

# PIZZA THE ACTION



Casa Romana offers a portal to Italy in the centre of Harrogate, writes Ali Schofield

I don't often go out to eat Italian food, save for the odd chain pizzeria two for one deal. This is not to say I don't love it — and a recent trip to Tuscany has confirmed my unerring approval of six course meals at lunch time — it's just I figure 'how hard is it really to cook pasta at home?'

Opened in 1983, Casa Romana has been serving up authentic Italian food at its Cheltenham Parade site for some 26 years. While the flashy restaurant space opposite has changed hands several times, Casa Romana has stood unassumingly as a favourite for couples, families and businesses alike who can hire out its upstairs room for functions, and returning conference delegates after friendly service and a traditional atmosphere. It is this which marks Casa Romana, on first entering the restaurant, as distinctly better than a night in with the Dolmio.

My friends and I were warmly welcomed as soon as we stepped

through the door, and shown to a window table. Italian background music played, a chef prepared food in the open kitchen and our Italian waitress furnished us with impressive looking menus. So far, so authentic Italian. Indeed, owner Carmelo makes a point of offering as genuine an Italian ambience as is possible in a restaurant some 900 miles from the country.

As such, we decided to ask our waitress to bring a selection of antipasti from the kitchen. We filled ourselves with delicious bruschetta — diced tomato; mozzarella; cold meats — olives, and pizza slices. Then we ordered starters (well, if you're going to do something properly). My avocado, tomato and mozzarella tricolori salad (6.95) made a refreshing start to the meal, while my friend's calamari (£6.95) was crisp and tasty.

For main my friends went for the Casa Romana Special pizza (£10.90) and Carmelo's pride,

the Pollo Sophia Lorene (£16.95). Quite what the actress would make of being compared to a cooked bird served in a creamy tomato sauce I don't know, but my friend was very impressed with the generous portion. The pizza was similarly huge, and flavoursome boasting Dolcelatte, prosciutto, salami and artichoke. I went for the Penne Parmagiana (£10.90). As my full belly had suggested after the second round of antipasti, I could easily have skipped a main completely, but the rich baked dish was tasty if a little overfacing; my fault, really.

Of course, you can't go to an Italian restaurant and pass on des-

sert though, so we all shared a luscious piece of tiramisu (£3.95) and enjoyed a zabaglione (£4.50) each. The traditional custard-like dessert made using eggs, cream and marsala wine renewed my hunger (or more accurately, greed).

In these days of penny-pinching and England staycations, it's reassuring to know you can be transported to Italy so effectively, if only for a few hours.

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