Tiger country: finding the cool, unusual and delicious in Richmond

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Richmond Town Hall.

THE world is literally full of Richmonds, at least 28, according to Wikipedia. Some are famous, such as Virginia’s state capital in the US. Or London’s Richmond, named by Henry V11 in 1500.

There’s a cute Richmond in New Zealand. A suburb in Vancouver. An air base west of Sydney. And an outback town in Queensland.

Richmond, Melbourne? It’s a near-city precinct we used to drive through as fast as possible, to get to more genteel suburbs such as Hawthorn and Kew. Then, there were only two reasons for stopping, but more of that later.

Richmond Street Scene by Hermann Schwaiger

Today, Richmond has all the trappings of a village, like established big brothers Carlton and Fitzroy. It’s even been dubbed an “Island State”,
the creation of some interested citizens because the area sits within the bosom of a bend in the Yarra River. More correctly though, it’s a small precinct with a wide sociodemographic range of citizens, including a perceptible presence of upwardly mobile singles and couples. And bicycles.

General manager of the nearby Mantra on Jolimont, Nathan Copsey, introduced me to the Richmond Island logo on Facebook. He’s moved into the area, sold his car and uses a share-car service, a brilliant idea to save fuel emissions, parking issues and of course substantial costs. This is the kind of forward thinking that younger villagers embrace.

Amora Riverwalk Hotel.

He points out that there are three main “avenues” (Swan, Bridge and Church) running through Richmond and a plethora of side streets and alleyways, all dotted with interesting bars/restaurants, pubs, cafes, outlet shops and boutiques as well as new residential and commercial development projects. Those who bought in early are now seeing a growth trend in property prices matching the move to a more “lifestyle” vibe around the place.

In short, it’s on the move … but there’s a way to go yet. It’s a work-in-progress and it’s to be hoped the character of the place will be preserved, including some classic Victorian terraces and workers’ cottages.

**Richmond Hill Cafe and Larder.** Photo: Nicole Tujague

One Richmond icon that hasn’t changed in 50 years is Vlado’s Steak House, which is one reason we used to brave the area in more “interesting” times. In Bridge Road, this establishment is legendary for its simple menu: the finest steaks you’ll find anywhere in Australia and
its classic salads and pancakes. That’s it. No frills. Regrettably, Vlado died a few years ago but his son Michael continues the tradition with dedicated long-term staff such as chef Ivan.

Richmond’s Swan Street.

Another local institution is Richmond Oysters, which was a wholesale operation and is now a classic fish restaurant with some of the finest fruits de mer you’ll find anywhere. There’s also Kanzaman, where amiable Bilal has been serving Middle Eastern delights accompanied by an energetic belly dancer for over 17 years.

But times are changing. A raft of new restaurants has hit the scene and the gastropub movement has arrived.

Here are a few suggestions, old and new, compiled by local contacts and the folks at Urban Walkabout.

**EAT & DRINK**

Mr Jennings modern Australian, with a special chef’s table

Noir similar, with a creative “tasting menu”

Bouzy Rouge friendly Spanish/Portuguese tapas pub

Feast of Merit A popular not-for-profit health-focused bistro

Richmond Hill Cafe and Larder cheese room, wonderful selection

Vlado’s Steakhouse old-style perfection

Richmond Oysters for rare Mt Martha oysters and seafood

Kanzaman convivial Lebanese
Top Paddock great breakfasts

Sabai and Brotherambo colourful, Asian influence

Bridge Hotel very, very hip indeed … you may have to line up for a table

Mountain Goat Brewery craft beer and pizza

The Collection cocktails and coffee

Gelato Messina voted best in Melbourne

SHOP

Outlet shops and designer labels in Bridge Rd. and Swan St. with trendy fashions, vintage and footwear. Recommended: Hut 13 in Swan St and Minette’s in Burnley St.

STAY

Amora Riverwalk Hotel, in a great location on the banks of the Yarra. The perfect base for exploring Richmond, excellent service standards and good value. Car parking; city tram right outside.

mantra.com.au

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