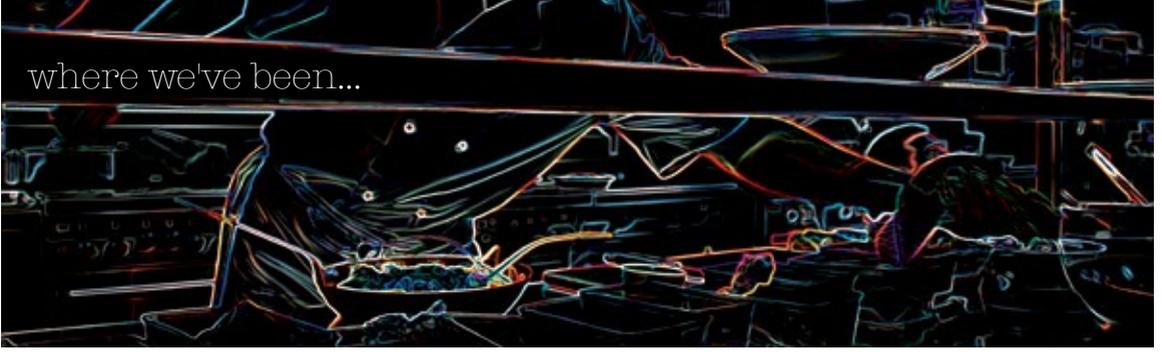


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IPANEMA GRILL Camden

There was a lot of excitement when I announced on social media that Camden was to have its own Brazilian Grill. The huge response to the post has been born out in bums on seats. The biggest challenge about dining at Ipanema Grill is getting a table, particularly on Saturday nights when Brazilian dancers entertain guests.

I lined up Lara Croft for this expedition. You have met Lara before, but under her real name. I thought it was time we had a new regular character. Lara is fit, beautiful and a very good friend of mine. We don't see a lot of each other but when do it's a talk fest. We solve the world's problems... n'stuff.

We met at Village Lane Wine Bar across the road, around 5.30pm. It was supposed to be 5pm, but both of us had to negotiate the excruciating Narellan Road, adding half an hour to the journey. I hope the work is close to finished, and I hope that it actually works when finished. That seems unlikely given the amount of traffic entering at the new lights from the M5. The current half an hour from Macarthur Square to the M5 junction will improve I'm sure, but by how much we will have to wait and see.

Village Lane Wine Bar is very quiet on a Thursday at 5.30pm, a discreet meeting place you could say. I ordered two glasses of pinot noir and settled in to the grand armchairs in the centre of the room. Lara told me of her coming trip to Sri Lanka. It's a place I have considered for a surf trip, so her trip is some-

what a reconnaissance mission for me (rolls her eyes). The nonstop action girl has taken up kite surfing and will be taking part in an organised seven kilometre downwind sail between Sri Lankan islands. The rest of the trip is touring around in a van, keeping an eye for surf spots for me (and tomb raiders of course).

We walked across Murray Street around 6.30pm to our food destination. Ipanema Grill is an unassuming little restaurant. Some might call it plain, but it really doesn't need much. Maybe a big Brazilian mural on one wall would give it some aesthetic. The buzz of happy diners does the trick though. Everyone seemed to be merrily chatting and eating as wait staff moved from table to table with 'swords' of meat. Anyone who has ever been to a Brazilian restaurant will know that it's mostly about meat.

Our waitress had a quick chat with us about the menu and seeing it was midweek, we only have one option. The weekend menu offers a second bigger choice. I am sure that when the staff looked at the size of our scrawny little bodies, they knew we were only capable of the smaller choice anyway. They were right!

She soon returned with a tray full of bowls. We were surprised to find that they were all for us. Salads, salsa and sauces filled the bowls, maybe eight of them. Then systematically, the meat carriers included our table in their rounds. Pork, beef, chicken, lamb and lamb thighs were presented to our table, over and over. The beef was the winner with

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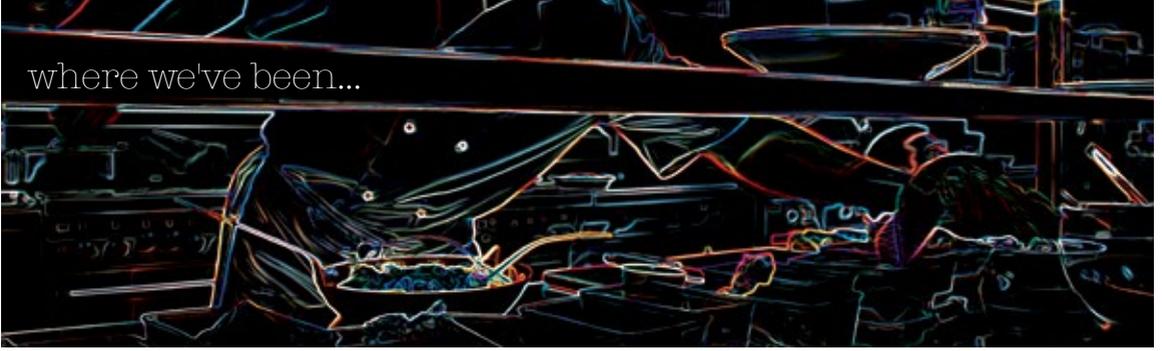
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maybe pork second and lamb third. All of it was great though. Cinnamon pineapple was the only non meat offered on the long metal skewers.

Everything I have described, including as much meat as you can eat, is \$29.90. That is extraordinary value for money. It's a simple little restaurant offering straight forward, quality food and the aforementioned value. Try to book in on Saturday night though and you will also be entertained by Brazilian dancers. Get organised though. You will have to book a few weeks ahead.

Lara was keen to ask about dessert but I couldn't do it. Carb loading is a part of Lara's world. All that fighting, running and killing uses up every ounce of your energy. We left satiated but without that disgusting over full feeling. Ipanema Grill is highly recommended for a casual fun night with friends - hungry friends.