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## Cost of dining out on the rise

Herald Sun, Melbourne

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## Spiralling prices on menu

**Mandy Squires**

Victorian restaurant bills have skyrocketed by 9 per cent in a year – more than the spike in NSW, Queensland and Tasmanian venues – but a hospitality chief says the state's industry is not profiteering.

Only South Australia saw a bigger increase than Victoria in average restaurant bills during the 12 months to March 2024, with an 11 per cent rise.

NSW, Queensland and Tasmania experienced only 3 per cent rises.

Meanwhile, the average bill in Northern Territory, Western Australia and ACT restaurants did not increase at all.

The shocking figures were revealed on Thursday by data company Lightspeed, which works with more than 10,000 Australian hospitality venues.

It comes as Melburnians have recently been warned

they should be prepared to pay as much as \$50 for a main meal in the city's restaurants and \$5.50 minimum for a regular flat white, with one South Melbourne cafe already charging \$6.50.

While Lightspeed's data showed South Australia had the highest average restaurant bill of all the states – with diners spending about \$63 – Victoria's average bill stood at \$52.52 in March 2024, compared to \$50 in Queensland, \$50.66 in NSW, \$44 in WA, \$43.79 in the ACT and just \$33.38 in the NT.

Victoria also had the second highest average bill increase over 12 months, in the nation.

Lightspeed said a factor behind the average bill increases could be rising food prices, with its "state of hospitality" report revealing 29 per cent of hospi-

tality operators said they had raised prices by between 27 to 39 per cent over the past year.

Melbourne CBD restaurant Gingerboy closed after 18 years this month, with its chef and owner Teage Ezard saying a mixture of low-spending diners and rising cost of food and beverages were behind its financial woes.

Ezard said Melbourne restaurants shouldn't be afraid to raise their prices to stay afloat, and warned diners to get comfortable spending more money for mains.

"We have to raise our prices, but the public don't want us to raise our prices," he said.

"Restaurants will not survive charging what they are charging.

"That perception (of not spending \$50 on mains) needs to change. We should be charg-

ing \$50 or more on mains."

Restaurant and Catering Australia chief Suresh Manickam said he was unsure why Melbourne restaurant prices had risen more than most other states in the past year, "but it may be as simple as Victoria (having) higher cost of living pressures than other states, proportionally".

Restaurants across the country had seen big increases in their operating costs over the past year, he said.

"The cost of labour has gone up since this time last year also and we have an absolute skills shortage, so that's having an impact," Mr Manickam said.

"None of our sector is profiteering off this, they are just simply passing on the costs of doing business."