



Number one: the Standard's Mark Chandler with Raffaele Giannandrea and Maria Ambrosia at Trattoria Raffaele which topped TripAdvisor

Restaurant bans service charge and increases salaries for staff

Rod Kitson

A LONDON restaurant is abolishing the service charge and "charity-style" tipping when it opens next month as it aims to improve the waiting trade.

Front-of-house staff traditionally topped up their wages with tips until the service charge became the norm, with some restaurants pooling the charge or, in the case of some venues, not giving it back to waiters at all.

Now chefs Bjorn van der Horst, below right, and Omar Romero plan to pay a flat salary when they open Kojawan in Edgware – with tips on card payments banned. Staff at the Korean-Japanese restaurant will get a competitive average London wage after cash tips. Mr Van der Horst, 43, said: "We want to bring back the idea that this is a vocation."

"You don't have to feel obliged to give a tip. They are fairly paid. You will not be able to leave tips with a card, because then we'd have to create some kind of system for that pot."

"Will it make the food more expensive? Yes – we are mak-

ing the entire dish worth it for everybody."

He and Mr Romero, 36, said that in the current system waiters have no stability and struggle to get mortgages as "earnings of £30,000 are £13,000 of tips, so the bank manager will say, 'No, you only make £17,000 a year'. We would pay £30,000".

Mr Romero added: "We owe it to our hospitality industry workforce to give them the opportunity to be equal members of the skilled working class. Not through a charity-style tips system but through a true, respectful salary based on the skill set and performance of a professional doing their job."

@RodKitson



Sydenham trattoria gets bookings from Beijing

Mark Chandler

A SMALL family-run Italian restaurant in an unfashionable corner of south-east London is celebrating after being rated the best in the capital ahead of Michelin-starred rivals.

Trattoria Raffaele, just a few doors down from the Lidl in Sydenham Road, has had booking enquiries from Beijing since it took the prized number one spot on TripAdvisor.

Owner Raffaele Giannandrea, 44, is giving names such as The Ledbury, Restaurant Gordon Ramsay and Le Gavroche a run for their money after a series of rave reviews. He said: "We find it quite amusing because not everybody knows where Sydenham

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is. We get a lot of foreigners. A family came from Arizona recently.

"A lot of Chinese people are showing an interest. But because they stay in central London, Notting Hill and places, they say 'are you far away?' "It's not very far away really, but when they get to London it fizzles out a bit once they see where we are."

Mr Giannandrea grew up around the restaurant – which has been on the high street for 45 years – when it was run by his father Dominic, now 78. After a career as a professional

golfer, Mr Giannandrea returned in 2008 and took over the family business, transforming it from an "old-fashioned" restaurant, changing the name and giving it a modern feel.

He said: "We started everything from scratch. We introduced our fresh pizza, fresh pasta, breads. Everything is made here."

"When we opened eight years ago there weren't any pizza places around here but as things progressed and the area's got a little bit better, we're selling more fish, meats and doing different specials every week."

Despite the changes, the ethos has remained the same, bringing the atmosphere and simple, rustic dishes of a southern Italian trattoria to Lewisham.

Mr Giannandrea said: "I was brought up in Sydenham, my dad come over years ago. I'm an Englishman but I've got a big Italian influence."

"Last week we had grilled sea bass, roast pork belly, homemade fettuccine, meatballs made with pork and veal, seafood spaghetti. We want to do things the way we want, but we also have to cater for the people that have margheritas and bolognese."

The 40-seater restaurant has a small staff to match, with chefs Manuel and Cati running things in the kitchen, "boss" Maria front of house and everyone "mucking in".

Recently, the reviews on TripAdvisor saw it crack the website's top 20 London restaurants, until finally it made the top spot on Monday.

Mr Giannandrea, who lives above the restaurant with wife Emily, 35, and daughter Sophie, seven, said: "We've got a lot of loyal customers so we get good reviews from them."

"But there are a lot of good restaurants in London. We're very proud of what we do and we try to do the best we can. But my feet are still on the ground over this." @Mark_Chandler

'We find it amusing because not everyone knows where Sydenham is. A lot of Chinese people show an interest.'

Raffaele Giannandrea

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