

## { 365 dining: crust }



### CRUST Italian Kitchen + Bar

by Rich Belmont

I have to admit I wondered what were they thinking! Matt and Sarah Kluesner already owned and managed Star when they decided to open another restaurant at the corner of 3rd and Main Streets in Dubuque. But why call it Crust? After all, the definition of crust is the hard exterior or surface of bread or a piece of bread turned dry or hard. Probably the best thing you can say about crust is it's a flat piece of dough on the bottom of a pizza.



I have been to Crust a number of times since it opened a year and half ago. And now I get it! Crust is all about the pizza and pizza is all about the Crust! This eatery is in essence a pizza and pasta house. By design it is more of an Italian Trattoria rather than a Ristorante. Trattorias are less formal with plentiful, quality food prepared simply and served casually.



At Crust friends and family gather together for good conversation while enjoying great food and drinks. When you go to the bar you will notice the

juicer mounted on the end. With warm weather upon us now is the time to try fresh squeezed fruit drinks like vodka and grapefruit or vodka and tonic with lime juice or lemonade. Crust's weekly specials are good reasons to hang out at the bar. Monday through Friday Happy Two Hour is from 4 to 6 pm. During this time the appetizers are half price and when you buy one Sangria or Margarita you get one for half price. On Margarita Monday enjoy \$5.00 margaritas at the bar including the house special Italian Margarita. This delightful drink contains Amaretto Di Saronno, Grand Marnier, Patron, fresh lime juice, agave syrup and is served on the rocks in a salt and sugar rimmed glass. On Teacher Tuesday teachers receive 20% off all pizzas. Do Dip and Sip on Wednesdays where for \$10 you get 3 wine samples and your choice of Baked Goat Cheese, Baked Artichoke Asiago Dip or Spicy Giardiniera Dip. Between 4 and 6 pm on Thirsty Thursday fresh squeezed juice cocktails are \$1.00 off and on High Five Friday martinis and wine by the glass are only \$5.00. Those who work in the service industry get a break on Industry Night Sunday when all drinks are \$1.00 off regular price.

In true Trattoria style beer and wine are also plentiful. Matt likes to stock unusual craft beers you won't find anywhere else in Dubuque. Wine is served in unusually large "fishbowl" size glasses providing the largest pour for the price in Dubuque. The assortment of wines is well chosen to pair with the menu choices. The wine list is written on 3 really large chalkboards strategically placed around the dining area. However, I must confess in all my visits I never saw them until Brian Hoffman, one of the floor managers, made me aware of them! Luckily, on my last visit Brittany, my affable and extremely knowledgeable server, brought a big wine bottle to the table that has all the wines listed on the label. When you are unsure of a particular wine your server is happy to bring you a sample. Crust is all about healthy eating too. The soups, sauces and crust are all made from scratch with fresh ingredients. All the cheese is freshly grated in-house so it doesn't have a chance to dry out. If you have special dietary requirements you should know there are many vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free items on the menu.

There is even a gluten-free pizza crust, pasta and gluten-free chocolate torte. When you sit down your server brings a basket of fried pizza dough balls with marinara sauce. You will have a lot to eat so you must be careful not to fill up on these things even though they are addictive.



As you read the menu you will notice this place is really focused on Crust. There are Crust Starters and salads that are Lite on the Crust. Sandwiches are Between the Crust and pizza is On the Crust. The pasta is Instead of the Crust and the signature dishes are Crust Specialties.

If you prefer to eat healthy you can order no-fat lunches with fat free dressings and sauces. A standout is the Lite Italian Salad of fresh greens, tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, shaved parmigiano-reggiano cheese and sun-dried tomato vinaigrette. If you are on a tight budget you can order Daily Lunch Special eight inch cheese or sausage or pepperoni pizzas for only \$6.95. The Express Lunch Soup and Any Half Salad is only \$7.95. These specials are offered 11 am to 2 pm Monday through Friday.

#### Crust Italian Kitchen + Bar

299 Main Street, Dubuque, IA 52001

563-582-6889 • www.CrustDubuque.com

HOURS: Sun – Thu, 11 am – 9 pm, Fri – Sat, 11 am – 11 pm with pizza only after 10 pm. Fri – Sat, Late night pizza by the slice.

DINING STYLE: Casual NOISE LEVEL: Conversational

RECOMMENDATIONS: Beet & Goat Cheese Salad, Meatball Sandwich, Chicken Bacon Wrap, Chicken Parmesan Sandwich, Margherita Pizza, Three Little Pigs Pizza or Thai One On Pizza, Angry Noodles, Lobster Ravioli

LIQUOR SERVICE: Full Bar; Fresh Squeezed Juices for Vodka, Lemonade or Vodka & Grapefruit or Vodka and Tonic with Lime Juice, Wine in "Fishbowl" size glasses, Affogato (espresso over gelato)

PRICE RANGE: Lunch: \$6.95 - \$12.95; Dinner: \$8.95 - \$19.95

RESERVATIONS: No. Large parties call ahead.

PAYMENT OPTIONS: Cash, Debit, All Credit Cards, No Checks

ACCESSIBILITY: Side Door Entrance & Restrooms

KIDS POLICY: Welcome! Menu, High Chairs & Boosters

CATERING: Yes. DELIVERY: Yes. TAKE OUT: Yes.

PARKING: On street; public lot & parking ramp close by

All of the salads are lunchtime big sellers. Two of the most popular are the Beet and Goat Cheese with fresh greens and beets, local goat cheese, candied walnuts and honey balsamic vinaigrette and the Garlic Chicken with chicken, bacon, cucumbers, tomatoes, red onions, cheddar cheese and roasted garlic herb dressing. During a recent lunch my dining companions had a Vegetable and Goat Cheese Sandwich (below) with mushrooms, eggplant,



tomatoes, spinach, fresh basil and goat cheese, and a Chicken Bacon Wrap with chicken, crisp bacon and roasted garlic aioli. I enjoyed my house made Meatball Parmesan and Mozzarella sandwich (below) very much!



Dinners are a lot of fun at Crust. You can build your own pasta. First you choose one of the pastas like Bucatini (long straws) or Spinach Fettuccini (little ribbons). Then you pick a sauce like Marinara, Basil Pesto or Puttanesca. Then you choose from a list of proteins including sausage, meatballs, shrimp or chicken. You can even make your pasta more interesting by adding any of the usual pizza toppings.



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Create your own pizza masterpiece in the same way by requesting any of more than 27 different toppings. If picking your own pizza ingredients seems like too much work you will really enjoy the signature pizzas. They all have cute little names so you can remember your favorites. All of them are in demand but some of the more popular are the Three Little Pigs with capicola, Italian sausage, bacon, cheddar, mozzarella and parmesan cheese. Also popular is the Roasted Garlic Shrimp with parmesan garlic cream, caramelized onions and mozzarella and parmigiano-reggiano. My favorite is the Margherita with imported Italian tomatoes, buffalo mozzarella and fresh basil.



While you are waiting for your dinner entrees it's a good idea to munch on some appetizers. The Calamari is hand-cut, cornmeal encrusted and deep fried. The Mussels are served with chopped tomatoes and garlic white wine cream. The Mushrooms are stuffed with Italian sausage and herb cheese pate and the Bruschetta (pronounced bru-sketta) includes tomatoes, basil, red onions, garlic, balsamic glaze and mozzarella (pronounced mot-zar-ella).

On those nights when you don't feel like pizza you will discover all of the Crust Specialties are delicious. The house-made Lobster Raviolis are filled with a blend of ricotta and parmesan cheese and fresh lobster meat. The Tuscan Brick Chicken is a free-range half chicken with a lemon garlic white wine au jus prepared between 2 terra cotta bricks. My favorite specialty of the house is the Angry Noodles (below). A delectable house-made spicy hot Italian sausage is nestled on a bowl of Bucatini pasta and covered with a spicy tomato sauce and melted parmesan and mozzarella cheese.



I hope you didn't eat too many of those fried dough balls! Because after a great meal you must have a nice Dolce (dessert). They are all wonderful starting with Smore Pizza. This is an 8" pizza crust with chocolate fudge sauce, chocolate chips, fresh marshmallows and a graham cracker dusting. It takes a while

to get ready so you should ask your server to have it prepared while you are still eating your dinner. Then there is the Apple Crostata individual apple pie with cinnamon apple crumble. The Deconstructed Tiramisu is wonderful. It's called deconstructed because the ingredients of the usual tiramisu are served separately meaning the mascarpone custard is layered with whipped cream and coffee and two lady fingers are served whole and crunchy.

And of course no good Trattoria would be without Gelato. It's always available in classic vanilla and also the flavor of the day. By the way, you probably know gelato is the Italian word for ice cream. But did you know gelato and ice cream are not the same thing? Gelato is made with more egg yolks, more milk and less cream than ice cream. It is churned at a slower speed so less air (called overrun) is mixed in. Less cream means gelato has less fat and less air results in a denser product resulting in stronger flavors.

Plan on dining at Crust soon. They don't take reservations but you can call ahead to be placed on the wait list. Ask for outdoor seating so you can dine as if you were in Italy. If you can't make it downtown, no need to deprive yourself of all this good food. They do deliver!



