11 percent alcohol by volume) and truly Italian.



Coffee: Tough choice. Nepali coffee or Italian coffee? Nepal is blessed by its climate and coffee beans are locally and often organically harvested, but you can never go wrong with a cup of Italian *espresso* coffee. The secret lies in the bean toasting, in the grinding, in the air temperature, pressure, water quality and in the *barista's* experience.

My favorite coffee in Kathmandu is *Lavazza "espresso macchiato"* at the Blue Note Cafè in Lazimpat. Rich, intense, always pleasant. *Espresso* means fast and the pretty waitress there knows that I want it *chito!*



Tiramisù: Tiramisù deserves one category for its own, such can be the differences between cakes of that kind. Well, I knew it was good, a friend of mine suggested that I try Raddisson's Olive Garden restaurant. But, honestly, I wasn't expecting it to be that good. Yes it is fairly expensive, but *mascarpone* is fresh and delivered from Italy, ladyfinger biscuits, another essential ingredient for tiramisù, are authentic Italian *Savoirdi*

and, last but not least, coffee is made with *Lavazza*. Worth a try.



Bread: An Italian without a piece of *pane* in his hand during a meal is not a true *italiano*. Either eaten with cheese or ham, tomatoes or just a little extra virgin olive oil, bread is the quintessential staple food for any Italian. There is a place, a secret place where you can order bread in Italian and spend some time with a kind Nepali baker speaking Italian (he has learnt the language and to bake bread and other delicacies from an Italian friend). This place is called...the *secret bakery*, and I am not really sure if I can disclose such information, nevertheless here is a hint: it's very close to the British School in Sanepa.



Cheese: *Ricotta*, *Gorgonzola*, *Caciotta*, *Mozzarella*...you name it and Sandro has it. Based in Lalitpur, Sandro's produces whatever is possible. His dairy is small and often Sandro cannot keep up with cheese demands, but that is a seal of quality and assurance that each process is followed attentively throughout the making. You can find him at the 1905 restaurant "Farmers Market" every Saturday morning. I tasted a five-month old *Parmigiano*-like cheese, a limited edition product. I'm still speechless.

Atmosphere: It's not *La Piazzetta di Capri* or *Via Veneto* in Rome, but Fire and Ice in Tridevi Marg, Thamel, offers what gets closest to *al fresco* dining. Thanks to its professionally run staff (some of them speak little Italian), the *pizzeria* offers not only *pizza* but also a wide variety of *pasta*, *lasagne* and, quite relevant, a good *gelato* (ice-cream). The place is always packed (good sign), so I'd recommend you book a table outside. Try *Sambuca con la mosca* (Sambuca with a couple of coffee beans, literally with flies!).

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