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Melbourne's best food to try in 2017

Dan Stock, Herald Sun

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FROM flat potatoes to pixelated avo, eggs on smoking hay or curried crab on a crumpet, these are the 20 best things to seek out and eat around Melbourne right now.



📷 Crab crumpet at The Mayfair Restaurant Picture: Eugene Hyland

1/ Crab crumpet at The Mayfair - \$24

Oh be still my beating heart. The blinds are drawn, the lights are low, there's a jazz two-piece in the corner and a serious selection of spirits beckoning behind the bar. Channelling 1930s glamour, The Mayfair is Melbourne's late night supper club that's a little bit elegant, a little bit louche and — thanks

to a collection of expertly executed bistro classics — a whole lot of delicious.

With nothing more so than the crab crumpet. A cooked-to-order crunchy-yet-airy disc is the bed for a generous mound of crab, dressed in a light curried mayo. It's every kind of yes that makes every night all right.

45 Collins St, city

2/ Steak at Butcher's Diner - \$MP

Butcher's Diner, the latest addition to the Con Christopoulos/Ian Curley stable of CBD eateries, answers the question: where can I get a decent steak at 3am? In the affirmative.

This new 24-hour diner — a working butchery for the group's restaurants — serves up a changing, "butcher's choice" cut that's cooked medium rare and simply served with hand cut fries, a mound of fresh horseradish and a dollop of Dijon. This is no-mucking-around protein that will always beat a shake, no matter the time.

10 Bourke St, city



📷 Light Years cafe's Pixel avocado. Picture: Kristoffer Paulsen

3/ Pixel avocado at Light Years - \$18

Having first put Fitzroy's Hammer & Tong on the can't-miss-brunch hit list with his stylish, Asian-litling café fare, chef Simon Ward is back doing the same at Hawthorn East's latest go-to, Light Years.

Here, Simon's taking care of all those pesky house deposits in perfectly Insta-friendly fashion, serving up his take on avocado on toast to millennials with retro-tastic style.

His pixelated avocado — think space invaders played on a Commodore 64 — comes on toasted sourdough along with a poached egg and chilli-dusted crunchy kale. A charred cheek of lime to spritz across the lot and it's game on in the brunch stakes.

132 Camberwell Rd, Hawthorn East



4/ Selection of dips - \$16

With its industrial chic fitout, a fridge full of craft beers and funky staff, this new-wave barbecue joint is bringing a touch of hip Fitzroy to Sunshine. Although charcoal chook is the main name of the game, while waiting for that beaut bird the selection of dips is excellent snacking.

A bowl of A1 Bakery Turkish bread, soft and charred hot on the grill, joins a quintet of dips that include powerfully smoky eggplant and green chilli, cinnamon-spiced carrot in spicy yoghurt and a vibrant pea, mint and pistachio number.

64 Glengala Rd, Sunshine



📷 Poached and roasted duck breast. Picture Rebecca Michael.

5/ Roasted duckbreast at Play the Fool - Six-course degustation \$90

By day this Mornington café serves one of the best breakfasts you'll find anywhere – hello, Jerusalem artichoke fritters with pickled red cabbage! – but it's on the last Saturday night of each month you'll see chef Leo Howard's talents really shine bright.

For it's here, during a six-course degustation, Peninsula produce is shown off to artful effect. That could look like a blushing pink, crisp-skinned slice of duck with sweet pumpkin puree and tamarillo for bite. It's clever cooking that never forgets to be delicious.

89 Main St, Mornington



📷 Sarsaparilla braised oxtail dumplings at Annam.

6/ Oxtail dumplings at Annam - \$12

Jerry Mai – she of the ethical, sustainable, damn delicious pho of Pho Nom – has returned to her first love, restaurants, and has just opened the doors to her Indochinese Annam.

Along with Cambodian-style goat curry and DIY rice paper rolls, the do-not-miss hit of the menu are Jerry's oxtail dumplings. Three delicate-yet-fat pillows are plumped to bursting with a sticky rich fragrant mix of oxtail that come dressed with a sweet hit of sarsaparilla. Melbourne's best dumplings?

Head to Annam and see for yourself.
56 Lt Bourke St, city



📷 Midnight spaghetti at Arlechin, Melbourne.

7/ Midnight spaghetti at Arlechin - \$12

Living up to its name, the midnight spaghetti - a twirl of capers, juicy tomatoes and fresh basil – is a burst of sunshine late in the night.

You'll find it served at the Grossi Family's latest addition to the empire, the open-until-3am laneway bar Arlechin, where's it's all about drinks and food and the cheeky mischief that comes with late nights.

Morane Pl, city

8/ Hiramasa kingfish at Bellota - \$19

As if South Melbourne's locals weren't already well spoiled with having one of the city's best wine bars on their Bank St doorstep, but now that Nicky Riemer (Union Dining) is in the kitchen cooking, they are quite rightfully feeling a little bit smug now, too.

For when you have the Prince Wine teamed with Nicky's Euro-leaning fare it's a package hard to beat. And Nicky's take on kingfish – for there isn't a menu in Melbourne without a kingfish dish – is one of the affirming best in town.

Cured with harissa which lends a sunshiny heat to the fish, tiny pickled onions, capers and slivers of sweet "Zuni" pickles finish a plate that's damn near perfect.

181 Bank St, South Melbourne



 Raw yellow tail kingfish at Lamarois. Picture: Marina Oliphant

9/ Kingfish at Lamarois Hotel - \$20

Lamarois in South Melbourne has had a recent refresh at the hands of AFL footballer-turned restaurateur Paul Dimattina and chef Geoff Lindsay. Fans of Lindsay's Richmond restaurant Pearl have welcomed the duo with open arms, for the chef is turning out a menu of best-of hits honed over his 30-year career.

But for an affirming version of kingfish, look no further, for this dish is as tasty as it is pretty. Bejewelled with pomegranate and bursting with finger lime, fresh coconut cream and chilli add sweet and heat equally to the fish. Delish!

273 Cecil St, South Melbourne



📷 Vitello tonnato at Juliet bar, Melbourne

10/ Vitello tonnato at Juliet - \$18

There's much to like about Juliet, the new subterranean sibling to CBD's perennially packed Punch Lane wine bar. That there's all sorts of house cured smallgoods being sliced to order, for one. That it's championing female winemakers from here and abroad is another and so, too, that there's raclette bubbling away on the bar.

But perhaps the best thing about Juliet's tight food offering is the contender for the city's best version of vitello tonnato. Blushing pink slivers of veal are dressed with subtle tuna-spiked mayo, caper berries and dots of black garlic adding richness to the plate that's finished with wobbly yolked quail eggs.

Basement, 37 Lt Bourke St, city



📷 Dulche de leche soft serve with malbec blueberries CHE Brunswick St, Fitzroy

11/ Dulche de leche soft serve at CHE - \$5

CHE stands for Chicken, Helados (ice cream) and Empanadas and this latest, fast(er) food addition to the San Telmo/Pastuso family of restaurants does all three with that same South American style.

Sure come for the chicken-skin-salted chips and smoky chicken, and big fat empanadas stuffed with brisket, but don't leave without a cup or cone of dulce de leche soft serve. For arguably Argentina's greatest gift to the culinary world here comes in caramelly creamy form that's great as is, even better when topped with malbec-steeped blueberries.

296 Brunswick St, Fitzroy



📷 Eel with potato. Picture Rebecca Michael.

12/ Eel potatoes at Saint Crispin - \$10

With chef Stuart Mc Veigh (Union Food and Wine; Sofitel's No.35) in the kitchen and a damn sexy dining room makeover, Collingwood's Saint Crispin has a new spring in its step.

Get up to pace with the brilliant flavour bombs that are roasted potatoes filled with smoky eel mousse and topped with salmon caviar. As an opening snack, it's explosive stuff.

300 Smith St, Collingwood



📷 Marshmallows over pinecone at Highline.

13/ Marshmallows at Highline - \$100 tasting menu

Chef Simon Tarlington's celebration of paddock-to-plate at The Railway Hotel's hidden restaurant Highline is a journey through the Oak Valley farm that supplies almost everything on the menu. And while highlights are many, the end of a meal here is as memorable as they come.

Over a rum-splashed pinecone that's then set ablaze, Daintree chocolate marshmallows are skewered ready to toast. Clever and fun, this is a fiery burst of sticky – and completely delicious – nostalgia.

29 Chapel St, Windsor



📷 Rosewater semifreddo at Stokehouse, St Kilda

14/ Rosewater semifreddo - at Stokehouse- \$18

For many Melburnians, spring means one thing – long lunches at Stokehouse. And now, thanks to new gun pastry chef Lauren Eldridge, those lunches have a very sweet full stop.

Her semifreddo is a vision of restraint, where toffee-covered pistachios are turned through a blood orange jam, the cream delicately scented with rosewater and dusted with raspberry. It's as sublime as that view.

30 Jacka Blvd, St Kilda



 The Clacked egg at Nomada, Fitzroy

15/ Clacked egg at Nomada - \$5

It's the tastiest piece of theatre in town. On a bed of smoking hay, an egg shell sits that's filled with an ever-changing array of good things - perhaps ham and potato one day, perhaps sticky rich lamb belly with peppers another.

Of course, when you have the smarts of Jesse Gerner (Bomba, Anada) and Jesse McTavish (ex The Kettle Black) behind this café by day, tapas by night hot spot, it's little wonder the "clacked egg" is four spoonfuls of swoon.

412 Brunswick St, Fitzroy

16/ Oysters at Wilson and Market - from \$4

Paul Wilson's multifaceted Prahran Market venue – part café, part bar, part brasserie – has added the final string to its ethical, biodynamic, seasonal bow. The just-opened terrace is tailor made for bubbles in the sun – or a cheeky local G+T –and a half dozen of the changing roster of impeccably sourced oysters.

Like everything the chef's serving up at his long awaited solo venture, the oysters are hard to fault. Bring on summer.

163 Commercial Rd, South Yarra



📷 Biggie Smalls' Biggie Snack Pack.

17/ Chicken BSP at Biggie Smalls - \$12

Spiced chicken. Fried haloumi. Chips. Hot sauce, cheese sauce and you can even add fried chicken and crispy bacon.

You don't have to be at the tail end of a big night for this Biggie Snack Pack to look all right, but tell you what, if you are and have this in your hands tomorrow all of a sudden becomes a sunny day.

36 Chapel St, Windsor



📷 Rice Paper Sister's Apple pie. Picture Rebecca Michael.

18/Apple pie at Rice Paper Sister -\$12

At once cheeky and clever and stupidly tasty, the apple pie at Rice Paper Sister is a tongue-in-

cheek take on that fast food finish to a certain burger meal that begins with a Mc. Star anise-flavoured stewed apple comes wrapped in roti toasted crisp and served with with a scoop of condensed milk ice cream.

Now that's a happy meal.
15 Hardware Lane, city



 Kisume, The Table Warm egg custard and pearl meat

19/ Warm egg custard at Kuro Kisume - part of \$195 tasting menu

In Australia's first dedicated Kaiseki experience – Japan's answer to haute cuisine – is the final piece in Chris Lucas' three-level Kisume restaurant. The 12-seat Table is where chef KS Moon designs an individual experience for each diner.

Seafood, of course, plays a luxurious role across the 15 courses, but an opening gambit of a mushroom-flecked custard, topped with pearl meal and finished with fresh wasabi is as artful as it is elegant. Like nothing else, Kuro is Japanese, but not as we know it.

175 Flinders Lane, city



📷 Run Over potato and sour cream at Miznon.

20/ Run Over at Miznon - \$8

He's the Israeli celebrity chef who's brought his pita pocket party palace to Melbourne – and those pita pockets do indeed deliver a party in the mouth.

But not to be missed off to the side and out of a pita is Eyal Shani's take on a jacket potato. Smooshed between two pieces of paper, the potato and all its garlicky, oniony sour creaminess is like a pancake of carbs and means you'll never look at potato the same way again. Party on.
59 Hardware Lane, city



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