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Eating Out

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Roma is just the job when it comes to Italian food

ROMA
Mary Street
Sunderland

When in Roma – you can expect a warm welcome whatever the weather.

On a nippy February evening, the warm glow of this chirpy Italian restaurant greeted us with open arms.

It's a consistent charm that's helped to make Roma perennially popular with those after a classic Italian dish.

Inside, the colour palette of rich reds and terracotta and wine bottles-turned-ornaments, coupled with exposed brickwork, is reminiscent of a friendly Italian you could have stumbled across in the back streets of Rome.

And the menu is as you would expect from a restaurant of that ilk. All the usual Italian suspects are there: pizza, pasta, risottos, chicken and steak dishes.

The inclusion of fajitas from Mexico seems a little incongruous but, what the heck, this is an informal place for an informal night out.

Visit during happy hour, which runs every day from noon to 7pm, and you can pick up bargain options, with starters priced at £3.95 and pizzas and pastas for £5.95.

You can pick 'n' mix though and I chose a starter from the a la carte menu – mozzarella wrapped in Parma ham (£5.95), which was served as two melt-in-the-mouth parcels of tightly-packed flavour.

For mains I chose a happy hour steak, which you can pick up for less than a tenner.

The pepe version comes as a huge fillet steak which was smothered in a rich sauce of mustard, peppercorn, cream and brandy. It would have been preferable to have the sauce served separately so you can flavour as you go, but you certainly can't quibble about the price and size, which also includes a side portion of chips or vegetables.

Hats off to the staff, you'll be hard pushed to find a friendlier bunch in the city.

In a city awash with Italian restaurants, Roma's reputation wasn't built in a day, but you can see what keeps people coming back for more.

Katy Wheeler



Inside the City Tavern.

Tudor tavern offers a bounty of dishes

CITY TAVERN
Northumberland Road
Newcastle

"Have you seen all that food for just two girls?," exclaimed one non-discreet diner as she passed our table.

In her defence, we'd ended up with quite the spread on our table after underestimating the portion size at City Tavern.

I blame the reasonable prices. At £7.95 for an antipasto plank, we assumed we'd get a few slivers of cured meat each and a few hunks of bread, not the bounty we received which, along with our other dishes, made us look like ladies who lunch – a lot!

Alongside the meat platter – a board also laden with goats' cheese and rocket salad, a huge mound of olives and bread – we'd chosen the cheese platter (£8.95 for one person or £11.95 for two), the pulled pork sliders (£11.95 for two people) and a side portion of chilli cheese chips.

Though the cheese platter was only meant for one person, it too had enough for two people and offered a good selection of farm and blue cheese with oatcakes, plenty of grapes and a tangy chutney to add a kick to the proceedings.

Though the platters gave them a good run for their money, it was the pulled pork

sliders which stole the show. Brioche buns are all the rage these days, but to give them their due, their sweetness works perfectly with that other menu feature of the moment: pulled pork.

The mounds of pulled pork were in danger of escaping the brioche but a handy cocktail stick, topped with a rasher-like shaving of gherkin, kept it all together in style and made it easy to devour. More tender and less greasy than other versions of this dish I've had, they were the only menu choice we managed to finish.

We were defeated by our haul. And that was just from the bar bait menu. There's a more substantial main menu

boasting pies, fish and chips and other hearty tummy-fillers. Newcastle can be an embarrassment of riches when it comes to choosing a place for lunch, but City Tavern offers something a little different from the chain restaurants.

Just off the main drag of Northumberland Street, a stone's throw from Haymarket Metro station, its mock Tudor facade helps it stand out from the crowd and gives it a character all of its own.

The interior is a mish mash of styles, with a blend of industrial and shabby chic. But it works.

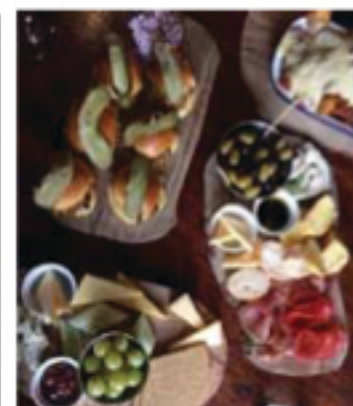
In keeping with the informal feel, it's even dog-friendly for people with four-legged friends. This is more of a place to while away the hours over a cask ale, as opposed to the more neon-lit scream-to-be-heard bars in Newcastle.

A local pub with a city centre location.

Katy Wheeler

RATINGS OUT OF FIVE:

Food	★ 5
Atmosphere	★ 4
Service	★ 5
Value	★ 5



"Its mock Tudor facade helps it stand out from the crowd"
KATYWHEELER

Katy Wheeler