

An Italian Oasis

True to its name, **L'Oasi** is a peaceful eatery far from the madness of Siem Reap's Pub Street. **Liz Ledden** meets co-owner **Carla Ara** and samples some authentic Italian cuisine.



Roberto:
Passionate about Italian food

Her main goal in the venture was "to just get fat"

which she admits is less of an authentic Italian dish than the others and more an "invention of Roberto's". The desserts, too, are perennial favourites, particularly the tiramisu "with real marscapone" and Carla's personal favourite, the pannacotta, a recent addition to the menu.

■ THE MEAL

We opted to begin with an antipasti di crostini di polenta (US\$4), which consisted of four squares of grilled polenta topped with a meat sauce similar to Bolognese and some parmesan. The polenta's soft texture with its crispy grilled outer layer created a nice contrast to the rich and hearty flavour of the meat sauce, which went perfectly with a glass of red wine.

Prosciutto di parma pizza (US\$6.50) was next along with Roberto's concoction, the gnocchi con gorgonzola (US\$6.50).

The thin-crust pizza was large enough for two and generously topped with good quality prosciutto plus tomato sauce, mozzarella and oregano. The gnocchi although not quite melt-in-your-mouth, was covered in a delicious cream-based blue cheese sauce that was not too strong or overwhelming in flavour.

Dessert was impossible to refuse, so we opted for both the tiramisu (US\$3.80) and pannacotta (US\$3). The former was beautifully rich with its espresso and liqueur soaked chocolate biscuit base, topped with sweet, creamy mascarpone and covered in chocolate sprinkles. The pannacotta was vanilla flavoured with a smooth, crème caramel-like texture and covered in a runny chocolate sauce with a hint of liqueur. Despite being Carla's favourite we begged to differ, declaring the decadent tiramisu superior.

L'Oasi, River Road, near Wat Preah An Kau Sai. Tel: 012 833 985 (Carla), 012 183 0797 (Roberto). Open 11am to 2pm for lunch, 6pm to 10pm for dinner (closed Monday lunch). **A**

LOCATED DOWN A NARROW river-facing road, on the edge of town towards the temples, L'Oasi exudes tranquillity. With undercover seating in individual open-sided bungalows set in a garden, plus a few indoor tables, the restaurant is spacious enough to create a feeling of privacy for diners. Its ambience is unpretentious and conducive to a long meal, reflecting the home-cooked Italian cuisine it serves.

Opened in February 2006 by long-time friends, Sardinian Carla Ara and Roberto Ferroni from Tuscany, the restaurant was "Roberto's dream," says Carla. Her main goal in the venture was "to just get fat and for all the staff to get fat," albeit with little success, judging by her petite frame.

Both Roberto and Carla initially worked as Italian-speaking tour guides upon moving to Siem Reap, twelve years ago in Carla's case and eight years for Roberto. Although clearly enam-

oured with the region – she has lived in various Asian countries for the last thirty years – Carla is equally passionate about Italian food, believing Khmer cuisine alone is not enough to satisfy one's taste buds.

■ HOME COOKING

Semi-regular trips back to Italy allow authentic ingredients to be picked up for the restaurant, including seeds to grow basil, rosemary, parsley and tomatoes. "He loves it," says Carla of Roberto's passion for the restaurant's vegetable garden. Many of the ingredients are homemade, from the pesto to their pastas such as tagliatelle, gnocchi and ravioli. Meanwhile other ingredients such as prosciutto, olive oil and mozzarella originate from Italy but are sourced from some of Siem Reap's food wholesalers.

According to Carla, the restaurant's most popular dishes are the homemade lasagna and the gnocchi with cheese sauce,

Perfect Pizza: Authentic Italian ingredients

