

New Zealand

# 'If Edinburgh had a love child with Brighton'

... Dunedin would be the result. Norman Miller discovers a mix of Scottish heritage, art deco and hedonism in New Zealand's coolest city

My Dunedin Saturday began amid the foodie bustle of the weekly Otago Farmers' Market in a historic train station yard, and ended among entranced nature lovers watching tiny blue penguins scamper across a moonlit beach whose Maori name means "echoing cry of the sea".

In between, I discovered A-list art in libraries, lunched in mural-clad warehouses, and reflected in the calm of a Chinese Scholar's Garden. No wonder this multifaceted city has a central hub called the Octagon.

One of New Zealand's oldest cities – and for a century its richest and most prestigious – it was envisioned by its early-19th-century Scottish settlers as an antipodean homage to their homeland capital (Dunedin derives from the Gaelic name for Edinburgh), right down to neighbourhood names: Corstorphine, Morningside, Portobello.

But while its august Caledonian template saw Dunedin's streets arrayed with dazzling Victorian, Edwardian and art-deco architecture, it has woven a web of hedonism and laid-back distinctiveness into its Instagram-friendly vistas – as if Edinburgh had created a love child with Brighton.

Framed by sturdy South Island hills and a fine harbour, Dunedin is the perfect off-radar city-break addition to any itinerary. It is beautifully compact, thrumming with creative buzz, and energised by the presence of New Zealand's oldest university.

The city is also a gateway to New Zealand's most mysteriously overlooked region – Central Otago. Think of a wonderland of world-class wineries, secluded Pacific beaches and transformed 19th-century gold-mining towns where boutique hotels and diners have replaced rowdy taverns.

It is no surprise, then, that lovely Dunedin has been selected as one of just nine cities across New Zealand and Australia that are set to host fixtures of the 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup when it kicks off on July 20. So, you had get booking before the rest of the world discovers it, too.



Essentials

Singapore Airlines (singaporeair.com) flies from the UK to Auckland and Christchurch, from £1,200 return. Onward flights on Jetstar (jetstar.com) or Air New Zealand (airnewzealand.co.uk) cost from £100

Norman Miller was a guest of the Princes Apartment (£220 a night; airbnb.com), set in a 158-year-old building, which film-maker Jane Campion declared her favourite accommodation in the city. The five-star Fable Dunedin (00 64 3 477 1145; fablehotelsandresorts.com) has doubles from £125

Information: dunedinnz.com

## SIX WAYS TO EXPLORE DUNEDIN

### CULTURE

Start by tapping Dunedin's Unesco City of Literature roots via quote-filled pavement plaques arcing around the statue of Robert Burns in the Octagon – then download the dtour app (available through Apple/Google), which links more than 100 writers to local spots.

The Dunedin Public Art Gallery (dunedin.art.museum) was New Zealand's first and it continues to showcase pioneering NZ artists, such as the acclaimed Maori painter Ralph Hotere. Also check the exhibition list at the University of Otago's Hocken Collections and Gallery (otago.ac.nz/hocken), and marvel at the unique bone-based art of Bruce Mahalski at his Victorian villa home, aka Dunedin Museum of Natural Mystery (royaldunedinmuseum.com). You can add the outstanding commercial galleries clustered on Dowling Street, too.

The Otago Museum (otagomuseum.nz) contains more than 1½ million objects, plus the Tuhura Science Centre, which includes a three-storey slide and a tropical forest alive with butterflies. Meanwhile, the Toitu Otago Settlers Museum (toituosm.com) chronicles the area's colourful social history in a beautiful art-deco building.



### FOOD AND DRINK

You certainly won't go hungry in Dunedin. The city punches way above its weight when it comes to restaurants. Moieity (moieity.restaurant), for example, presents tasting-menu titillation in the historic Warehouse Precinct area, while Plato (plato.cafe.co.nz) is a colourful seafood treasure that has pulled locals harbourwards for decades. Down by the beach at St Clair, Titi (titi.co.nz) has seasonal menus yards from the surf.

Just off the Octagon, the Swan (the swan.nz) feels more cool lunch hideaway than brewery-taproom eatery, while the cavernous Vogel St Kitchen (vogelst.kitchen.nz) is a bustling spot for snacks and craft beers. Emerson's (emersons.co.nz) and Speight's (speights.co.nz) both offer well-regarded brewery tours and food matched with beers.

- ▲ Green and pleasant: the city of Dunedin
- ▶ Sign of the times: a mural at St Clair beach
- ◀ Pioneer: Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Mazagran (facebook.com/mazagrancafe) and Heritage Coffee (heritagecoffee.co.nz) provide little-and-large bookends to any café crawl, while Stuart Street offers two contrastingly enticing drinking dens – Albar, a cosy, wood-paneled homage to the Scottish pub (135 Stuart Street) and lively mixology spot Woof! (at No368).

### NATURE

Its location near the tip of the South Island (next stop, Antarctica) fuels Dunedin's claim to be the wildlife capital of New Zealand, offering the chance to get close to animals you would normally see only on *Frozen Planet*.

Covering options afloat and ashore, Monarch Wildlife Cruises & Tours (wildlife.co.nz) and Blue Penguins Pukekura (bluepenguins.co.nz) offer excursions to spot the only mainland colony of royal albatrosses in the southern hemisphere gliding around Taiaroa Head, or flotillas of little blue penguins and their yellow-eyed cousins.

### ACTIVITIES

Perhaps less surprising, given New Zealand's reputation for dramatic landscapes, the Otago peninsula is listed among the world's top 10 cycling spots.



For mountain bikers, Signal Hill (trailforks.com/region/signal-hill) is a downhill and enduro hub featuring 38 trails, while the Otago Harbour Trail combines flat riding with great scenery.

Learn to skim the waves in style at the Esplanade Surf School (espsurfschool.co.nz), with individual and group lessons (including for children). Dozens of hiking trails also snake from and around Dunedin – 45 of which are outlined by All Trails at alltrails.com/en-gb/new-zealand/otago/dunedin.

### HISTORY

Perhaps the best way to understand Dunedin is by delving into its eccentric and unusual past. Olveston Historic Home and Theomin Gallery (olveston.co.nz) is an opulent Edwardian mansion that offers a glimpse into the gilded

lifestyle of the period – with a poignant family saga thrown in – on daily tours. The Dunedin Gasworks Museum (gasworksmuseum.org.nz) has some great examples of working 19th-century steam-driven machinery.

Just outside Dunedin, New Zealand's only castle beckons. Set in magnificent formal gardens, the 19th-century Larnach Castle (larnachcastle.co.nz) has a tragic history, grandstand views across the Otago peninsula, and luxury antipodean afternoon teas served in its splendid ballroom.

### DAY TRIPS

Venturing a little further afield, follow in the footsteps of Captain Scott to Port Chalmers – a dozen miles along the harbour shore from Dunedin, 30 minutes by No 14 bus from the city centre – and discover its Antarctic links at the delightfully crammed Maritime Museum (portmuseum.org.nz).

Rail enthusiasts should make a bee-line for the vintage trains that head out on daily heritage trips from Dunedin's magnificent 19th-century station into the majestic Otago landscape (dunedinrailways.co.nz). Stylish time-travellers might like to consider the 70-mile trip to Oamaru, a splendid Victorian coastal town lauded as the steampunk capital of the world, to visit its Steampunk HQ gallery (steampunkoamaru.co.nz).

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## Miami

Save 10% at the 4\* Mondrian South Beach

Located on newly-fashionable West Avenue, South Beach. This modern tropical oasis has a fabulous bayfront spot with great views and provides sophisticated coastal living. The Baia Beach Club is a hub of activity which features multiple areas for indoor and outdoor dining/entertaining, a bayside pool with cabanas, marina, wellness spa, and a state-of-the-art fitness centre with stunning views.

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Save 20% at the 4\* Pan Pacific Toronto

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## Mallorca

Save 20% at the 5\* Jumeirah Port Soller

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