

PIZZARIUM

To get there I had to trek the most gruesome tourist trails along the Vatican walls. I only found the place by use of some of Google's more amazing technologies. When my navigator announced that I had reached my destination, I searched the neighbourhood for a peaceful spot and a glass of wine to prepare my stomach. All I found were garages and hairdressers. It was hot, I was tired and my legs were in pain.

What I wanted to do was to catch a taxi to some nice terrace where the waiter could fill my glass with sparkling wine and choose starters on my behalf. What I did was to have lunch in a hole in the wall, standing uncomfortably with a view of a bus stop while sipping sparkling water from a plastic cup. But what a lunch it was. I was in Pizzarium.

Romans love their pizzas in slices, *al taglio* as they call them. The little shops are everywhere; bad ones also do shawarmas while upscale ones offer other Italian foodstuff as well. Pizzarium defies all attempts at categorisation. Since you pay by the weight of what you order, based on the price of the ingredients, it is significantly more expensive than your on-the-corner shop, but 15 euros suffice for one person, beverages included. It's well invested money.

Pizzarium is not only the most expensive, but possibly also the smallest pizza place I've been to. Yet it is kept neat and clean and there's a little porcelain hand-sanitizer next to the (paper) napkins. The interior is functional and simple, dominated by solid wooden shelves and polished zinc fridges and by a need to fit a lot of things into a very small space. Nothing in there draws your attention away from the main attractions.

I never knew a pizza could look so voluptuous. They were alive, the ingredients shivered and shook and some seemed to want to jump at me. The crusts were thick, far too thick to pass for the usual crisp bread-like crust that Romans prefer. The colours were as vivid as in a Tiziano masterpiece, and so, I gathered from what All-Smiles behind the counter explained to me, were the flavours.

I chose one white red and one white. One with tomato sauce and one without. The white pizza had a cream of pumpkin, covered by *broccoletti*, topped with pecorino cheese. The red slice had spoonfulls of dark, spicy tomato sauce, interrupted by ricotta-cheese and toppled with crunchy lightly seasoned rocket salad.

How they manage to make a crust that thick melt in your mouth after it has done its duty, to carry the rest of the toppings and crack when you bite, is a mystery. Whoever invented the succulent pumpkin-*broccoletti* combination is a genius. The usually sharp Pecorino didn't disturb the harmony, it underlined it. And when I managed to balance it

all the way to my mouth, the ricotta neutralised the surprisingly spicy tomato sauce, giving way for the refreshing leaves of dark green rocket salad.

Pizzarium does not make any effort to accommodate customers but the setting makes you focus on the food. I am very inclined to believe that it is on purpose. All-Smiles and his colleagues were blinking and service-minded and when they were in doubt about any of the ingredients, they called Daddy in the kitchen, a good sign around here.

Next time I decide to go to Pizzarium I might take the scooter. But there will be a next time. There will be many next times. *Pizza al taglio* will never be the same again.

PIZZARIUM

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Bookings are not possible (there is nowhere to sit).

Price range: 12-20 euros per person, beverages included