

# Indie Italian Eats

Meet the Italian restaurateurs and chefs who are bringing *la dolce vita* into Bali's thriving dining scene. By Eve Tedja

It is not hard to conjure images of the good life when one mentions Bali. Think of the tranquil azure sea and long days spent leisurely at a beach club. Consider the joys of four hands massages, yoga classes by the lush padi fields, and heaps of resort-wear retail therapy. Bali has so much to offer, and that is precisely why it remains Indonesia's most popular holiday destination.

Today, Bali is drawing the attention of hungry foodies who are excited about feasting on the best that the island has to offer, and nomadic chefs with Michelin star credentials and intrepid restaurateurs are only too glad to answer their calls. Add to that the abundance of locally grown produce, a rich supply of seafood from Indonesia's marine bounty, and Bali's reputation as a hot dining destination is sealed.

Luigi Barzini, Italy's celebrated journalist and politician wrote in his book, *The Italians*: "They eat the dainty food of famous chefs with the same pleasure that they devour gross peasant dishes, mostly composed of garlic, and tomatoes, or fisherman's octopus and shrimps, fried in heavily scented olive oil on a little deserted beach". His observation of his fellow countrymen is true, for the Italians are truly passionate about their food.

Here in Bali, the Italians have won over locals and tourists alike with their scrumptious homemade pastas, thin crusty pizzas, and smooth gelato. The following are accounts of entrepreneurial determination and treasured family recipes handed down through generations, that tell of how a dedication to bring the taste of home to an island 11,000 km away has created a marriage of cultures that enriches the island community.



La Casetta

## La Casetta

A familial duty was the foundation of La Casetta, home to hearty Italian fare in Umalas, Kerobokan. Luciano Ricca first came to Bali 25 years ago, soon after his eldest daughter was born. He felt that the island was the right place to raise a family, and did just that. Together with the help of his housekeeper, Iis, the family thrived. Luciano taught Iis everything he knew about Italian cooking; skills that were passed down from his grandmother. When Iis' 15-year-old son died, Iis was heartbroken and bereft. In his bid to heal her hurt, Luciano nudged her to create a project together, and La Casetta (which means a small house in Italian), is the fruit of their collaboration.

La Casetta's casual vibe and friendly service suits its home-cooking concept perfectly, and I can't help but feel a strong sense of being in a close-knit community whenever I visit. Southern Italian

food is loved for its simplicity, and the dish of Zeppolelle di Alghe is a worthy example – the savoury fried seaweed ball a lip-smacking testament to how local ingredients can be used in an Italian recipe.

Fiercely proud of its artisan tradition, the restaurant makes its own pasta. "Our philosophy is very simple. My family eats here, our friends eat here, so we offer what we would eat and enjoy ourselves," says Ricca who recommends the Pappardelle Al Ragu and Pizza Dello Chef. The beef ragu is slow-cooked to perfection, thick and luxuriously blanketing the pappardelle with its rich sauce. The combination of blue cheese, rocket salad and prosciutto atop the thin-crust pizza is also superb.

Approximately Rp 250,000 per person without wine.

PHOTOS: DHITA BEECHEY



La Casetta



Luciano Ricca and chef Iis



La Casetta



Massimo Ristorante

Zibiru



Massimo Ristorante

Zibiru



### Massimo Ristorante

To find Massimo Ristorante, all one needs to do is to follow the long gelateria queue along the pavement of Sanur on the hottest days. Two large display freezers that hold more than 40 flavours of gelato are surrounded by sweaty mobs. Vaniglia, cioccolato, stracciatella and their exotic cousins like the Himalaya – almond and pink salt – are displayed beautifully, complete with flattering garnishes such as cocoa pods or coffee beans. Near the entrance, two industrious women dance the intricate tango of tossing, rolling, spreading, sprinkling, and lastly, shoving pizza after pizza into the hot oven.

I've been going to this restaurant for a decade, and it never ceases to amaze me how masterfully attuned this particularly flavourful orchestra is to the waves of its conductor's hands. The conductor in question is Massimo Sacco and like the best operatic aria, his story in Bali began with a woman. "I used to work on a cruise ship and then one day in 1996, we docked at Padang Bay. My duty that day was to take care of the Balinese dancers who were going to perform aboard. Then, I saw one particularly beautiful Balinese dancer and she made me fall in love with Bali even before I set foot on its shores," reminisces Sacco. By 2004, he had rented the space where his restaurant currently sits, transformed it from its previous crumbling state into a cosy al fresco eatery serving up Italian delights prepared with recipes from his hometown of Lecce, Puglia.

Sitting under the shade of palm trees, I tuck my napkin on my lap and welcome the Spaghetti allo Scoglio, a wonderful dish bursting with flavour from the sweet tomatoes and briny juices from the clams, shrimps and squids; and a special of the day: Red Snapper with White Sauce Reduction, Mussels, Tomato and Fish Broth. Sacco's obsession with creating good Italian food can also be seen in the adjoining factory where the company produces gelato, pasta, bread, and even specialty cheeses such as pecorino and scamorza.

"It is easier for us to eat another type of cuisine than to eat badly cooked Italian food," admits Sacco, who attests that the vast Italian community shares a similar cultural trait with the Balinese that makes them feel welcome here. "Both the Balinese and Italians understand the importance of familial attachment. For us, family comes first."

*Approximately Rp250,000 per person without wine.*

### Zibiru

Created by Luigi Calcagno, the same man behind Monti at The Fullerton Pavilion in Singapore, Zibiru has been a Seminyak stalwart for the last five years. Slightly hidden from the bustling street, the restaurant is a charming retreat and offers a romantic



Chef Massimo Sacco



Chef Andrea Torelli

### WHERE TO GO

❖ LA CASETTA  
Jalan Bumbak Dauh  
No. 172, Kerobokan  
Tel: +62 813 3727 5726  
lacasettabali.com

❖ MASSIMO RISTORANTE  
Jalan Danau Tamblingan  
228 Sanur  
Tel: +62 361 288942  
massimobali.com

❖ ZIBIRU  
Jalan Drupadi  
No. 7 Seminyak  
Tel: +62 361 733265  
zibiru.com

dining experience, especially when you're seated at the candlelit rooftop dining area and the air is filled with acoustic jazz. Head chef Andrea Torelli serves up delicious Italian cuisine with a farm-to-table approach, sourcing produce from a farm in the hill of Bedugul. "We smoke our own hams, make our own mascarpone, and create our own pastry simply because we want to get

as close as possible to the authentic Italian flavours," says Torelli.

A spoonful of his homemade Ravioli di Carne Al Midollo later, I understand why Zibiru still reigns supreme in Seminyak's fierce culinary war. Each bite of the minced beef ravioli is a delicious medley of flavours that results from the thoughtful marriage of beef, bone marrow sauce, parmigiano reggiano and lemon zest. The exquisite experience continues in the form of Tagliata, a sous-vide Australian Black Angus beef tenderloin served on a block of Himalayan salt, which elevates the look and flavour of the rustic Italian dish. For dessert, the Tiramisu is lovely. I have to quote a witty paragraph from the menu that I agreed wholeheartedly: "La vita may be dolce, but it's also too short not to eat good food". *Approximately Rp400,000 per person without wine.* e