

# Australia's best Italian LOCAVORE

We've tasted our way across the country to bring you the insider's guide to where to head for dinner with a touch of glam, the ultimate pizza, indulgent cakes and gelato, or a cheeky glass of prosecco.







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## THE BIG NIGHT OUT

If you're out to impress in Melbourne, it's hard to go past the enduring elegance of **Grossi Fiorentino** (grossi.com.au). The upstairs dining room teams polished service with a diverse wine list and precise classics. At **Da Noi** (danoi.com.au) it's all about the ever-changing menu of antipasti, handmade pastas and rustic meat dishes, often showcasing capretto (baby goat) from chef Pietro Porcu's farm in Yarck.

Expect a welcome as warm as the Amalfi sunshine and sharp service under the watchful eye of matriarch Maria Favaro at Adelaide's venerable city restaurant **Chianti Classico** (chianti.net.au). Chef Toby Gush is pushing boundaries with dishes such as crab pasta with zucchini and crab jelly, and venison with polenta and truffled chocolate and chilli sauce.

**Tartufo** (tartufo.com.au) owner Tony Percuoco (whose brother Armando has Buon Ricordo in Sydney) has hospitality in his blood and it shows in the generous service and fabulous food at this Brisbane favourite. Sydney stalwarts **Otto Ristorante** (ottoristorante.com.au), **Ormeggio at The Spit** (ormeggio.com.au), **Pilu** (piluatfreshwater.com.au) and **Lucio's** (lucios.com.au) continue to set the fine-dining bar high with vibrant dishes from the city's godfathers.

On the west coast, **Villa D'Este** (villadeste.com.au) offers a graceful villa ambience, while **Divido** (divido.com.au) is our pick for modern-Italian flavours, with an excellent wine list and sommelier too.



**Opposite (clockwise from far left):** Lucio Galletto in the iconic art-lined dining room of his Sydney institution, Lucio's; Grossi Fiorentino's elegant dining room; Sydney's waterside venues Ormeggio at The Spit and Pilu at Freshwater beach; Da Noi in Melbourne; Otto's capesante scallops. **This page (clockwise from above right):** pasta making at Bondi's A Tavola; Popolo's rabbit ragu; the meat counter at Salt Meat Cheese; fresh pasta is cooked to order at Etto in Melbourne.

## PASTA WITH PASSION

Sydney's **A Tavola** (atavola.com.au), headed up by chef/owner Eugenio Maiale, is known for its silky fresh pasta at the original Darlinghurst restaurant, and has recently set up a Bondi branch, including the signature marble table, at Hall Street's new dining precinct. One-hatted **Popolo** (popolo.com.au) has a sleek, winebar feel, but dishes up sunny southern flavours including fregola (Sardinian-style couscous-like balls of pasta) with clams, and rabbit ragu with maltagliati – offcuts of flat pasta.

The go-to dish at friendly Melbourne trattoria **Thirty Eight Chairs** (thirtyeightchairs.com.au) is the curly pappardelle with duck and porcini ragu, topped with ribbons of fresh pecorino; while the kitchen at **Etto** (etto.com.au) turns out fresh dough twice daily, which they cook to order with your choice of sauces – try rigatoni with spicy sausage, or tagliatelle with smoky pancetta carbonara, eat in or take-away. **Yak Italian Bar & Kitchen** (yakitaliankitchen.com.au) on Flinders Lane flies under the radar, but is worth a visit for chef Leo Gelsomino's handmade pasta, using local stoneground flour.

Strands of freshly made spaghetti hang in the open kitchen at Adelaide CBD's new **Borsa Pasta Cucina** (borsapastacucina.com). The vongole are done with Coffin Bay clams and a flicker of chilli, while the carbonara is tossed at the table.

After 10 years, **Dell'Ugo** (dellugo.com.au) upholds its reputation as a Brisbane institution with dishes such as handmade gnocchi and braised duck pappardelle.

## ANTIPASTI AND MORE

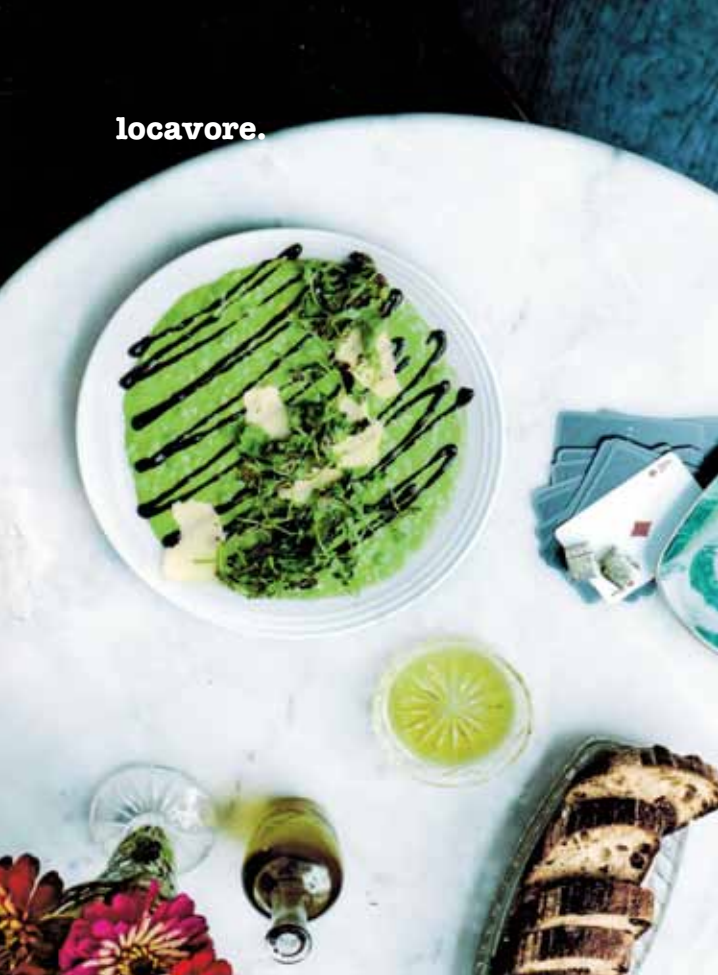
Bocconcini, prosciutto and pasta are now everyday staples thanks to the proliferation of delis such as Sydney's **Fratelli Fresh** (fratellifresh.com.au), where you can sit down to a pizza after shopping. The cheese room at **Fourth Village Providore** (fourthvillage.com.au) brims with imported varieties, but try their creamy Australian buffalo mozzarella. **Mercato e Cucina** (mercatoecucina.com.au) is a deli, restaurant, bakery, butcher, grocer and wine cellar under one roof; while emporiums **Salt Meats Cheese** (saltmeatscheese.com.au) and **Paesanella** (paesanella.com.au) are recent inner-west additions.

With two locations in Brisbane and a prodigious range of cheese and salumi, **Tognini's** (togninis.com) is a one-stop shop for Italian comestibles; while at **MBD** (m-b-d.com.au) in the heart of Broadbeach, the front counter groans with salads, pasta and cakes, and the shelves are stocked to the ceiling with provisions.

**Spring Street Grocer** (springstreetgrocer.com.au) is a one-stop-shop at the Parliament end of Melbourne's CBD, comprising Gelateria Primavera, a cafe and fresh produce upstairs, and Anthony Femia's sigh-inducing cheese cellar downstairs. Carlton's **Enoteca Sileno** (enoteca.com.au) overflows with Italian food and wines.

**Bottega Rotolo** (bottegarotolo.com.au) started as a single store in Adelaide and now has outlets around the country, selling everything from parmigiano to panettone. Nonnas head to WA's **Re Store** (231 Oxford St, Leederville) and **Galati & Sons** (19 Wray Ave, Fremantle).





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## GELATO HEAVEN

The gelato games are well and truly on, and it's old versus new. **Gelato Messina** (gelatomessina.com) in Sydney's Surry Hills has a cult following for its bombastic flavours – think 'Elvis, the Fat Years', peanut butter gelato with fried brioche and banana jam – with queues snaking down the street, even in the depths of winter. A few blocks away, **RivaReno** (rivareno.com), which launched in Milan before spreading through Italy, then to Australia, is all about creamy, velvety classics. **Pompei's** (pompeis.com.au) at Bondi Beach is a longstanding favourite for its truly authentic scoops, including blood orange sorbet and pistachio.

While Melbourne's Fitzroy outpost of Messina has the same wild appeal as the Sydney original, you'll find equally flavoursome scoops at **Gelateria Primavera** (springstreetgrocer.com.au), where Massimo Bidin's seasonal creations are scrawled on brown paper at the entrance to Spring Street Grocer, spanning fior de latte, Piedmont hazelnut, or watermelon and mint.

A visit to Sicily inspired the original owner of SA's **Gelato Bello** (gelatobello.com.au) to recreate the island's silky-textured iced treats. Now you can see the company's lime-green signs around Adelaide but, for a range of more than 30 flavours, visit the Glynde store.

A visit to Noosa is simply incomplete without visiting **Massimo's Gelateria** (75 Hastings St), where the scoops are not overly sweet and only steps from the beach.

## FAMIGLIA FARE

Sydney's chic **Fratelli Paradiso** (fratelliparadiso.com) and buzzing **La Disfida** (ladisfida.com.au) are go-to venues for comfort food classics, from cotoletta to tiramisù, washed down with Italian wines; while **Berta** (berta.com.au) treats seasonal produce with reverence and **Osteria di Russo & Russo** (russoandrusso.net.au) is a refined interpretation of traditional flavour combinations.

A Melbourne laneway is the latest home of Rosa Mitchell's soulful Sicilian eatery, **Rosa's Kitchen** (rosas-kitchen.com). The short menu is peppered with freshly picked vegetables from her farm in Yandoit, and may include stuffed artichokes. **Pure Italian** (249B Belmore Rd, Balwyn North) is a warm, family-run cafe, serving smoky scamorza and eggplant parmigiana.

Dan and Mark Rotolone and Mark's talented pasta-making mother-in-law, Minna Diana, make up the family behind Brisbane's **Vine** (vinerestaurant.com.au). Spanner crab risotto and chestnut-flour gnocchi with pancetta and mushrooms are favourites.

**Lucia's** in Adelaide Central Market, was started by the Rosella family in 1957, and little has changed about the decor or home-style renditions of pasta, pizza and minestrone. Parents, even grandparents, who grew up slurping spaghetti at this institution now take their own children. **Andre's Cucina & Polenta Bar** (andrescucina.com.au) by ex-MasterChef finalist Andre Ursini, has hearty dishes that go far beyond polenta.

**This page (clockwise from far left):** Osteria di Russo & Russo's mod-Italian dishes include pea risotto with pecorino, fermented black garlic and charred pea tendrils; old-school gelato at Pompei's, Bondi Beach; Gelato Messina has a cult following for its wild flavour combinations; Andre's Cucina & Polenta Bar in Adelaide; Melbourne's mamma of Sicilian cooking, Rosa Mitchell. **Opposite (clockwise from top right):** Da Orazio owner, Maurice Terzini; Da Orazio specialises in pizza and porchetta; the sleek dining room at Locale in Noosa; Locale's pizzaiola in action; Da Orazio's pizza margherita.



## THE RIGHT SLICE

Expect perfectly charry crusts strewn with speck, fontina and mushrooms, or porchetta and mustard fruits perhaps at **D.O.C.** (docgroup.net). Bonus points for the mozzarella bar and BYO wine. **400 Gradi** (400gradi.com.au) pizzaiola Johnny Di Francesco scored top honours in this year's World Pizza Olympics (yep, that's a thing), so you know he means business. Go for the classic margherita and look out for their brand new Venetian-style bar nextdoor, **400 Gradi Cicchetti**.

When it comes to Sydney's best slices, simplicity is key. Iceberg's Maurice Terzini's latest Bondi restaurant, **Da Orazio** (daorazio.com), is all about Neapolitan-style pizza and porchetta in a modern polished-concrete setting. **Pizza Mario's** (pizzamario.com.au) Rosebery spin-off, **Da Mario** (36 Morley Ave), is as good as the Surry Hills original, with doughy bases topped with fail-safe toppings such as speck and fontina.

After a day at Noosa's main beach, there's nothing better than sinking into one of the lounges at **Locale** (localenoosa.com.au) for a prosecco and pizza topped with Gympie baby zucchini and buffalo mozzarella.

It might be the romance of the glow of the wood oven at Adelaide's **Est Pizzeria** (estpizzeria.com.au), or it might just be the magnificent crisp-based pizzas with toppings such as mushroom, porcini and scamorza. Either way, it's easy to fall for this little gem where everything is cooked by the fire, including sublime gnocchi with gorgonzola.



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## SWEET SPOTS

Top honours go to **Pasticceria Papa** (ppapa.com.au) in Sydney’s ‘little Italy’ of Haberfield for their moreish torta di ricotta (ricotta cake). The doughy cake base is filled with ethereal whipped ricotta and sprinkled with cinnamon — the stuff of dreams. If you’ve made the effort to queue on a Saturday morning, you might as well pick up some panzerotti alla ricotta, pillowy ricotta-stuffed doughnuts. For biscotti and cannoli, head to **Sulfaro** (119 Ramsay St), a few shops down, where the glass counter is a colourful sugar mosaic and the Italian women behind it take their time, or Fivedock’s **Tamborrino** (pasticceriatamborrino.com.au).

For a sugar rush in Melbourne, tuck into cannoli, ricotta cheesecake, amaretti biscuits and flaky sfogliatelli pastries filled with sweet, citrusy ricotta from the dizzying display at **Brunetti** (brunetti.com.au), located in Carlton, the city and Camberwell. **Dolcetti** (dolcetti.com.au) is a Sicilian-style pasticceria in West Melbourne best known for its biscotti, honey-laced torrone (nougat) and plump bombalona (doughnuts) filled with chocolate or vanilla custard.

Once you’ve tasted one of the custard-filled cannoli from hairdresser-turned-pâtissière Maria De Leso at **Dolce Classico** (33 Chapel St, Norwood, SA) there’s no turning back. The buttery pastry tubes are made fresh each morning and filled with a smooth custard that is the ultimate treat alongside a latte. Look out also for the liqueur-soaked layers of the diplomatico mousse cake.



**Opposite (clockwise from far left):** Baker Bros. attracts the lunchtime crowd for their hearty panini, including this oven-roasted mushroom with caramelised onion, ricotta and olive; Alessandro Panetta at his Sydney cafe, Baker Bros.; sfogliatelli, ricotta pastries, and coffee are the perfect morning or afternoon treat at Brunetti in Melbourne.

**This page (clockwise from above right):** Drink your coffee standing at Melbourne’s Roman-style Sbriga Espresso Bar; Pino Tomini Foresti brings 30-years’ experience to Sydney’s Pino’s Dolce Vita; Mondo White Rocks Veal from WA butcher, Vince Garreffa.



## CAFFE, PER FAVORE

The backyard vegie patches and fruit trees of the local neighbourhood supply much of the produce for **Minestra** (123 Churchill Rd, Prospect, SA), a fabulous suburban cafe run by Sandy Cenin. The seasonal crop forms the basis of a blackboard menu that will likely have a few sustaining soups and more substantial meals such as beef and pork ragu with polenta and bitter greens. All very simple – and very Italian. **Lucia’s**, the city’s first pizza bar, (see Famiglia fare) is the go-to spot for coffee.

Brothers Alessandro and Gianni Panetta are the brains behind Sydney’s **Baker Bros.** (bakerbros.com.au), a pocket-sized CBD cafe by day and wine bar Thursday and Friday nights, where diners perch on the 23 bar stools over wine-friendly plates. It’s the brothers’ first solo venture outside the family restaurant and their hearty panini, think oven-roasted mushroom with caramelised onion and ricotta, and \$1 espresso if you take it standing at the bar, are a winning combination.

At Melbourne’s Roman-style **Sbriga Espresso Bar** (sbriga.com.au), order an Allpress ristretto, then sip it while standing at one of the high-top counters as they do in Rome (there are a few chairs if you’d prefer to perch).

Think coffee in Queensland and **Merlo** (merlo.com.au) comes to mind. Their beans are roasted daily in Torrefazione roasting houses around Brisbane, where you can taste the coffee and buy bags for home, or head to one of the Bar Merlo espresso bars, dotted around the city, for a flat white and a light bite.

## BEST BUTCHERS

One of Perth’s most respected butchers, Vince Garreffa of **Mondo Butcher** (mondo.net.au) in Osborne Park and Inglewood, offers organic free-range meat, including Mondo White Rocks veal, which this year celebrates its third year in the *delicious*. Produce Awards Hall of Fame for being consistently outstanding. Brush up your skills at one of their workshops or cooking classes, including sausage and salami masterclasses.

Three generations of the Marino family have run **Marino Meat & Food Store** in Adelaide’s Central Market, which doubles as a butcher and manufacturer of exceptional prosciutto and other Italian smallgoods. It’s the place to buy ready-rolled porchetta, skewers of spiedini and other specially prepared meats. There’s also a good range of pasta, oils and other essentials.

**AC Butchery** (acbutchery.com.au) in Sydney’s Leichhardt is a family-owned affair from Angela and Carlo (hence AC) Colaiacomo, specialising in Italian-style cuts and sausages – they have 20 varieties, but the chicken and rocket is a standout. At 2014 *delicious*. Produce Awards Outstanding Food Store **Pino’s Dolce Vita** (pinosdolcevita.com.au), Pino Tomini Foresti has been handcrafting sausages, salumi and prosciutto for over 30 years.

In Melbourne, follow the notes of opera to Leo Donati’s old-fashioned butcher shop **Donati’s Fine Meats** (402 Lygon St, Carlton), where you can stock up on osso buco, polpetta (meatballs) and house-cured meats.



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## VINO WITH A VIBE

At Melbourne's **Ombra Salumi Bar** ([ombrabar.com.au](http://ombrabar.com.au)), the newest addition to Guy Grossi's family empire, they make their own salumi and serve platters of antipasti. It's a cosy den over two-levels, and Carlo, Guy's son who runs the business, has a quirky winelist to match the robust flavours. **Bar Di Stasio** ([distasio.com.au](http://distasio.com.au)), Ronnie Di Stasio's sexy slip of a bar, runs adjacent to his iconic St Kilda restaurant. Prop at the marble bar for a negroni sbagliato with a splash of prosecco and snacky plates.

There's a good reason it's hard to snag one of the 25 bar seats at Sydney's intimate **121BC** ([121bc.com.au](http://121bc.com.au)) – easy-drinking wines by the glass and restaurant-style plates such as fritto misto take a tour of Italy's regions. If you can't get a seat, pick up a bottle from the adjoining wine shop, or try your luck at slightly larger sister venue **Vini** ([vini.com.au](http://vini.com.au)) around the corner. At **Buffalo Dining Club** ([buffalodiningclub.com.au](http://buffalodiningclub.com.au)) it's all about creamy white spheres of buffalo mozzarella, which they import fresh from Naples three times a week to serve with fried mortadella and a bottle of Soave of Argentinian malbec.

In Adelaide, Salvatore La Pira and his braces-wearing brigade keep up a ready supply of snacks, cocktails and mischief-making at Sicilian-themed **Turi** ([turi.com.au](http://turi.com.au)). Try the house specialties, arancini and chickpea fritters.

Brisbane's **1889 Enoteca** ([1889enoteca.com.au](http://1889enoteca.com.au)) is a typical Roman-style enoteca with an emphasis on natural and biodynamic wines from Italy and beyond. **d.**



**Clockwise from top left:** Adelaide's fun Sicilian-inspired arancini bar, Turi; Ombra's braised beef and slaw sliders; salumi is made in-house and served with Italian wines at Ombra; Brisbane's Roman-style wine bar, 1889 Enoteca; respected Melbourne restaurateur and chef Guy Grossi at Ombra.

WORDS SHANNON HARLEY, RACHEL HANSON, SARAH LEWIS & SIMON WILKINSON PHOTOGRAPHY KATJA ANTON, ALAN BENDON, JAMES CROUCHER, BEN DEARNEY, NAOMI FINLAY, DEREK HENDERSON, KATIE KAARS, TONY MOTT, IVANNA OKSENYUK, ANN OUCHTERLONY, MARK ROPER & BRETT STEVENS