

## GO NZ: Dunedin »



# Shifting focus

Changing times presented Glenn Dwight with the opportunity to tick off some must-do visits in Dunedin

**T**he good thing about Dunedin's Forsyth Barr Stadium is that it's the only one in New Zealand with a roof, meaning weather can never stop play. It seemed like a foolproof plan to time a post-lockdown visit to the great Southern city around the much-anticipated Highlanders v Hurricanes Super Rugby game — the last match of the season.

But unfortunately, 2020 and a global pandemic had other plans — as the country moved back into alert level 2, the game had to go ahead behind closed doors, no fans allowed. I was disappointed, yes, but with accommodation booked and my car packed, I decided to take the opportunity to visit anyway, travelling from my home in Christchurch for a weekend away. I decided to shift my focus from rugby to doing all those Dunedin things I have often said "I must do one day". Here are my highlights and recommendations.

### Start at the Octy . . .

Every city has a centre and the beating heart of Dunedin is the Octagon, so what better place

to start? And where better to get a sense of the city than in one of the Octagon's most popular pubs? I headed to the Stuart St Mac's Bar to sample local brew Emerson's.

This was my kind of establishment — a bar with jokers to the left of you, foreign exchange bankers to the right, and me seated comfortably in the middle talking about the Highlanders 2015 Super Rugby win. Honestly, what could go wrong?

Talking rugby with the locals soon turned to local recommendations, leading me to my next stop.

### Feed your senses at Jizo

One of the great things about travel is discovering great new places, and Jizo, a Japanese restaurant just off the Octagon, was just that. It's the city's original Japanese restaurant, first opened in 1997.

Here, you'll find traditional Japanese cuisine made with fresh local ingredients and for me, the deliciously fresh salmon and tuna sushimi platter and kushiage tofu were definite highlights.

Diners can also watch the food being prepared in front of them, which really adds another level to the experience. It was like watching a painter create a masterpiece.

### Step back in time at Larnach Castle

Dunedin is described as the Edinburgh of the South and what could be more Scottish than a trip to a castle?

Larnach is New Zealand's only castle, privately owned and open to the public year round.

The stunning family home was built between 1871 and 1874, commissioned by Australian William Larnach, who moved to New Zealand in 1867 to take up a position at the Bank of Otago.

It took more than 200 men three years to build the shell of the castle, then another 12 years to embellish the interior, using materials from all over the world, such as Italian marble, Welsh slate, Venetian glass and native wood such as kauri and rimu.

Parts of the castle are opulent and boastful, demonstrating Larnach's success and wealth, but there is also a colder, darker feel at times, which could be attributed to the fate that befell him later in life — bankruptcy, loss of parliamentary seat and eventual suicide in 1898.

The castle was purchased in 1967 by the Barker family, who have since painstakingly restored it to a point where walking around, you are swept back to an earlier era — it's easy to find yourself transported, picturing the 280sq m ballroom bustling with Otago society, music and dance (maybe a dram or two).

The spectacular home is matched with a 14ha garden that takes in sweeping views of the Dunedin harbour and wider peninsula.



The Royal Albatross Centre at Talaroa Head (top); Larnach Castle is New Zealand's only castle (above). Photos / Dunedin NZ; Supplied



Jono Walker from Arc Brewing Co Dunedin (top); The Toitū Otago Settlers Museum documents the growth of the city from the days of the European settlers; Dunedin's Ōrokonui Eco Sanctuary (above).

It's a very special place.

**Spread your wings at the Royal Albatross Centre**

Dunedin's delights stretch further than just the city limits — head out to Taiaroa Head to visit New Zealand's only mainland albatross breeding colony.

Here you'll get the chance to see these impressive birds in their natural habitat. Their 3m wingspan means they can glide effortlessly on thermal currents from their nesting ground across the ocean to South America. It's the chicks that are truly mesmerising though, as many New Zealanders will agree — during New Zealand's first lockdown, thousands of Kiwis tuned into the webcam at Taiaroa Head to watch the live feed. Seeing them for myself, I can now understand the attraction. I stood spellbound just watching these chicks waddle, flap their wings and look longingly for their parents in the sky.

For a different perspective of these majestic birds, head out into the ocean with Monarch Wildlife Cruises and Tours. We were treated to flyovers from giant petrels and Buller's albatross, and got to see nesting grounds of the Otago shag. These endangered birds have built nests on the peninsula headland, often stealing material from the albatross nests above. Tour guests will often see sealions, dolphins and penguins as well.

Bird-lovers should also make time to visit Ōrokonui Eco Sanctuary, 307ha of predator-

free native forest. Here, it is all about the sound of New Zealand. Walking around with the calls of New Zealand's native birds overhead really is magical. On my visit I saw takahē, kākā, tūi, and kererū, but there are also kiwi, kākārīki, South Island robin, South Island saddleback, native bats, tuatara and jewelled gecko to be found.

**Refresh yourself at a brewery**

Richard Emerson is another local legend — he first started brewing beer in his mum's kitchen before "scaling up" to a flat in 1992. In my student days we also attempted this, but without any of Emerson's success.

Things have come a long way since then; he is now a favourite son of Dunedin and his beer is exported worldwide. These days Emerson's Brewery churns out up to 20,000 litres of beer a day and (subject to alert level restrictions) brewery tours showing the process are available — something that might have been helpful in my student days.

If you're still thirsty, Arc Brewing Co is a little gem located just outside Dunedin in an old hotel on the shore of Blueskin Bay. This boutique brewery is the perfect way to chill on a Sunday — or any day for that matter. Enjoy one of their small batch hand-crafted beers, while sitting at one of the mosaic tile tables created by owner/brewer Jono Walker. The careful craftsmanship in each table gives a sense of the skill, passion and patience he brings to his beer.



**Checklist**

**DUNEDIN**

**DETAILS**

To find out more highlights and recommendations, go to [dunedinnz.com](http://dunedinnz.com)

**Relive history at the Toitū Otago Settlers Museum**

Housed in the stunning Art Deco New Zealand Rail building, this museum documents the growth of the city from the days of the European settlers, as well as more recent history of the Dunedin sound and Dunedin look. There is even a room where you can search the records of early European settlers to find any roots you might have in the area.

The building is just one of the varied architectural highlights of the city — others include Olveston, a 35-room historic private home now preserved as it would have looked in the early 1900s and open to visitors as a museum; the Dunedin Gas Works Museum; Speights Brewery; the well-photographed Railway Station, and many other early heritage and Edwardian buildings.

It is also exciting to see how the city is re-inventing itself — many heritage buildings are being restored and repurposed into cafes, hotels, apartments and boutique stores.

While taking a walk around the city's streets, make sure you look out for the extensive collection of street art murals which bring colour and life to the inner-city alleyways and street corners.

**Reset your perspective**

Rather than quench my thirst for Dunedin, my trip has given me reason to come back and discover more. Because, like the gold rush that brought so many people to the city in the 1800s, you can still find gold nuggets all around Dunedin — natural beauty, architecture, food, drink and people.

So if you haven't yet explored Dunedin, you must, and if you think you've seen or done Dunedin, I suggest you look again, because around every corner there really is a new adventure.

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