



Doing Dunedin

With an artistic vibe so strong even the sunsets look like modern paintings, Dunedin is just across the bay but a world away.

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Most days of the year, Dunedin appears to be a forgotten outpost of Old Florida, tucked along the central gulf coast. About an hour west of Tampa with a population one-tenth the size, Dunedin can appear to the passersby heading to neighboring Clearwater Beach to be a quiet, tiny coastal town billing itself as a

city on the welcome signs marking the borders of the so-small-if-you-blink-you'll-miss-it downtown.

Don't blink, and the multihued buildings lining the streets may catch your eye. Here old-world architecture dosed with acid orange, bright green, and grape hues showcases an artistic charm. Strategically placed

around town, large-scale sculptures double as bicycle racks, and the Navel-orange-themed graffiti kicks up an artful vibe, a siren call of sorts to laid-back creative types, drawing them in to experience Dunedin's ever-growing charms.

And this month, they descend upon Dunedin in droves. On February 22,

34,000 revelers are expected to come to the city for the 29th annual Dunedin Mardi Gras Parade and Festival—the largest celebration of its kind in the southeastern US. For perspective, the capacity of Universal Studios maxes out at 27,000; the population of Dunedin tallies just above 36,000. So, yeah: This. Is. Big. And it's



getting bigger every year, as people tell their people who tell their people about that aforementioned vibe. The buzz is building, and the secret is almost all the way out. Dunedin is one badass community, and it's on the rise. Won't be long before some high-profile travel writer describes it as an idyllic blend of funky Key West, open and artistic Provincetown, and progressively planned Austin. Go now, go often, and you'll find yourself saying one day soon that you've known about Dunedin since way back when.

If you go for Mardi Gras, just be sure to get there early. The festivities

run from noon through 11 p.m., with late-night raucousness spilling over into the bars and pubs. The parade kicks off at 7 p.m., winding along the packed streets of an already compact downtown. If you can swing the \$135 VIP ticket—unlimited beer and wine, cocktail samplers, New Orleans-inspired menu, executive rest room access—you'll be happy you did.

Whether or not the massive party is your kind of scene, the cacophony of the crowd is likely to drown out the vibe that's distinctly Dunedin, so plan to either go back or stay awhile and explore. There's a whole lot to love, no matter which way your interests lean, and we've rounded up some highlights.

Sigh-inducing waterfront views. Dunedin is one of the few cities with an open waterfront—for nearly four miles, palm trees are the only things

blocking views of the Intracoastal and the Gulf of Mexico beyond. There's also a one-mile stretch of Edgewater Drive south of downtown that provides views of St. Joseph Sound, Clearwater Beach, and Caladesi Island.

A Main Street mentality. The town revolves lazily around its downtown nucleus, where the aptly named Main Street is the most appealing stretch, reasonably free of tourist kitsch. Instead of mass chain retailers, downtown Dunedin is franchise-free and thriving. There are more than 100 privately owned businesses in the hip little downtown area—a charming, walkable community hugging the water's edge where it's easy to idle away an afternoon, wandering from home decor store to vintage shop to art gallery to ice cream parlor to a palm-fringed café for an iced coffee or a sauvignon blanc, preferably from New Zealand so you can share this fact: There's a Dunedin, New Zealand, named after the Gaelic word for the Scottish capital of Edinburgh. Dunedin, Florida, was a Scottish outpost in 1899, and the country's influence runs deep.

Florida's first official Trail Town designation. Bisecting downtown Main Street, the Pinellas

Trail is a 15-foot-wide, 40-mile haven for walkers, skaters, and bikers that runs on an old railway route. Credited with revitalizing the downtown core, the trail has been a hit with Floridians. You'll see bikers wandering around hitting the shops and eateries, having locked up their rides at any of the aptly named Artistic Bicycle Racks, part of the city's larger Public Art Masterplan. A signpost stands where the Pinellas Trail crosses Main Street, pointing the way to local hot spots, shops, and galleries.

Artist colony feel. There's a laid-back bohemian air mixed with a touch of Florida Keys flair that attracts artists, gallery owners, musicians, and artsy types. The result is a multi-layered arts scene that the city government is focused on supporting and growing, with multiple initiatives enhancing the community's sense of place and connection. Dunedin Fine Arts Center (DFAC) is a great spot to dig into the local scene. An art critic at the *Tampa Bay Times* once described it as “the artistic equivalent of a village square.” That's a spot-on description. Much like the town that surrounds it, it's not a stuffy, pre-



tentious place but rather a gathering spot for the community. Come as you are; flip-flops and shorts are welcome. DFAC's stated vision is to be the premier art center in Florida, providing educational, cultural, and creative experiences.

Craft beer pioneers. Established in 1995, Dunedin Brewery introduced Florida to craft brewing, kicking off a micro-brew mania. The original brewery is credited with cultivating a hyper-local passion for craft beers, inspiring eight other breweries to open up within one mile of each other. Not a square mile, mind you. You can walk to all eight spots in a row in less than a mile, according to the Visit Dunedin's brewery walking map.

Dedicated golf cart parking. Golf carts are a standard mode of transportation for locals, faster than walking and potentially safer than biking. While the Pinellas Trail is off-limits to the carts, they are allowed on any street with a speed limit under 30 miles per hour, and the city's worked hard to provide plenty of streets and crossings for golf-carting residents—of which there are many heading downtown on any given weekend. On



Fridays and Saturdays from November through May, the Dunedin Downtown Market in Pioneer Park becomes the hot spot for locals looking for fresh produce and gourmet items.

The beaches. One of Florida's top-rated sandy stretches, Dunedin's Honeymoon Island State Park has great swimming, fishing, shelling—and a Fido-friendly beach.

Spring Training stomping grounds. Dunedin is one of the smallest spring training destinations for the MLB, but that didn't stop the Toronto Blue Jays from committing to another 25-year lease. The Toronto Blue Jays host the Atlanta Braves on February 24 for the preseason's first home-away-from-home game—and the first

game in the newly renovated stadium.

Sunset celebrations. As the sun sinks toward the water on the horizon, a nightly spectacle unfolds, painting the sky mystically vibrant shades of pinks, oranges, purples, and blues. All it takes to cement adoration for Dunedin is a seat along the seawall at dusk. Take it in, lean in. Or lean back. You'll catch the vibe. **S**

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