

Dining & Drinking in Dunedin

It's often pointed out that the statue of the Scottish poet Robbie Burns which dominates the Octagon has his back to the kirk and his face to the pub, something of which the strict Presbyterian founding fathers no doubt would have disapproved. Today he faces not one, but almost a dozen watering holes. The Octagon at the centre of Dunedin is also the centre of cafes, bars and entertainment. Here, and in the surrounding streets you'll find everything from bistros and up market restaurants to casual cafes, intimate bars, lively nightclubs and fast food outlets, as well as cinemas and theatres.

Three or four blocks to the south of the Octagon, near the exchange and Queens Gardens, in what was once the city's commercial centre, there are other restaurants and venues worth seeking out.

And about three or four blocks north of the Octagon towards the university, there's a host of cheap Asian eateries as well as some more up-market cafes and restaurants and lively student watering holes.

Octagon and Moray Place

Walk round the lower Octagon on a sunny day and you may have difficulty weaving between the cafe tables that spread across the wide footpath. Even if it's cold, Dunedinites, used to rugging up warmly, enjoy their lattes, paninis and cold Speight's in the brilliant winter sunshine.

On the corner of Lower Stuart St which leads from the Octagon down to the much admired railway station, a former bank building houses four eating and drinking places. On the ground floor corner is **Brioso**, a small smart café with simple food (12 Octagon, phone (03) 477 3776).

Upstairs (the door's just around the corner in Stuart St) is **Bacchus Wine Bar**. Lunches here are excellent, popular with business people and it's a congenial place to visit after a show at the nearby Regent Theatre or Town Hall. It also has one of the best wine lists in town (12 Octagon, phone(03) 474 0824).

Also at 12 Octagon (next door to Brioso) is **di lusso**, a small, laid-back bar (phone (03) 477 3776). Right next door, their doormen chatting to each other late at night, is Pop (14 Octagon phone 474 0842), a basement bar and club with a smart '50s ambience serving sophisticated cocktails. Both have DJs at weekends.

Next is **The Bean Scene** (16 Octagon, phone (03) 471 7372), serving coffee and light food during the day. On the other side of the Regent Theatre is the popular **Ra Cafe and Bar** (21 Octagon, phone 477 6080). During the day it's a cafe serving breakfast, lunch and snacks, and at night it livens into a busy bar, often with dancing.

The venerable **Tip Top Restaurant** occupies the corner of the Octagon and Princes St (phone (03) 477 7594). For years it remained a old-fashioned milk bar and tearooms but recently introduced hamburgers and other fast food.

Across the road and heading south along Princes St, you come to the entrance to the **Savoy** (50 Princes St). In the early and mid 20th century it was Dunedin's most elegant tea rooms and restaurant. Now operating as a function centre, it still retains its Tudor panelling, dance floor and stained glass although the street entrance and stairs are bland now. Dunedin Heritage Tourism organises old-fashioned afternoon teas here -phone the Savoy ((03) 477 4649) or Visitor Information Centre ((03) 4773300) to find out when the next one is. Be sure to put on your hat and gloves for this elegant affair, complete with fine china, cucumber sandwiches, dainty cakes served on cake stands with doilies, and live piano music.

Right beside the Savoy entrance is **Jizo**, Dunedin's first Japanese cafe and sushi bar which remains a favourite for its generous bowls of noodles orrice topped with all manner of tasty morsels, and its free roasted rice coffee (56 Princes St, phone (03) 479 2692).

Round the corner in Moray Place, a ring road one block back from the Octagon, is **Etrusco** at the Savoy. Run by Fred and Megan Gianone, it's one of the city's best pasta and pizza places, rather like a traditional family Italian restaurant in an old palazzo with marble pillars, gilded plasterwork and stained glass. Fred's a wine buff and although the restaurant is fully licensed with some interesting wines on the list, he allows guests to bring their own wines as well. (8 Moray Pl, (03) 477 3737).

Next door to Etrusco is the barn-like **Bennu Cafe and Bar**, with a stunning stained glass canopy over the bar and some smart, decorative metalwork (12 Moray Pl, phone (03) 477 5055). It sells gourmet pizzas and other food and is popular for lunch as well as for after-work gatherings.

A few steps further along is **Thai-Hanoi**, one of a chain of Thai restaurants scattered through southern towns, run by Murray McCarthy. The food in these is relatively authentic but, like the decor and service, attuned to New Zealanders' tastes. This one, as its name suggests, also incorporates Vietnamese cuisine (24 Moray Pl, phone (03) 471 9500).

One of the city's best-kept secrets is **Pequeño**. Its official address is Lower Ground Floor, Savoy Building, 50 Princes St, (phone (03) 477 7830) but you get to it down an unmarked alley in Moray Pl between the hairdresser next to Bennu, and Thai-Hanoi. Follow your nose past Bennu's back door to find one of the city's most congenial bars, a tiny place with an open fire, live jazz on Thursdays and a DJ on Saturdays.

Back on Moray Pl and a few steps past Thai-Hanoi is the tiny **Mazagan** Espresso Bar and coffee roaster, another of the city's gems and not to be missed by serious caffeine fiends (36 Moray Pl, phone (03) 477 9959). There's barely space for the coffee roaster and a couple of tables and chairs, but here, besides espressos, you can buy a variety of beans from different regions and several different blends. Regulars often bring food from Taste Nature, the organic shop across the road, and eat it at the outside tables while drinking their coffee.

Almost at the top of Moray Pl, next door to the Fortune Theatre, is **Tangente**, a cafe and bakery with huge windows for people-watching, funky teapots and mugs, simple filling food, and great organic bread which you can take away. (111 Moray Pl, phone (03) 477 0232).

Opposite the theatre, in historic terraced houses is **French Cafe** with Esbargot bar above (118 Moray Pl phone (03) 477 1100) There's a nod to French provincial cooking in some of its menu, the wine list is interesting and it also allows BYO. Under the same ownership is Italian cafe next door, on the corner of Moray Pl and Stuart St (221 Stuart St, (03) 477 1424). It's more casual and serves simple, more or less Italian style food.

Heading down Stuart St, back towards the Octagon is **A Cow Called Berta**, (199 Stuart St, phone (03) 477 2993) an up-market restaurant occupying the ground floors of a couple of the terraced houses. Swiss chef Fred Maibach serves rich food in the hushed surroundings, charmingly decorated in a style to suit the Victorian architecture.

Back in the Octagon, between the Dunedin Public Art Gallery and Hoyts multiplex cinema, is one of the city's best cafes, **Nova** (29 Octagon, phone (03) 479 0808). Open from early until late, it serves everything from decent espresso or a glass of wine to full meals. Food is good, often imaginative - don't miss the jambalaya - and there's a good wine list with many available by the glass. They are even helpful with children. The only downside is that it is often busy, especially at mealtimes and before shows and concerts in nearby venues, so if you want a table, especially for a group, it's wise to phone ahead.

On the other side of the Upper Octagon, in the Municipal Chambers and next to the Visitor Information Centre, is the **Hungry Frenchman**, a friendly bistro serving good food with French accent (38 Octagon, phone (03) 477 5748).

Across George Street in the lower Octagon, is the **Terrace Sports Bar and Grill** (6 Octagon, (03) 479 0010) that serves stone grilled food. Pieces of meat or fish are presented on a special ultra-heated stone and you cook them to your liking. It's a healthy way to eat.

The Flying Scotsman pub (11 Octagon (03) 471 9222) is on the corner of Lower Stuart St, and beyond, on the way down to the railway station there's another handful of bars and cafes worth visiting down Lower

Stuart St. **The Percolater** (142 Stuart St, (03) 477 5462) is the oldest of the bunch, the first in recent years to make a point of good espresso, but is a bit tired now.

It's worth popping round the corner (between Bronx Bagels and Minami Japanese restaurant and sushi bar) and walking a few paces down narrow Bath St to **The Strictly Coffee Company** (23 Bath St, (03) 479 0017). A coffee roaster and a retro cafe serving, among more contemporary food, the famous but almost forgotten local speciality, cheese rolls. This is a mix of cheese and other flavourings spread on thin white bread, rolled up, toasted and slathered with butter - deliciously drippy and indulgent.

Bar Central (135 Stuart St, (03) 479 2468) has a good range of beers and wine by the glass and bottle, but since they put in a big screen it's no longer such a good place for a drink and a chat.

Just off Stuart St, in the southern quadrant of Moray Pl **Cafe Rue** (368 Moray Pl, phone (03) 477 3406) is a stylish place for lunch and weekend brunch.

Vegetarians will relish Potpourri Natural Foods (97 Stuart St, (03) 477 9983) which has served simple vegetarian and vegan food for a couple of decades.

South of the Octagon

A little further from the hub, it's worth seeking out **Arc**, a couple of blocks to the south of the Octagon, in High St opposite the Southern Cross Hotel and casino (135 High St, phone (03) 474 1135). An alternative sort of place, during the day it's a vegetarian cafe with good food and coffee, comfy sofas and shelves of books; at night it turns into a major venue for all forms of alternative music and other types of performance - live poetry is every second Monday. Upstairs is the avant garde Blue Oyster Gallery.

Down the bottom of Dowling St overlooking Queens Gardens is **The Palms**, an old stalwart of the Dunedin restaurant scene which has recently gone a little more up market. It's great for relaxed dining, has a good wine list and allows BYO. (18 Queens Gardens, phone (03) 477 6534).

Speight's Ale House, next to the brewery in Rattray Street is a popular pub featuring the south's most popular brew, identified with that rough diamond, the "southern man". There's a nod to hearty farm-style food like lamb shanks, in its menu. You can visit the brewery where they make the draught version but like most of the big breweries' products, Speight's is a token local as the canned and bottled versions are made elsewhere.

The best local brew is Emersons, made by Richard Emerson a passionate young brewer who has gained a national reputation for his flavourful beers made in a micro brewery in Grange Street near the university. You'll find his draught Bookbinder and his bottled beers and ales in many of the region's best bars and restaurants.

Three other restaurants are within walking distance of the centre, albeit a longish stroll or a short taxi ride, are well worth seeking out if you appreciate good food.

Many foodies have heard of **Bell Pepper Blues**, where Michael Coughlin, the region's most celebrated chef, presents immaculate food in subdued surroundings. It's at 474 Princes Street (phone (03) 474 0973), about five blocks south of the Octagon and, despite a good wine list, allows wine aficionados to bring their own special bottles. Attached to Bell Pepper Blues is the **Chile Club** that has live jazz some nights.

In the industrial area near the waterfront and almost under the railway overpass, is **Plato**, in a 1960s building formerly the Seafarers' Centre. It's decorated in a 1960s style and proudly displays chef Nigel Broad's huge collection of mid 20th century coffee pots and cups. Nigel is particularly good on seafood and offal, but there are plenty of other choices on the menu which changes frequently. There's a good wine list and they also allow BYO. (2 Birch St, phone (03) 477 4235)

On the waterfront at 29 Kitchener Street (phone (03) 477 9784) is **High Tide**, with lovely views across the garden to the harbour; Chef Mark Lane is innovative - try the local indigenous specialty, mutton bird, if its on the menu.