

Worth the Trip: Out Aza Blue

This excellent restaurant, located in Gales Creek, offers a wonderful dining experience, almost in our own backyard

By Scott Laird

We recently found out about a well kept secret and made the trip to Gales Creek for one of the best dining experiences we've had in a long time.

Out Aza Blue is located on Highway 6 about 10 miles west of Banks, and just east of the Timber Road junction. The restaurant is nestled between the highway and overlooks the scenic Gales Creek. Attached to the building is a new addition, the Slowdrift Brewing Company. The outside of the building seems unassuming and really doesn't suggest the magic inside.

Out Aza Blue is a place you can go on a date night or to celebrate a special occasion. It's also a great place to go for pizza and beer with friends, or for a light meal, just because you like really good food. The food is excellent, the servers are knowledgeable, and the setting is unbeatable. And it's right here in our neck of the woods – the 45 minute scenic drive from Vernonia over twisty Timber Road, with almost no highway driving, just adds to the charm of this

worthwhile trip.

The first thing you notice when you walk through the door is the tastefully decorated and intimate dining area. There's a bar and a few tables out in front, but step into the back dining room and you're treated to big windows with an inviting view of meandering Gales Creek, and high ceilings that make the space feel larger than it is. In addition, a beautiful covered patio offers additional outdoor (and heated!) seating.

Chef and owner Gabriel Berber is well trained and versatile in the kitchen. Born in Palermo, Italy to a Sicilian father and French-Lebanese mother, he moved to Long, Island, New York as a child. He earned a culinary degree in Europe and returned to the states where he worked for many years across the country in big city, high-end restaurants and hotels, before settling down in the backwoods of Oregon and opening Out Aza Blue in 2008.

His international background has a big influence on his menu, so get ready for an exceptional culinary experience. Be warned – you'll want to try everything, but the serving sizes are not small.

Chef Berber mixes his international background with some American classics to create a menu that is just full of, what they call, "AZA flair," using locally sourced, seasonal, and organic ingredients, and supporting local farmers and suppliers when possible.

Just a quick aside about the name – Out Aza Blue comes from this unique fine dining experience "out in the middle of nowhere" said in Chef Berber's unique accent – "out aza blue." When asked what kind of food they



prepare, the answer is "everything from A to Z and back to A." AZA!

Right next door is the newly opened Slowdrift Brewing Company which is the featured beer on the menu. Slowdrift opened just over a year ago, and has a nice selection of their beers on tap in the tasting room. There's something for everyone here including a golden ale, hefeweizen, Irish red, pale ale, at least four IPAs, a porter, and two seasonal stouts on nitro, along with ciders made regionally by the Helvetia Cider Company. Co-owner and co-brewer Darren was friendly and offered tasters of anything we wanted to try.

The menu at Out Aza Blue changes seasonally which keeps it interesting – when we were there in March we ordered off the menu, but in April they are offering fixed price three-course meals with numerous options on Friday and Saturday, and a pasta and pizza menu on Sunday. There's a

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