

NORTHSIDE FOODIE

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McDonalds & El Bulli



It was April 1st 2011. There were four of us driving from Barcelona airport up to a little town called Roses and we were very hungry. We'd been up since early in the morning, and dinner wasn't until much later.

So we did what every self-respecting Irish tourist does in the north Spain, the food capital of the world. We went here:



Northside Foodie

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I think there is some kind of equation that applies to Irish people on holiday. Here is my hypothesis : $n-1/k(x+y)$ = likelihood of a McDonald's visit, where n is the number of people on the holiday, x is the number of visible Golden Arches they pass, and k is the maximum amount of CONSTANT MOANING FROM A

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HUNGRY WIFE A MAN CAN TAKE.

So, I ate this :



McDonalds fries are not the worst in the world.

And I ate this:



McDonalds Quarter Pounders are actually the worst in the world

And we left our little detour mildly disgusted with ourselves, but sated and ready for the next part of our odyssey. We were on our way to the famous El Bulli. We had the golden ticket.

You might wonder how a cretin like myself managed to get a table at El Bulli, and I wouldn't blame you.

There's a film about the restaurant showing in the Lighthouse Cinema at the moment (another jewel of the northside!) , and everything it says is true – they had 2 million requests each year for only 4,000 tables. They ran at a loss of a million a year. There were more chefs than there were customers. The head chef Ferran Adria was a Willy-Wonka type mad bastard genius who had turned a small Spanish steakhouse in the middle of nowhere into the greatest restaurant in the world, single-handedly inventing molecular gastronomy.

When we went last year, it was known to be the final season – it closed less than two months after we visited – and a table was even more difficult to get than before. I'm still not sure how I swung it, but it involved a lot of persistence, a

huge amount of luck, and great deal of telling lies.

The drive up the mountain to the restaurant is quite the journey – tiny winding roads along the bay with the most incredible views. You really are as far from the madness as you can get.

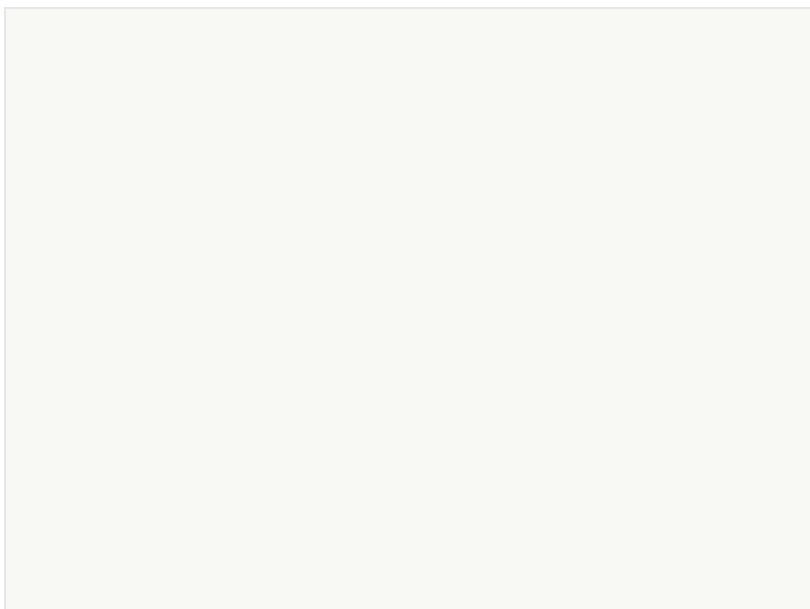


The bay at El Bulli

And then you arrive, and you can't quite believe it.



We are brought in, given a tour of the kitchen, and introduced to the big man.



Identities hidden to save members of the party embarrassment of knowing me.

And we are seated, and taken on a 46-course (46!!!) journey like we've never experienced, and almost definitely never will again.



Course 1 – Ginger and Lime Candy



Course 2 – Warm Caipi-Mojito & Course
4 – Peanut & Honey Cookie



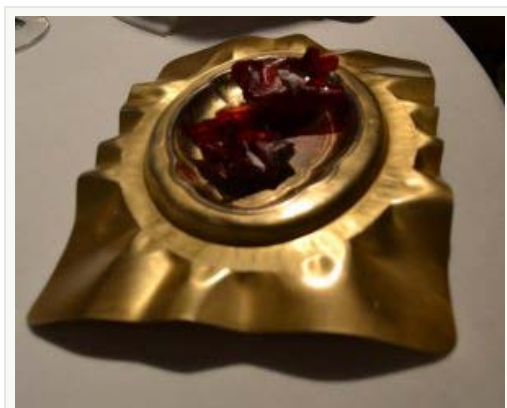
Course 3 – Mojito 'Sandwich'

It started out with a trio of Mojito themed courses. The candy and the warm drink were great – but the star here was the Mojito 'Sandwich' – yes, an actual sandwich that turns into an apple-infused mojito in your mouth. It's actually quite shocking when you try it – unbelievably cold, and somehow turning straight into liquid. Real Willy-Wonka stuff.

To go with our Mojito-fest we had a Honey and Peanut cookie. Again, this was a strange sensation – it was literally the texture of a clumped ball of sand, dissolving in the mouth. This was our introduction to the El Bulli snacks – small shocks of flavour that start tasting one way and end another. This one started sweet, and ended salty, with a small kick of pepper at the back of the throat.



Course 5 – Almond Fizz Cocktail & course
6 – Nori Seaweed with Lemon



Course 7 – Hibiscus and Peanut



Course 8 – Pistachio Ravioli

Another Cocktail in the form of an Almond Fizz arrived, and a few more snacks. The Nori Seaweed bites were tiny little ravioli made of crispy seaweed, filled



with tangy lemon puree. Weird. The pistachio ravioli – despite looking like dried up used tea-bags – were beautiful. They exploded with pistachio liquid in the mouth, again they were almost shocking in the sensations they gave.



Course 9 – Bloody Mary



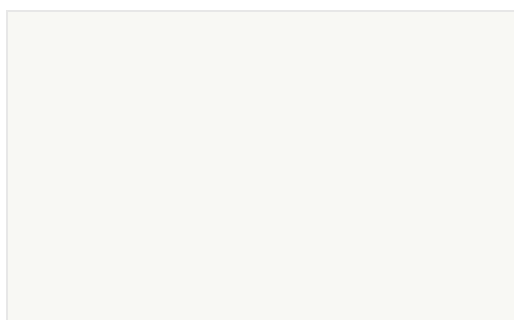
Course 10 – Olive Oil Crisp

And our final cocktail – a Bloody Mary. It was in the form of two small frozen balls to be sucked up off the grease proof paper. The Olive Oil Crisp was a little beauty – a solidified disk of the most unbelievable olive oil. How do you make olive oil solid and turn it into some kind of crisp?



Course 11 – Cod Fish Crust

Another Snack – a fried Codfish crust – the ultimate Prawn cracker. There was a dot of honey on one end – so it started salty and finished sweet.





Course 12 – Parmesan Macaroon



Course 13 – Parmesan Porra

And to finish off the snacks, a duo of Parmesan treats. The Parmesan 'Macaroon' was in fact a parmesan marshmallow. It was so intense and rich and downright weird it was just unpleasant. Ferran going a bit too mad here. The 'Porra' however, was delicious – a crispy stick of parmesan-ey goodness.



Course 14 – Shimp Tortilla
aka – 'don't eat me meester irishman'



Course 16 – Prawn 'Two Firings'

This is where the more substantial dishes started. We got a trio of prawn courses. The first was the Shrimp Tortilla – a small disk of solid prawn essence with tiny baby shrimps scattered over it. Second, we got a simple prawn, boiled on its own so the body was almost raw, and we were told to suck the brains out of the head. I don't have a picture of this one, but we did enjoy learning the art of prawn brain-sucking. I do it all the time now and love disgusting the people around me.

And the third and final movement of the prawn symphony was the 'Two Firings'. A spoon of intense prawn essence, accompanied by a prawn with its head fried so you can eat the entire thing. This, my friends, is where the meal went into the stratosphere. This was perhaps the best thing I've ever eaten, and will live with me for the rest of my days.



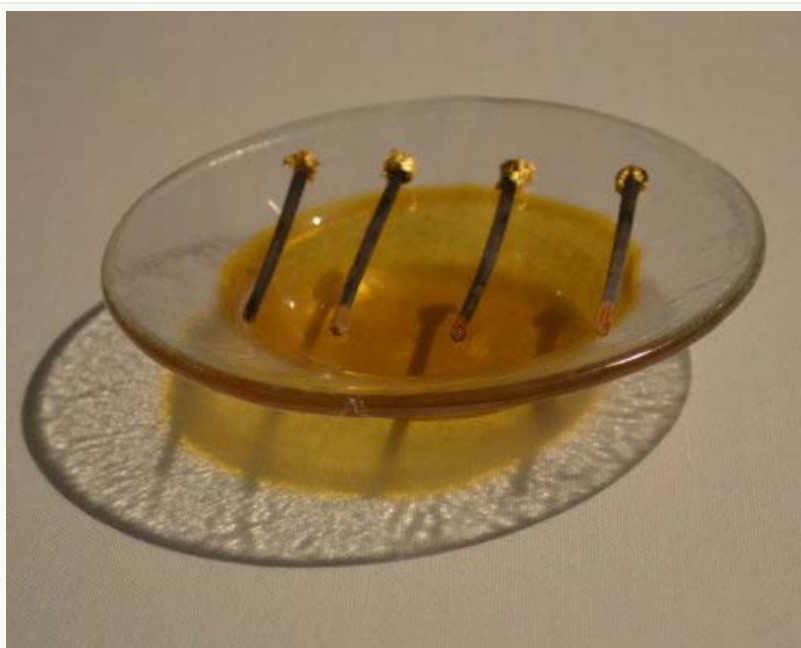
Course 17 – Drunk Oil Soup

I've no idea why this was called drunk oil soup, but it was a small palate-cleanser. It was cold olive soup with olive-oil 'caviar' in the middle. The caviar shaped olive-oil was the first sign of the famous 'spherification' the restaurant became famous for.



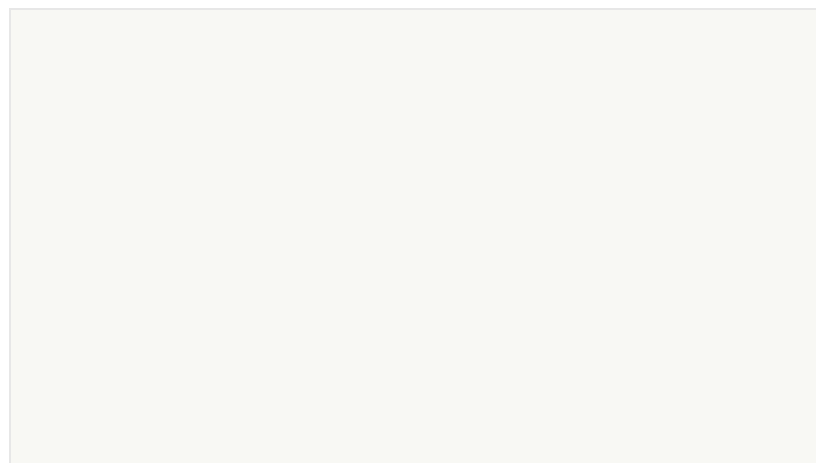
Course 18 – Quail Breasts with Carrot coating (2 already eaten!)

This was one of the more dainty (and ridiculous) dishes. Four tiny little quail breasts barely cooked, and the waiter took out a paint-brush at the table and painted on a thick carrot sauce on each one. The last piece of ridiculous attention to detail was that each individual quail-breast had a different spicing on its tip – it like a little game to guess each one.



Course 19 – Soy Matchsticks

Yes, that's right. Little matchsticks made from soy sauce. There was gold-leaf on the end, and the mixture of the gold and soy tastes kind of 'flinty', like an actual match.



Course 20 – Tiramasu

This was one of the more controversial courses of the night – Tiramasu 'Japanese Style'. This had all the texture of an actual Tiramasu, but instead of cream, cocoa, and alcohol, it was made with whipped soy bean, soy sauce, miso and wasabi. While it was a funny play on concepts and ingredients, it didn't go down to well at the table. Only one of us finished it.



Course 21 – Caviar & Hazlenut

This was another high-concept dish. On the left, real caviar with hazelnut cream. On the right, spherified hazelnut 'caviar', with caviar cream. Ying and Yang, like the design suggests. This was weird, exciting and decadent. Loved it.

Tune in next time for Episode two of Northside Foodie's El Bulli saga. He will do the following things – eat 25 more courses, be kissed by a random man at the next table, spill sticky dessert-wine over his jeans, and finally have his credit card refused. Expect it over the next few days.

COMMENTS

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CATEGORIES

El Bulli, Foreign Muck, South of the Liffey, Uncategorized

Terra Madre



Lardo.

The fat from the back of a pig cured with spices.

Warmed on some toasted bread to make Lardo Bruschetta.

This is my kind of food.



Lardo Bruschetta – last piece of three left. It smelled too good to wait for the photo.

I'm not sure where I heard about Terra Madre first, but I know a few different sources had told me it was excellent. We went for lunch on a Saturday afternoon – the place was empty except for us and an Italian father and daughter combo who seemed to know the chef. It reminded me of the different restaurant culture I had experienced in Italy – much less formal than here – staff chatting with the guests, chatting with each other. They don't value speed of service either – things move at a different pace.

After our Lardo bruschetta we ordered two pastas – Fettucini with Italian sausage and tomato sauce, and the daily special, Fettucini with Cream of sweet Pepper and Pecorino cheese. They also had other things I hadn't seen on an Irish menu before - Pasta Gricia (Guanciale – pig jowl bacon, onions and cheese), and unusual soups with barley-type stuff in them.

The pasta arrived looking unassuming – they seemed plain enough (I didn't take photos). But then I tasted them, and wow, I really haven't had pasta this good in a long time. The Italian sausage one had a deep porky-fennel flavour, and the other was a great mix of sweet pepper and salty pecorino. The dishes were just beautiful.

I'll definitely be back for the evening menu at some stage – (Rabbit-sauce pasta, Pheasant Ragu – can't resist a menu with those things on it). The place is small and cute – kind of a mish-mash minimalist decor. Not that I know about these things, but if I did I'd recommend it as a date venue.

The lunch of two pastas, a bruschetta and an espresso was €26. This is good value.

90% of Italian restaurants in Ireland are awful, but I like this place alot. I hope it stays.

Terra Madre Cafe

13A Bachelor's Walk

01 8735300

COMMENTS

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CATEGORIES

Italian, Lunch, Northside

Various Northside Musings

I know you've been missing me, but I'm not dead yet.

Here's a list of some of my favourites things to eat at the moment in Dublin:

Best Sandwich:



Paris Bakery, Moore St.

Moore St. is probably my favourite place in Dublin. First it was home to the fish-ladys, then it was taken over by small hovel-like Chinese restaurants, the likes of which Dublin had never seen. Then the Chinese moved up to Parnell St., and African hairdressers and supermarkets moved in. Now comes the French invasion – the Paris Bakery opened it's doors a year or so ago in this most unlikely of locations.

I'm not sure what I expected when I first came here – I thought it was a small place – but it was huge, and absolutely heaving with people. It's pretty popular already.

I ordered one of these – a sandwich with goat-cheese and peppers.



Mmmmmmmmm

Bread is the all-important ingredient in any great sandwich, and they have nailed it here – crisp, fresh and chewy, just the right density and flavour. The cheese and pepper filling was perfect. Just a beautiful sandwich, and at less than 4 euro, an absolute bargain.

I saw one of these too and couldn't resist.



Lemon Tart, just like mammy used to make. Actually, she never made anything like this. I don't know why I said that.

It tasted as good as it looked.

Best Burger:



Burger with Kitsch-up. Get it?

Bobo's, Wexford Street

Jo'Burger can Jo'fuck off. Bobo's was one of the best burgers I ever had when I first tried it a few years ago. It declined pretty badly after that – burgers weren't great and the place just looked dirty. Then a year ago, on a whim I tried again. Something had changed – new ownership or management, but the staff is now entirely Chinese. And by god the burgers are magnificent.

I don't like any of the fancy mango-salsa and pork or lamb and creme-fresh nonsense (another reason I don't like Jo'Burger). You can get that here, but you're missing out on what a burger should be – mostly beef, maybe a little cheese, and garnish. Bobos are very good at this.

A special note on the chips – they are truly superb. I'm a chip purist, and I really can't remember having better than the skinny fries here – crisp, fresh and tasting of actual potato. Apparently the new managers went to some effort to perfect the fries – I've been told they know everything there is to know about every potato farm in Leinster.

I also like the fact that I'm sitting in an Irish-kitsch themed burger bar being served traditional American food by a Chinese man.

It's a pity I have to go to the southside for this, but needs must and all that shite...

Best Indian:

Bombay Pantry, Ashtown/Fairview

About five years ago somebody told me about Bombay Pantry. I drove quite the distance to Rathmines just to try it. It was beautiful, it had a freshness I hadn't had in Indian food before.

They were open for six months in Ashtown before I realised – I still regret the six-months of the perfect Chicken Karahi or Lamb Bhuna I could have been scoffing during the period. Anyway, I'm a regular now and I can't see myself changing any time soon. Nowhere comes close to Bombay Pantry in terms of quality – no Indian or any other kind of takeaway actually. If somebody could point me towards a Chinese takeaway that is as good as this, I'd be eternally grateful.

Best Coffee:



3FE written backwards on a sign.

3fe, Abbey St. (in the Twisted Pepper)

Let me tell you a little bit about me and coffee.

I was once in San Francisco on a holiday, and we went to the famous Ferry Building food market. While we ate our way around the stalls, my eyes kept being drawn to a small hole-in-the-wall selling coffee. There was a 25-minute queue for the place constantly. I was intrigued, but couldn't justify wasting half an hour for a coffee. The next day we came back, and again, a queue formed the minute it opened, and again it was a half-hour wait. On our third and last visit to the market I gave in. I had to try this coffee people were so obsessed with. So I waited in the queue, got to the top, and asked for something without milk. They gave me a filter coffee – I had never had one before.

The coffee was delicious, but it didn't seem to justify the price or the wait. As I walked, however, and the coffee cooled – I had some kind of Proustian mind-fuck awakening. The coffee was changing in the cup – it was one of the most satisfying and complex things I had ever tasted.

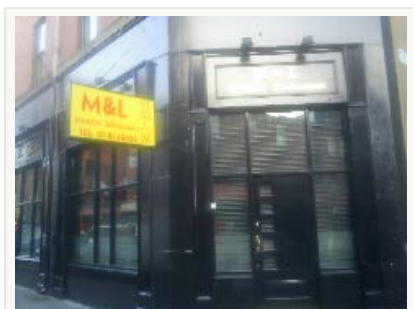
For a couple of years afterwards I used to dream of that coffee – and I was convinced I would never have it again unless I was back in San Fran. I even looked up the company to see if they would ship to Ireland (they wouldn't).

Fast-forward to two years ago – I'm running to a meeting on Abbey St. and I have ten minutes to spare. I go into a cafe to get an espresso to take away. The guy behind the counter says no. What? We don't do espresso to takeaway, he says – you'll take it outside, the temperature will drop, it will go bitter, and you won't come back here again. I was taken back abit , but decided to sit down and have it there – I liked this guy's style.

So he makes me the espresso, proceeds to tell me all about the beans, where they come from, why the espresso doesn't suit takeaway. I tasted it, and was transported right back to the coffee in SF – complex, almost fruity – unlike anything I'd ever had before. I was hooked.

What I didn't realise was this – the coffee in SF was not particularly special, it was just done RIGHT. There was a whole speciality-coffee culture that I had never experienced, and until 3FE opened, I was blind to it all. The chap in 3FE was a guy called Colin Harmon, and his empire is now expanding – for a while, we had these guys to ourselves, but the bastards went and opened a shop on Grand Canal Street. Anyway, they were first on the Northside, so I'm going to claim them as our own.

Best Chinese:



M&L. Tell them Northsidefoodie sent you. They won't have a clue what you're talking about.

M&L, 13 Cathedral st.

I won't go into the whole authentic vs chicken balls and curry sauce thing, other than to say this isn't the latter.

The Chinese places around Parnell St change so often it's difficult to keep up with which places are good and which have jumped back on the gloopy sweet-and-sour train.

For a couple of years now M&L has been good. If you order off the Chef's

Special menu you will eat well – they have good dumplings, great razor clams (feckin love these things, but hard to find in Dublin, apparently we ship them all abroad), and some great authentic szechuan stuff. Soft-Shell crab is always on the menu, but hasn't been available on the three times I've been here.

Like all of these Chinese places, they seem reluctant to give you the real Chinese stuff – make sure you insist, because the regular Irish-Chinese stuff here is not great.

COMMENTS

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CATEGORIES

Uncategorized

Howth



My pictures of Howth are, quite frankly, a bit shit. They really don't do it justice.

I'm quickly learning that this photography lark takes a bit of effort, and possibly requires a contraption more advanced than the one I have.



No, I wouldn't want to go here either.

My point is this – ignore the photos, go to Howth.

It's a wonderful place for a day-trip, and if you're anything like me (and for your own sake, I hope you're not) – it holds plenty of childhood memories of slot-machines, fish and chips, and the 80s.

Returning now after all these years – it's turned into a bit of a foodie haven. In fact, if the northside has any kind of food-specific destination, this must be it. There's certainly nowhere else I can think of with so much good food in one place.

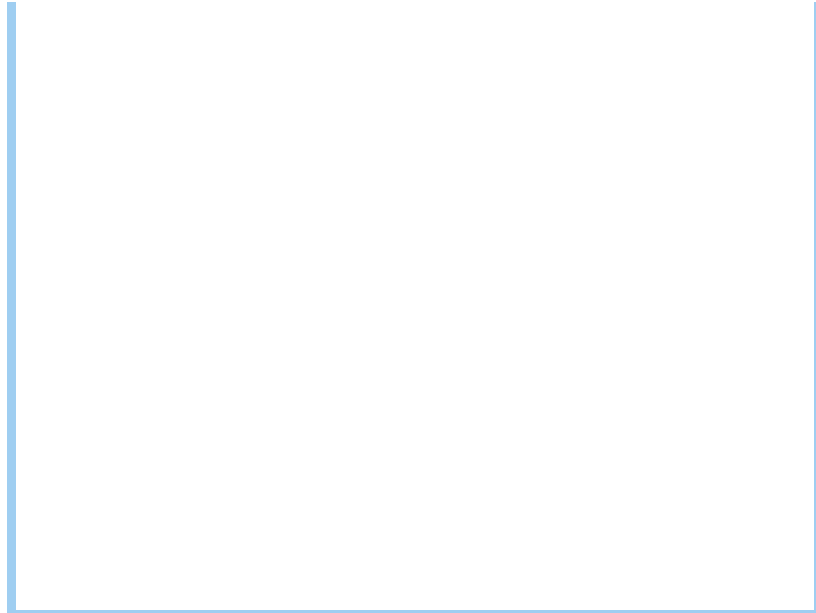
Fish, fish, fish of course – and plenty of it everywhere you look. Fishermen in the harbour, fishmongers on the pier, seafood restaurants and wine bars all on the seafront.

Last weekend Mrs. Northside Foodie made the trip up, and we started in Ivan's – the first place you hit as you walk down the pier.



Ivan's has a good set-up – you can either sit in the restaurant, or in their market and oyster bar beside it. We like the atmosphere of the oyster bar – you can watch them shuck the oysters – and it's a bit less formal than the restaurant.

We ordered a dozen oysters and one of the tapas from the board – mussels with cream, wine, chilli and garlic.



Oysters can work out expensively – and I appreciate that they're not for everybody – but sweet mother of Jesus on a motorbike do I love them. Here you get half a dozen – they have a selection of varieties – for €13.00 – with some good bread and butter. These were beautiful – and went great with the €2.50 daily special glass of Sauvignon Blanc.



Despite being blurry, these mussels were very tasty indeed.

Mussels are one of my new favourite things – and these were very good – the sauce especially was great soaked up with the bread.



I get the impression there are probably places along the pier that offer better value – Ivan's is the first and biggest place you hit, and you are probably paying a premium for that. It is reliable though – I've been a couple of times, and it's always great.

Some others along the pier are capitalising on the wine/tapas system – you can order a glass of wine and a small plate of prawns or mussels or something. I'd guess they are mostly good because of the quality of the produce they have to work with – but I have no experience yet.



After the oysters and mussels we went for a walk. We pretended we were taking in the picturesque beauty of the harbour – but of course we were just walking in a straight line towards this place.



Note – this is Beshoff Bros – a different place to the Beshoffs around town. I always thought they were the same – but while the places in town are fine – they can't hold a candle to this stuff. It's in a different league.



A rain shower scuppered our al fresco arrangement, so we retired to the car. We opened the boxes, and by god was it beautiful.



I must have had hundreds of fish and chips from chippers all over the country in my life-time, and this must be in the top two or three. The batter on the haddock was light and crispy, the chips had very a slight crunch – not overly greasy (but just greasy enough) – the tartar sauce brought it all together. Just perfection. Better even than I remember as a kid.

We waited for the rain to stop, but it didn't. Considering how we'd eaten, though, we didn't mind. So it was back home again – driving tiredly along the coast, full of sea air and seafood.

And although I go for the food, Howth is more than that. It rekindles some kind of strange, intangible sadness – not a negative thing, but a lingering nostalgic feeling. You can't shake it away as you drive home. And I'm sure it was responsible for the thought that popped into my head as we were driving – that despite everything, life is good.

Tags: [dublin](#), [fish](#), [howth](#), [northside](#)

COMMENTS

9 Comments

CATEGORIES

Cheap, Northside



'Burritos as big as your head' is not the motto of Boojum, but it should be.

The burritos here are huge.



Unless you are Bono, this burrito will be bigger than your head

This is good fill-you-up for the day food, and makes a good lunch if you intend skipping dinner later. Taste-wise, it's good without being great. I'm not a burrito expert, but this one was miles ahead of ones I've had across the road in Cactus Jacks (not good), and in the heavily marketed Pablo Picante (better but still average) on Baggot street. I've heard good things about Burritos & Blues on Camden St, but I haven't tried it.



Five bites down, and it looks like I haven't started yet

Boojum operates a production-line operation where you move along cafe-style and choose your fillings. Tortilla bread or tacos, black beans or pinto beans, green or red salsa, pork or beef, etc. There are other things on the menu, but like all Mexican food they seem to be – as Billie Connolly once said – the same thing only folded differently. The end result is tasty, but ultimately a bit bland (I think they over-do it on the rice and beans).



The lunch deal was a burrito and a bottle of water for €7. This isn't massively cheap, but is just about right for a lunch of this quality. And it will most certainly fill you up, because it is truly gigantic.

Boojum is part of what people call the new Italian Quarter – despite the fact it's over 5 years old, and has 2 Mexican places and a Vietnamese restaurant.

Despite being pretty soulless, it's a pleasant enough place to walk off your ginormous Mexican lunch, and a couple of the cafes do good coffee.

I'm sure this is actually as far from Mexican food as chicken balls and curry and curry sauce is from real Chinese food. In fact, I don't know if there's any authentic Mexican food to be found in the country at all. I reckon it's an untapped market – and if I had a wad of cash to lose, I'd give it a lash. I don't though, so I won't.

Also, beware the effects of all those beans. Don't go into an important meeting immediately afterwards like I did...

Boojum gets three syringes out of five from me.

[Boojum](#)

Millennium Walkway
Dublin 1
01 8729499

COMMENTS

5 Comments

CATEGORIES

Uncategorized



Don Mimis



North Strand road has a bit of spice about it.

I like a road where it's as likely you will get stabbed as get asked if there's any ATM between here and NCB Stockbrokers.

In the middle of this strange dichotomy is Don Mimi. Don't be put off by the fact that the sign over the door actually says Da Mimmo – it is in fact Don Mimi. The menus say Don Mimi, and I was assured it was the same place I heard good rumours about.

Don Mimi does Italian sandwiches – they have some nice Italian breads, and sandwich fillings that are actually appetizing (no Spar-style coleslaw and reconstituted 'chicken' here thank you very much). They had a daily special of a foccaccia sandwich with any number of fillings for a fiver.

The real reason to go to Don Mimi's though, is the pizza. It's excellent.

Pizza is one of those things that seems so easy to do, but more often than not it's not great. The pizza I got here was exactly the way I like it – very simple and very thin, with a slight crisp in the base.



With a salad, it would probably be enough for a lunch for two – but fat pig that I am, I ate the lot and was satisfied I did.

You can get a nice sandwich here for a fiver, but my pizza and an excellent espresso came to 10.50.

One more plus – heterosexual males will appreciate the waitstaff.

Four syringes out of five from me.

Don Mimi/Da Mimmo (whatever you want...)

148A North Strand Road

01 8561714

COMMENTS

2 Comments

CATEGORIES

Cheap, Italian, Lunch, Northside, Pizza, Uncategorized

Welcome to the Northside



I want roast cod and samphire with a thai coconut dressing and I want it now!!

Hello.

My name is Mr. Northside Foodie and I shall be taking you on a journey across Dublin's oft-maligned north-side. Gastronomically speaking, that is.

Southsiders may think they have a monopoly on the best food the city can offer, but I will try to find as many 'good eats' as I can up here. Generally speaking, the food IS better down there – but I'm hoping to start a change. We deserve better than soggy batter-burgers and cremated pub-grub sunday roasts (I will most definitely be doing a piece on the best batter-burger!).

And, we absolutely deserve better than the awful neighbourhood Italian/Steakhouse/Chinese places dotted around every suburban village. Too many places are serving (at best) average fare to people who won't complain. This drives me mad. We deserve good food at reasonable prices, and I don't see any reason why decent places can't survive, even in the current climate.



I hear they wipe their arses with
their hands up there.

I'm not too interested in trashing places either. I know how hard it is to make a living in such a harsh environment. I won't hold back on my opinions, but I will concentrate on the positives. I want to point out the good stuff. We do have 2 Michelin stars up here, after all.

And lastly – this will also be a general blog – I eat all over the place, so the posts will reflect this. My first report is about a restaurant in Spain. I may don a Leinster Jersey now and then, and venture to an establishment on the southside. Or, god forbid, I might even venture beyond the Pale to that place they call 'The Country', and see if they eat anything other than boiled cabbage. Most of the time though, I'll try to keep to the brief.



What's a celeriac?

I am a vain man, so please feed my ego by commenting as much as possible on the posts. Also, I am open to suggestions and recommendations – if you know of somewhere great, please let me know at northsidefoodie@gmail.com. I don't want to miss anything good.

Disclaimer — This is my first ever blog, and the first few posts will be a learning curve. Bear with me and offer as much good advice as you can in the comments. I am also truly awful with a camera, so initial pictures are going to be bad. My first reviews might not have any pictures. Be patient and it will get better.

COMMENTS

15 Comments

CATEGORIES

Uncategorized
