

Blogging - the good, the bad and the ugly.

Once upon a time there was the hotel post card, mailed to friends, the bragging right of a lovely stay, somewhere exotic. Then came the guest book, where happy clients, using their best handwriting, registered a sweet comment. That which was omitted from these message modes would end up as word-of-mouth, over dinner or at the BBQ, satisfied travellers boasting of a wonderful holiday. But just as seasons and trends change, so do customers. Enter the computer and internet Blogs, the stuff of a very different adventurer. We call it the tool of Gen Blog, a generation who care less about the beauty of the unique hotel they are visiting, and more about what they can Blog about their stay. Often they sit at the dinner table, in our restaurant, Blogging as they eat!

I was a Blogger once, a member of a club that needed a passport: I chose TripAdvisor, where I'd post a tip or two, offer comment on a fabulous room or Villa. I think I posted 53 blogs, all generous, to let fellow travellers know about a gem, an idyllic location or friendly stay. Then it changed. And I quit. Blogging today is harsh; it suits the faceless. Many of the keyboard comments are critical and the over-worked hospitality operators are suffering. No other industry is subject to such constant scrutiny. TripAdvisor too has changed, gone from the informative travel 'partner' to an all-encompassing global conglomerate, making a fortune from selling advertising space, it encourages Blogs on all aspects of food, hospitality and lifestyles: more blogs, more advertising, more revenue! What it's actually doing is dumping down an industry and making revenue on the back of encouraging criticism of Australian businesses. TripAdvisor's own score card has fallen to F - !



To paraphrase the Opinion Page in a recent Sunday Age newspaper:

"Have you noticed how social media is becoming distinctly antisocial?...Colin McLaren, who runs a restaurant and boutique accommodation near Bright believes some aspects of social media threaten small businesses. .."It's disillusioning people in the restaurant business...some are just packing up, saying they've had enough." While his property, Villa Gusto, has been well received by critics and customers – its restaurant was awarded a chef's hat in the latest GFG – he's noticed disparaging comments appearing on travel site TripAdvisor, which relies on user-generated material for its content...in the UK more than 700 hotels and restaurants are threatening legal action against the US based site, claiming malicious and anonymous postings are damaging their businesses...that said, there seems little doubt that some social media are being used to square-up and no doubt there will be wider calls in the future for stricter controls..."

We agree entirely with this Opinion.

Villa Gusto has had a licking of negative 'reviews' on TripAdvisor. We recall one scathing quip, posted because we were fully booked and couldn't offer a table! Another from a group of girls who wanted to run amok and didn't like being told they couldn't. Yet another from a lady we politely declined to have on our gourmet tours to Italy. Her comeback was to Blog that the Villa was dirty, the chef no good. One of the best/worst was from a (not so) jolly man who enjoyed barking at our staff; when his misguided manner was addressed he started a wave of malicious Blogs about our food, tables, napkins, glassware, cat, produce, hospitality, everything ...all whilst assuming a woman's I.D. Bless him! Even competitors have Blogged against us and no doubt we'll receive more anti-Blogs for placing this opinion on our Home Page. Oh yes...the truth has many faces!



We're not alone in the malicious world of Blogs; a well-respected local restaurant was 'reviewed' that one dish was akin to 'dog food'. Turned out the 'reviewer' was an angry ex-employee. And on it goes. With a system that requires no identification and no verification it's open slather to the vindictive, such are the standards of Trip Advisor. It's become a cruel weapon. And owners are stuck with it, unable to get dodgy 'reviews' removed unless they supply a credit card and suffer a small fee! Owners are also asked to supply property tax and Bill of Sale documents to prove ownership, before a dodgy 'review' can be even looked at. We bluntly refuse this regime, akin to something you'd expect from the Stasi in the 1960s! So the negative Blogs remain...for all to read, for all to judge. TripAdvisor needs to find integrity in Blogging, ahead of revenue & profits. It's not so much the GFC that is causing a reduced trade in hospitality, but more the scurrilous system of Blogging created by companies like TripAdvisor.



In an 'everybody-is-now-an-expert' world (where a genuine expert is actually a dying breed), we ask two relevant questions: how far will this Blogging phenomenon go and in the end, which B&Bs/restaurants will be left standing? Australia is a changing nation, one such change is Blogs. Once a country that supported each other, we are now growing a generation who wants to lambast. Perhaps a third question might be relevant, based on the extraordinary level of scrutiny upon operators: what is happening to our hospitality industry... Australia?



Amidst this nonsense, the owner/operators persevere, still putting in 16-hour days. Some are quitting the business, tired of the put-downs; some are waiting, watching ...and reading. Meanwhile, Villa Gusto prevails; we believe an overwhelming majority of our guests are wonderful people, interesting travellers seeking great experiences. We still enjoy opening our door to the travelling public and offering what we do best: luxury accommodation and gourmet southern Italian degustation menus, matched to wines.

Occasionally we receive the highest accolades from our lovely guests as well as the toughest judges of all: professional/media judges; other faceless people, sure...but they offer articulate, constructive and well balanced critiques. Even their industry is at risk, TripAdvisor's latest creation is a click-the-single-button review system for restaurants called; 'Love it, Hate it, Rate it'. (what an insult!)

Come and say hello to us at Villa Gusto, stay and enjoy a truly unique culinary experience. We'd love to see you...we'd love to serve you...*la dolce vita e buon appetito.* (bring back the post card!)

See the professional reviews: <http://www.villagusto.com.au/httpdocs/html/media.htm>



VILLA GUSTO
la dolce vita