

Tempe's New Thirsty Lion Pub & Grill

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

Lamb shank and sliders. Sushi rolls and fish and chips. Tempe's new Thirsty Lion Pub & Grill specializes in traditional sports bar fare with an upscale twist.



AFTER FINDING SUCCESS IN OREGON, the team behind Thirsty Lion Pub & Grill opened its third (and only non-Oregon) location of the popular bar and grill at the ever-growing Tempe Marketplace. With 16 flat-screen TV's gracing the pub and more than 50 beers on tap, Thirsty Lion is a sports fan's dream. However, with a menu that includes oven-roasted lamb shank with white cheddar mashed potatoes, rosemary-mint chimichurri and lamb demi, the eatery has far more than the typical sports bar fare (though standbys like beerbattered onion rings and nachos are available, as well, for a true bar-going experience).

Thirsty Lion's interiors also impress more than those of a stereotypical sports bar. Though Thirsty Lion meets the expectation of a masculine aesthetic (think plenty of wood detailing and a dark color palette), there are touches that kick the design up a notch: cagelike chandeliers, plush raised booths and a large garage door that opens on fair-weather days. The centerpiece of the pub is its 360-degree bar; the most impressive sight is the number of taps that take residence on the bar top. Also, for being such a large dining destination that can pack in quite a few diners, Thirsty Lion manages to stay at a reasonable volume, making it easy to converse with lunch companions even while there are games and music videos booming from the TV screens.

It's an understatement to say that Thirsty Lion's appetizer listing has something for everyone. Sushi lover? There are two different types of rolls. Looking for something a bit different? The Scotch eggs are begging to be tried. Want something on the more healthful side? Have your pick of edamame or seared ahi tuna. Seeking nothing but comfort (and calories)? Hello, two varieties of nachos and oven-baked soft pretzels with a fondue dipping sauce. With so many options, it would be easy to go for a usual suspect, like calamari or artichoke-spinach dip. However, you'd be missing out if you didn't sink your teeth into the Scotch eggs. The hard-boiled egg wrapped in pork sausage and a light breading is a traditional picnic food in the U.K. Along with a cold beer, it is also the ultimate comfort food.

For a starter that is a little less sinful, the seared, spice-rubbed ahi tuna makes for a more health-conscious appetizer. The tuna is topped with a ginger-soy glaze, sided with a zesty cilantro-lime slaw and marinated jicama and comes with two delectable sauces: sriracha and wasabi aioli. The bacon-wrapped prawns make for another tempting seafood-based starter. While the tuna has more of an Asian-meet-Latin feel, the prawns are smothered in barbecue sauce, making them more of a casual backyard cookout-inspired eat.

Diversity is a feature of the entree listings as well. Burgers, pizzas, salads, sandwiches, from-the-grill meat and seafood plates and more are available. Because Thirsty Lion is such a prime destination for those wanting to watch the big game, the pub offers plenty of casual, shareable entrees that can easily be enjoyed while keeping your eyes glued to the flat-screen. With delectable, slightly sweet crusts and plenty of toppings, it is easy to see—and taste—why the pizzas at Thirsty Lion are so popular. The roasted artichoke and spinach variety is considered a restaurant specialty and is generously capped with kalamata onions, red onions, pepperoncinis, sizable chunks of garlic, fontina, feta and provolone cheeses and, of course, plenty of artichoke and spinach.

The IPA beer-battered fish and chips is another customer favorite. The fish is lightly coated and crisped, letting the flaky white fish shine through and keeping indulgers from feeling too guilty. The fish is paired with a divine tartar sauce that is brightened up with lemon and capers. Though the hand-cut fries, which round out the fish-and-chips dish, offer good flavor, they could use some crisping.

With 52 varieties on tap, it is no surprise that beer makes its way onto the dessert menu in form of the Black Butte brownie. The decadent dish features a chocolate pecan brownie concocted of Black Butte Porter and then crowned with vanilla ice cream and hot fudge. After a few ooey gooey bites of dessert, and with Scotch eggs in your not-toodistant memory, it might not matter whether your team wins or loses during your Thirsty Lion visit.

To Learn More

Thirsty Lion Pub & Grill

2000 E. Rio Salado Pkwy., Ste. 1041, Tempe.

480.968.2920

www.thirstylionpub.com

chef: Kody Harris

Hours: Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to midnight; Friday and Saturday 11 a.m. to 1 a.m.; Sunday 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

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