



finedining

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Gran Paradiso

4335 Austin Blvd.
Island Park
516-432-1200
granparadisony.com

COST \$\$-\$\$\$

SERVICE Excellent

AMBIENCE Very good

ESSENTIALS Open Monday to Thursday and Sunday, noon to 10:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, noon to 11:30 p.m. Weekend dinner reservations suggested. Credit cards accepted.

Bernardo Collado is in the dining room. Benny Collado is in the kitchen. You should be at the table.

Gran Paradiso may have nothing to do with Italy's alpine national park. But it's a peak in Island Park, with dependably fine food and gracious, friendly service.

The welcoming new restaurant is where Meson Iberia resided for decades. The major makeover brightens the openhanded place. There's no

froufrou, either. Gran Paradiso emphasizes the informal in style and the familiar in cuisine.

If you're set on a Piedmontese sojourn, try the beef carpaccio, drizzled with a lemony vinaigrette, finished with a mini-mountain of arugula and shaved fennel, plus some nutty Asiago cheese for a Veneto side trip. A citrusy vinaigrette accents the tasty salad of roasted beets, baby spinach, toasted almonds and pecorino cheese. The hot antipasto highlights clams casino and shrimp oreganata. Whole baked clams are good, too.

Executive chef Benny, cousin of general manager Bernardo, prepares a savory, satisfying white-bean soup, which floats Parmesan croutons. A special of tomato-tinted seafood soup comes across like well-seasoned zuppa di pesce in miniature. Capellini primavera, a light, spring-vegetable soup, will finally make you forget winter.

Paccheri, similar to oversize rigatoni, benefit from a zesty marinara, made pink with a



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Tomato risotto is the bed for jumbo shrimp at Gran Paradiso in Island Park. ■ More photos: newsday.com/restaurants

little cream and enriched with sausage and peas. Husky cannelloni are the spinach variety, filled with a mixture of veal, beef, chicken, spinach and ricotta, completed with meat and béchamel sauces. Lobster ravioli, ample and flavorful, could make you rethink a dish that so often turns into a travesty.

Gnocchi Bolognese are refreshed with a dollop of ricotta, but they're still a bit heavy. Penne Taormina means escarole, sun-dried tomatoes, roasted garlic, olive oil, and, for reasons unknown, grilled chicken.

The birds that fly here are chicken Montagnola, with escarole and beans; and one of the better versions of the eternal chicken Parmigiana. Eggplant Parmigiana is recommended, too. The pan-seared

pork chop, paired with cherry peppers, grilled asparagus, and white potatoes, delivers big flavor in a tender package. The grilled veal chop Piedmontese comes with broccoli rabe and noisette potatoes, but is almost undone by a smothering, mushroom-and-Gorgonzola demi-glace.

Large shrimp, delicately sautéed, arrive on a respectable tomato risotto, for a welcome alternative to the inevitable Parmigiana-oreganata-scampi preparations. Sole amandine and pine nut-crusted St. Peter's fish are in the regular catch.

Top desserts veer to Sicily, with commendable cannoli and a balanced, pleasing zabaglione with berries. You'll want to linger.

Bernardo and Benny ensure that.



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Paccheri pasta with sausage



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Pork chop with cherry peppers

AVERAGE MEAL PRICE PER PERSON \$ = \$15 \$\$ = \$30 \$\$\$ = \$60 \$\$\$\$ = \$100