



Delightfully Decadent by Alison Cotes

Courier mail

Address: Shop 17a, 19 Albert Ave (Aria Building), Broadbeach, Ph: 5538 8223, www.m-b-d.com.au, Hours: 7am-6pm seven days (kitchen closes 3pm),
Liquor status: BYO only, corkage \$2 per person, Prices: Average hot dish around \$15; cakes from \$1.50; Segafredo coffee from \$3, Owners: Con and Steve Manolas, Chefs: Matt Jefferson and Rob Lam, Parking: In Broadbeach car parks, some on-street, Wheelchair access, toilets: Yes, Other: All credit cards except Diners; counter service; vegetarian and gluten free available; 15 per cent surcharge public holidays; air conditioned; toilets in complex; noise level high; customer loyalty card

THE SCORE

Food: 18

Service: 15

Ambience: 16

Value for money: 16

About the Score: 0-5 don't bother; 6-9 needs serious improvement; 10-12 reasonable; 13-14 good; 15-17 very good; 18-19 exceptional; 20 perfection

Whether it's your inner gourmet or your inner glutton that needs indulging, you can't go wrong at MDB Deli-Café in Broadbeach. It offers an Aladdin's cave of culinary wonders.

Just walking into the place is guaranteed to put a couple of extra kilos on the hips, and you should allow yourself at least 15 minutes to browse before ordering.

We were so taken with the lamb shanks, cooked slowly with vegetables and red wine and served on a chive mash (\$22.90) that we didn't even look at the other offerings, so missed out on the lamb's fry and bacon with mash and gravy (\$15.55), one of my favourite winter foods, and hard to find on any restaurant menu these days. I also cursed when I later noticed the paprika chicken with sweet potato, snow peas and honey vinaigrette. I'm saving that for next time.

Keep away from the cake counter if you're worried about burgeoning hips. You might think that a nibble of Mars Bar Cheesecake, the café's speciality, mightn't hurt, but the serving is so big and the taste so decadent you might find, as I did, that when you looked down at your plate somehow you'd eaten it all. My friend did equally well with his spicy pear cake, which was much more exciting than that description sounds - think moist fruity cake topped with a caramel nutty crumble glazed with toffee, warmed slightly in the oven, served with cream and ice-cream.

Owners Steve and Con Manolas are of Greek origin and know what hearty food is. There's something almost over-lavish about the look and feel of their deli-café. This is not the place for slim-line models who just want a cup of lemon tea and a lettuce leaf in elegant surroundings - it's more like a crowded village trattoria (or whatever the Greek equivalent is), with the locals sitting elbow to elbow at long communal tables, spreading out newspapers, ordering more and more coffee, exchanging smiles and remarks with strangers, and generally feeling part of a big sociable crowd.

It's not the place for wannabes, you won't find a society photographer within coo-ee, and I'd say it's rustic rather than either rough or regal.

This doesn't mean food sensitivities aren't catered for, and you'll find dairy-free, high fibre, gluten free, nut-free, diabetic and vegetarian options. All of it is so good that my friend found he had eaten gluten-free toast without noticing (I did the ordering while he wasn't looking).

Then he went to town on the DIY Big Brekky - crispy bacon (three slices), grilled tomatoes, sautéed mushrooms, pan fried potatoes, poached eggs and toast (\$16.90). To this he added extra spinach and the chef's own Creole-style baked beans (an extra \$3.50 each), and all that after he'd demolished a plate of Bircher muesli with yogurt, honey and stewed rhubarb (\$11.90). Fresh Fruit, he proclaimed triumphantly.

He was also tempted by the pumpkin and spinach fritter stack, served with fried eggs, crispy bacon and grilled tomatoes (\$16.90), but for once realised his eyes were bigger than his stomach and reluctantly allowed himself to be led away after the third cup of coffee.

I, meanwhile, contented myself with bangers and mash, made up of three fat proper sausages with a hearty serve of good mash and onion gravy. Never was \$11.90 better spent.

We then spent a lot more money on take-home treats - banana and blueberry bread at \$4.50 a slice, which toasted superbly before the fire that night; plum and almond tart, and so many items from the deli shelves that it blew the housekeeping budget for the next month. I even relented and took home more Mars Bar cheesecake for the teenagers, although I resolutely declined their insistence that I learn how to make it, and so the whole family was almost satisfied.

The food here is just sumptuous. I could list some of my other favourites, but why don't you just check their website yourself and get an idea. I defy anyone not to find something here that they really can enjoy; and if you don't like the rubbing elbows with your unknown neighbour, there are tables on the pavement area, sheltered from the wind by roll-down vinyl blinds and warmed by gas braziers.

In my book, this is the best café food on the Gold Coast, and it's worth taking a special trip to MBD just to experience it.