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Italian eatery Gusto has expanded its offering with a new take-out venue, offering all the best of Italy in a take-home format. **Mark Ogier** and family were eager to try it, and Gusto's restaurant dining experience, declaring both to be 'molto delizioso'

HAVE NEVER been one for big sit-down lunches, so the chance to try a new take-out venue offering authentic Italian food from one of Town's most popular restaurants was not one to be passed up. Gusto in Smith Street has expanded its operations to the seafront, where it recently opened Gusto Espresso, offering pasta, soup, and a range of Italian pastries that are worth driving into Town for. It was a Saturday lunchtime when I and a younger Ogier ventured along to pick up something for the family, all of whom were eager to sample the delights on offer. The board offered a pasta of the day, soup of the day, and a variety of toppings to go into a salad box - Italian meats and cheeses, of course. But there was more to tempt us under the glass counter display, and I liked the look of a spinach and ricotta cheese pastry, calzone, along with a couple of the amazing looking sweet treats.

Added to this I picked a couple of different paninis for the boys and a Parma ham salad for the other half. The paninis were made from fresh bread rather than the sort of pre-packaged products you'll find in many cafes, adding to the feeling that this was a lot more than your average takeaway outlet. This feeling was enhanced by the fact that everything was beautifully packaged in small paper bags and when unpacked after a 10 minute car ride still looked as good as it did in the shop. It all tasted good, too, with the generous amounts of cheese and meat going down well with the boys. I'd been accompanied on my buying trip by Ogier junior, Harry, who had gone for ham and mozzarella, while I'd chosen salami and scamorza (a smoked cheese) for his elder sibling, Joe. My better half, Karen, was presented with a salad of crisp lettuce, tomato and cucumber and a small pile of Parma ham, while my calzone was a lovely blend of melted cheese and spinach in a thin pizza-like wrapping.



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But it was the sweet treats I was most keen to sample, and I'd come home with two of chefeppe's home-made tarts - an apricot crostatini comprising light melt-in-the-mouth pastry with a tangy preserve filling. I begrudgingly shared it, on the understanding that I'd get to try some of the other pastry I'd liberated from Gusto, a pastiera. This was the highlight of the lunch - the same light pastry but filled with a soft cake which included ricotta cheese. I was told that these cannot be found anywhere else in the island, so I urge any cake lovers to get themselves to Gusto Espresso as soon as they can to sample this amazing pastry.

It was a light but worthwhile lunch that hinted at Gusto's culinary class, but we still had the pleasure of a dinner to enjoy.

A few days later we found ourselves entering a little slice of Italy on a dark and wet Wednesday night as we found our way to Gusto's main premises in Smith Street.

The clean white walls, white furnishings and beautifully painted frescos are enough to make anyone forget where they are and it was no surprise that by the time we left the restaurant was full. Opened in mid-2017, Gusto has made a good name for itself and probably didn't really need the likes of me to come along to tell everyone how great it is, but I was not about to turn down a chance to see what other wonders chefeppe could rustle up and happily took up manager Sabino's invitation, once again along with my spouse and offspring. The menu offered a small but varied choice of mains, many of which could be picked as a starter, while the starter section itself boasted a nice array of tempting-sounding dishes.

With seafood prominent among the antipasti, three of us chose it while Harry decided to go veggie for a change and picked grilled vegetables. What arrived was a generous portion of cold grilled aubergine, courgette and peppers, which was pronounced a good mixture of crunchy and soft. I was impressed with the tender calamari in my fritto misto, and was told by Sabino that, like the spaghetti, they had taken to cooking it longer than usual since it had been found that local diners were not particularly fond of 'al dente' dishes. The squid was complemented by some tasty whitebait and small prawns cooked in a deliciously light batter that seemed to dissolve on the tongue. 'This is just stunning,' Karen declared of her seafood fantasy, singling out the crab for particular praise owing to it being especially tasty. Joe went for the baby octopus in tomato sauce, and he loved the smooth, tangy sauce which was the perfect accompaniment to the meaty octopus. There was more fish to come for him

since he had ordered the prawns and calamari salad, and was also able to enjoy the wonderfully tasty and light squid that I'd had before. Harry's choice of main gave him a chance to sample the crab that Karen had been so enamoured of, and he too declared it 'fantastic' when he tasted his crab linguini for the first time. Karen, meanwhile, thoroughly enjoyed the veal saltimboca with spinach, with its creamy sauce and tender meat. I had chosen a casserole-style dish, chicken cacciatora, with a side of courgette - or zucchini - fries. This was a generous bowl of chunks of chicken in a lovely savoury sauce accompanied by black and green olives.

The chicken was beautifully tender and the olives added a lovely piquancy to the tang of the sauce. The fries were served in a light batter - the same as that of the prawns earlier, perhaps - and made for a perfect accompaniment.

After two courses which saw us all clearing our plates of everything edible (Joe drew the line at the king prawn heads and shells) we wondered if we could manage a dessert. One glance at the array of sweets on offer soon put any doubts out of our minds. I had already decided to go with the special, pistachio parfait. This was an ice cream scoop-sized ball of creamy and nutty pistachio covering an equally creamy centre that I would have devoured, were it not for someone not far away realising that there was rather more rum in his rum baba than he had bargained for.

Joe had listened to my raving about this dessert on seeing it in the menu, but found the taste of the alcohol not to his liking.

I was happy to relieve him of it and he enjoyed my parfait as much as I had been. But that baba was a taste of heaven. The sponge could not have been any more light and the rum oozed out deliciously with every mouthful. I could have eaten another without blinking.

Harry was also relishing his sweet, Sicilian cannolo. This light deep-fried pastry tube was filled with a creamy ricotta based sauce with chocolate chunks that Harry declared amazingly tasty. Every dish seemed to offer something new to us, and even Karen's selection of cheeses, which could so easily have been routine, managed to delight since as well as the creamy gorgonzola and firm Parmesan, she loved discovering a new variety - taleggio.

It was with heavy hearts but full bellies that we had to wend our way home from this little slice of Italy in Town, but hope to revisit it before too long.

◆ Gusto Italian: 722828 or email book@gusto.gg.



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