

# Food for thought in Nelson Bay's Blue Water Paradise

by Nicki S.

Finishing an exquisitely fresh seafood risotto for lunch at the Boatshed at Tea Gardens, while trying to see the fish swimming under us got me to thinking, my husband and I are unashamed foodies. Roughly translated, this means we love trying new restaurants, and we no longer have athletic physiques. But gosh, we have some fun.

It was the last day of our trip. We had travelled over on the foot-ferry from Nelson Bay public jetty next to the Marina. It was like a mini cruise, lasting 1½ hours. We were lucky as the dolphins were under the bridge between Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest.

Tea Gardens Boatshed

Staying at API's Tidemark holiday home, in Shoal Bay, had many advantages. Eating prawns and oysters, from the fisherman's co-op in Nelson Bay, washed down with a crisp Pino Gris on the balcony while watching the boats bobbing on the bay, makes us feel like we are millionaires.

Another lovey place for lunch, or dinner, is the Shoal Bay Country Club, which underwent an amazing face-lift a couple of years ago. The view from the restaurant upstairs is spectacular. I recommend the 'Pardon My French' Rosé and the rocket, pear and parmesan salad. Yum. As it is a 3-minute walk from Tidemark, there is no concern in finishing the entire bottle of Rosé either!

Gianni's Italian has been serving good wine and lovely hand made pasta for years. My personal experience is pizza lovers are likely to enjoy the woodfired pizzas at the Country Club over Gianni's. There are several restaurants in Shoal Bay, and I am sure we have tried most of them. The convenience to Tidemark is hard to go past.

We love to indulge in a late breakfast, or more correctly - brunch. Nelson Bay is a 5-minute drive from Shoal Bay and has an enviable range of great locations. My long-suffering husband, John, knows my favourite is 'The Home Interior'. The food presentation, professionalism of the staff and aroma of the coffee are exceptional. He also tolerates my passion to wander around the adjoining home interior shop, where there is usually something I desperately need to buy!

John likes boutique beers, so we share the driving to Murray's Brewery and Winery. John drives there and I get the privilege of driving him back! The food is good pub-grub style. Try the 'Fred Manburger' stuffed with 12-hour smoked beef brisket, maple bacon, beer pickles etc. (Do you feel hungry yet?). Murray's makes a 'Fed' IPA to accompany the burger. The sweet potato wedges are also good.



Murray's brewery



Shoal Bay Country club

The Home Interior Café



Rick Stein has opened another 'Bannisters' at Soldiers Point, a 20-minute drive from Tidemark. With the motto of 'Fresh Seafood Simply Cooked', this is a special occasion restaurant, with prices to match.

A little further along, also at Soldiers Point is aptly named 'The Point' restaurant. We discovered it quite by accident a few years ago, but that is another story. We go at lunch time as the views are over the marina, and we never tire of the birds and boats. The food is really good and very reasonably priced. It always feels very serene to us.

By the way, you will either need at least two weeks, or a return holiday, as I have not yet mentioned the Little Beach Boathouse, Sandpipers, Evviva Café or the views from the Lighthouse Café, and the list goes on.

Fortunately, there is a Woolworths supermarket and BWS at Stockton & Donald Street, Nelson Bay, where we use the discounted eGift card from API, when we are not eating out. On one occasion, we forgot to bring beach towels. It was easily fixed by buying new ones using the API discounted eGift cards at Target in Salamander Bay, or was it at Kmart? **API**

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