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Is finding a restaurant roommate the way to maximise rent?

Splitting costs with a restaurant roommate could be the key to thriving. We chat to the operators co-sharing locations.

 Restaurants

By Maida Pineda April 29 2026 6 min read



Melbourne prides itself in having an outstanding café culture. But with most cafes trading only until 2 or 3pm, the space is wasted the rest of the day and night.

Three years ago, in my search for the best Bingsu in the city, I found [Scoopy](#) in Guildford Lane with a devoted clientele flocking here for Korean shaved ice from 4pm onwards. A few days later, I return to the same spot to find [Brick Lane Café](#), a busy brunch and coffee destination. As it turned out, Scoopy was leasing from Brick Lane Café, trading on hours the café was not operating. Guilford laneway was once home to indie art galleries, now popular for its brick and stone buildings, lush hanging plants and cosy cafes.

St Kilda also has their own version of  restaurant roommates. St Kilda locals know the drill. They head to [Trouper Café](#) to get their caffeine fix from 6am to 11:30am. They feed their Banh Mi and Pho cravings from 11:30 onward in the same spot for [Saigon Street Eats](#).

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Having two operators share this one location is the brilliant idea of Trouper Café's owner Jackie Bega. She has been running restaurants since 1997. With 13 cafes under her belt, this force behind Galleon Café, Las Chicas and Radio Mexico had foresight to approach Saigon Street Eats a year and a half ago to propose the idea of sharing her existing café space.

Tired of running a seven-day operation, Bega opened Trouper café hoping to gain back her weekends. She says: "I was thinking I would just do Monday to Friday. But then it turned out with how the economy is at the moment, that I really needed to work on weekends as well." Knowing she enjoyed making coffee and with a loyal clientele, she opted to just do coffee.

Bega explains: "Unless you run a really busy kitchen, it's really hard to great to make good margins out of  food at the moment, because everything's so expensive and wages are so expensive. But I've been making coffee for 35 years, so I can do that quickly and consistently and make good money that way."

Bega's timing was perfect with Saigon Street Eats' lease about to end. The popular 10-year-old Vietnamese restaurant had also outgrown their space. She also broached the idea of serving alcohol, giving them another revenue stream. In November 2024, their roommate relationship began.

They split the bills

More than six months on, the co-sharing arrangement has been pretty seamless. They split the costs of things like electricity, outdoor seating, things like window cleaning. She explains, "It's all the stuff that once you have a shop you have to incur those outlays anyway. But I guess it's kind of like having an airplane. It's only making money if it's in the air, you know. So, in this regard, the shop continues to make money because it's open longer hours. They get to trade the hours that suit them, and I get to trade the hours that suit me. When I close at 11:30am, at least the shop's still trading."

Bega says, "I think it's a smart idea to share a space, but I think you definitely have to be willing to make a lot of allowances and both come at it to achieve a win, win situation." One thing they have learned to adapt to is the changing of the guards. She shares: "At around 11am, it feels like the pits in Formula 1. We're trying to get out, and they're setting up." It helps that to have clear communication with the owners of Saigon Eats. They have a WhatsApp group, where all three women are upfront with concerns that need to be tackled.

From temporary co-sharing to lasting relationships

Since September 2023, Scoopy has secured its own stand-alone space in La Trobe Street in Melbourne's CBD, not far from Brick Lane Café. Angelo Labrador, one of the co-owners of Scoopy points out that sharing with Brick Lane came up in late 2019 out of necessity. Their initial pop-up location in A Beckett Street closed, giving them only two weeks' notice. One of the co-owners of Scoopy went to uni with the son of the owners of Brick Lane. What began as a temporary co-sharing set up, got them through multiple lockdowns, lasting nearly four years until they found their own space.

Labrador reflects how sharing space with Brick Lane proved to be a good launch pad for their emerging business, "It was a good way for us to get into Guildford laneway, and being in that laneway helped our brand grow more. Because it was iconic, people would go to that laneway and find us."

Splitting the cost of rent, electricity, grease traps, cleaning supplies, and other overhead costs proved beneficial, but it was not without logistical challenges like lack of storage as well as dealing with hectic changeover. He recalls, "Sometimes they would run their deep clean, and we would have to open around them."

In a full circle moment, Scoopy is now finalising an agreement with a new  restaurant roommate to take on the daytime hours of their store. Whether it's having reduced office workers in the CBD or cold winter weather, to Labrador it's clear, "In today's economy, there's just less people going out."  Restaurants

Learning from co-sharing in the past, he says, "You really need to have that open line of communication, making sure that you're voicing your concerns, they're passing on to their team, and they're voicing their concerns and you're passing them on to your team. You're almost like working as one company, but with two different working teams."

While both Trouper Café and Scoopy have favourable experiences co-sharing, it may not be a ideal set-up for other restaurants. Just like finding the perfect roommate to share a home with, it does not end there. Every day requires communicating openly and working together to make it a space suitable to meet both tenants' needs.

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