



The Exchange Hotel, Gawler

Getting to the Barossa is just a couple of hours from Adelaide for those who take the 'traditional' route through Elizabeth then on to historic Gawler, where a stop is a must before heading on to Lyndoch and further into the heart of the Valley.

Gawler is the Barossa's southern regional business centre - a country town fast taking on a 'peri-urban' feel, retaining its own image certainly, but with a lot of the amenities reflecting a large 'suburban' shopping/business-centre focus.

For tourists or locals, visiting Gawler often involves lunch - as it did for earlier 'tourists' and locals when historically, Gawler was a 'way-point' for the horse-drawn coaches and traps which made their way north from Adelaide before venturing into the 'outback'.



It's no surprise then that Gawler's main street - and areas around its railway line - saw the establishment of a number of fine hotels, many of which survive today.

Some, sadly, are today in the hands of unfeeling conglomerates - but others remain in local hands - hands which, when their pockets allow, have crafted refurbishment and renewal that not only celebrates Gawler's fine past, but positions them to carry forward Gawler's rich history into the future.

The 150-year-old Exchange Hotel in Murray St (can we say Murray St *north?*) is the latest example.

Located just metres to the north of the intersection of Murray St and the road to Lyndoch (the Barossa Valley Way), this hotel has been a fixture in Gawler forever - but now made thoroughly modern by its local owner who has spent considerable money making this hotel a 'must visit' for a refreshing ale or two - or for a 'time out' lunch or dinner for tourists or locals alike.



An extensive make-over (just officially opened) has taken The Exchange from a 'blood'n'guts' pub to a sophisticated hotel and restaurant with great indoor and outdoor areas, better than most 'nouveau' hotels in metropolitan Australia.

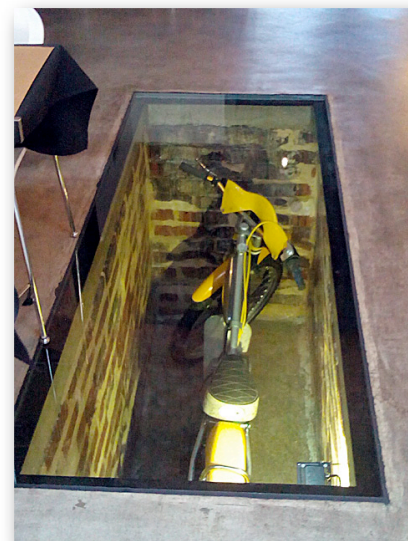
In The Exchange's case, this has meant converting what was once a 'drive-through' bottle shop into a smart outdoor eatery, complementing an indoor make-over where exposed brick, timber and modern fittings encompass what was once a former motorbike shop.

There are few hotels, if any, where within the main restaurant, a 'pit', glassed over, contains a motorbike as a tribute to the room's past. For motorcyclists who in increasing numbers tour the Barossa, this is a 'must stop' to pay homage to your two-wheeled beasts -- and the coffee is good too!

When we visited for a lazy weekday lunch, we chose to sit outside on the rear elevated deck overlooking Gawler's Pioneer Park, a fine grassed area and rotunda stretching into the distance, in the traditional country town-park style. Bliss - but the deck area would get exceptionally warm in summer months. Fortunately there's the downstairs outdoor area under greater shade, or plenty of seating in air-conditioned comfort inside.

The Menu is good for a country pub with a range of tempting plates from Starters through to Small Plates to Sandwiches and Pub Fare - but for those tempted by a longer lunch, the BBQ and Grill offers Brisket, Pork Shoulder, and Ribs from a delightful and unique 'smoker' in public view, along with traditional steaks from the Grill.

We were in a hurry on our first visit and chose a 'Gravedigger's Burger' which featured an Angus Beef Patty. The presentation was superb - but to be honest, the Angus Beef patty was a disappointment. Our 'significant other' (a trained chef and foodie) felt it was dry and offered little in the way of seasoned taste - and the promised 'tomato chutney and smoked paprika mayo' were missing. Hopefully they will do better next time....



The Wine List is good, featuring more local Barossa Valley wines than that offered by some of the other of Gawler's Main St pubs - and for those who prefer their tippie amber-colored and frothy, there is a first-class list of beers from Fat Yak American (beware the stuffed Bison head in the front bar!) to Dirty Granny's Apple Cider.

And it must be said that The Exchange has perhaps the most friendly of staff for a local Gawler pub - the day we visited, we could not have had better or more pleasant service.

Would we go back? Most certainly. We'll try the Burger again - and hope that

the chef has learned something about adding taste to the patties, and greater finesse to his burgers (an egg might be nice?).

Overall, The Exchange Hotel, remodeled, is a bonus for Gawler. Maybe there's some more refinement and attention to detail needed in the kitchen, but check out The Exchange if you're driving through, or call in if you're a Barossan. You won't be disappointed.

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