



Keys to the cities

Concierges across the country reveal their best insider tips

CHRISTINE McCABE



Andrew Natoli



Colin Toomey

A HOTEL concierge is marked by their lapel badge of a pair of crossed golden keys. If you are new to a city, seek out this badge and make its bearer your new best friend. They know the finest places to eat and drink, and generally have some savvy advice on sightseeing outside the town square.

Many smaller hotels don't run to a concierge desk but the duty manager can usually point you in the right direction. So, what's hot to trot across the country? *Travel & Indulgence* asked some of Australia's leading concierges and front-desk stalwarts.

The **Sofitel Melbourne's** concierge **Andrew Natoli** recommends Maze and Maze Grill, the new Gordon Ramsay nosheries in the Crown Metropol. His favourite small-scale eateries include Coda on Flinders Lane (a basement restaurant with a standout chef, Adam D'Sylva, and "a very funky, industrial dining space") and Gills Diner (Little Collins Street), "a little bit like a school canteen, with old wooden tables and great rustic fare in the slow food vein".

Natoli says Melburnians in the know lunch at Journal Canteen, a

quirky, upstairs eatery on Flinders Lane (when not serving food, it's a classroom). Barflies should check out the very cool Cabinet ("up Rainbow Alley, past some bins, then up a flight of stairs, with a balcony overlooking Swanston"), Hells Kitchen (Centre Place) or the swanky Left Bank (on Southbank) and Spice Market on Beane Lane.

Sightseeing? Take a themed walking tour (try Hidden Secrets) and on a Sunday afternoon join locals in the busy Belgian Beer Garden (557 St Kilda Rd).

At the **Shangri-La Hotel Sydney**, chief concierge **Colin Toomey** reckons guests are spoiled for choice, with a slew of standout restaurants within easy striking distance of the hotel's harbourside position: Uccello at Ivy; the new Sake (12 Argyle St) and the more relaxed Pony in the Rocks, "serving tapas-sized modern Australian dishes".

Toomey says the new Rockpool Bar & Grill is very popular while the Steel Bar and Grill (on Carrington Street near the Old Menzies Hotel) does a mean steak.

For food with a view, look no further than Altitude on the

Shangri-La's 36th floor, he says. "And if guests are in need of a strong coffee, I send them round the corner to Brew on Harrington Street, which boasts an excellent barista." His recommended nightclubs include Tank (Bridge Lane) and Arq (Flinders Street, Darlinghurst). And if you're lucky, Colin will get you access to the exclusive De Nom at Ruby Rabbit on Oxford Street. Sightseeing? See the harbour from a private yacht or motor cruiser with your own skipper (courtesy East Sail) or join a 7am behind-the-scenes tour of the Opera House.

James Cunningham, chief concierge at Brisbane's stylish **Emporium Hotel**, recommends Belle Epoque ("a slice of Paris in Brisbane"), Ortega ("Simon Hill's latest restaurant, featuring a tapas bar on the ground level and a formal dining room downstairs") and The Euro, "a more casual but just as stylish alternative to its sister venue, the recently spruced-up Urbane".

Aria, the Matt Moran Sydney offshoot, is perfect "for serious foodies", he says. For coffee look no further than Campos or Little Larder, a pint-sized cafe in New



Farm with “eggs benedict to die for”. After dark, Cunningham suggests you stay in-house to enjoy the Emporium’s acclaimed Cocktail Bar or try Cloudland, Brisbane’s answer to Sydney’s Ivy. Alternatively, the X & Y Bar has live music seven nights. Sightseers should pack their walking shoes and explore Brisbane on foot, says Cunningham; the city’s River Walk connects more than 20km of pathways, roads, bridges and parks along the Brisbane River.

InterContinental Adelaide concierge **Daniel Reilly** recommends **Bistro Dom**, a tiny, stylish eatery on Waymouth Street and, for lunch, **Insieme**, a smart new Italian eatery run by two sisters at 63 Flinders St. **Chianti Classico** is an Adelaide institution and does the best breakfast in town, he says, while bistro-style **Cos** is good for steak.

After dark, Reilly points guests to the cosy booths at **Spats** for coffee and dessert (King William Road, Goodwood), the bar in the Spanish-Italian **Osteria de Mesa** (Glen Osmond Road, Frewville) and the **Cork Wine Cafe** (Gouger Street), which offers flights of wine and late-night tapas.

Night owls might like to check out Reilly’s suggestion of **Zhivago** near Light Square, a laidback club with a mixed crowd.

Sightseeing? Don’t miss the pandas at **Adelaide Zoo**, the **Central Market** (with coffee at **Lucia’s**) and glassblowers at work in the **Jam Factory** (19 Morphett St).

At **The Richardson Hotel** in Perth, senior assistant manager and erstwhile concierge **Taya Reid** points guests towards the eco-savvy **Greenhouse** on St Georges Terrace, where the walls are smothered in strawberry plants and the rooftop hosts a bar and garden. Cool new bars include **Clarences** in up-and-coming **Mount Lawley**, five minutes from the city, where wood panelling and candlelight make for a sophisti-

cated vibe. Or try **The Garden**, a chic outdoor room adjoining the popular **Leederville Hotel**.

“Our clientele tend to favour special dining experiences,” Reid says. “I generally recommend **The Richardson’s** own **Opus** or **Star Anise** [Shenton Park] for dinner, and **Zafferano**, on the river, for lunch.”

The **Subiaco Hotel** and **Little Creatures** in Fremantle are great fun, she says; the latter is a boutique brewery and dining hall (once a crocodile farm). For outstanding coffee, **Richardson’s** guests need only pop around the corner to **Epic Espresso** on **Outram Street**. And weekend visitors should make time to explore the **Saturday farmers’ market** in **Subiaco**, where Reid recommends the breakfast pizza.

In **Hobart**, **The Henry Jones Art Hotel’s** concierge **Phil Cummings** promises guests they don’t have to walk far to enjoy some of the city’s best, starting with the hotel’s own fine dining restaurant (**Henry’s Harbourside**) and a new series of guided walks, conducted by the hotel’s resident historian **Warren Glover** (concluding with a champers or beer in the funky **IXL Long Bar**).

Beyond the hotel’s doors, **Cummings** recommends **Monty’s** on **Montpelier** (“with a superb cheese selection and great wine list”), the stylish **Source** restaurant at **Moorilla Estate** (where the much vaunted **MONA** is opening next year) and **Plum** on **Salamanca Square** for great **Tasmanian produce**. **Cummings** frequents the buzzy **Zum Cafe** (on **Salamanca**) but the nearby **Retro Cafe** also does “wonderful food”. After dark, try **Cargo** “for beautiful cocktails” or the nearby **Bar Celona**. Seagoing sightseers might like to book a **Bruny Island Eco Cruise** or jump a **Navigator’s vessel** up the **Derwent** for lunch at **Moorilla**.

Luke Ashcroft, assistant manager of the concierge desk at the

Hyatt Hotel Canberra, says guests frequently dine in-house at the **Promenade Cafe** or the fine-dining **Axis** (also run by **Hyatt**) at the **National Museum of Australia**. He’s also quick to recommend **The Chairman & Yip** (**Bunda Street, City**) for exciting **Chinese fusion cuisine**, the perennially popular **Ottoman** in **Barton**, **WatersEdge** in **Parkes** and **Mezzalira** in the **City** (fine Italian dining in an old bank building).

“**Sage**, in the **Gorman House Arts Centre**, offers a very intimate dining experience,” he says. “Next morning duck out for pastries and coffee at the stylish **Silo Bakery** in **Kingston**.”

After dark, the **Hippo Lounge Bar** in the **City** and **Julep Lounge** in **Manuka** host a sophisticated crowd. **Ashcroft** urges sightseers not to forget **Old Parliament House**, now that the **National Portrait Gallery** has been shifted. “The guided tours are great,” he says.

Kate Eckel is duty manager at the new **Medina Grand Darwin Waterfront**, where the in-house **Curve** restaurant is one of her top picks. Add to this: **Buzz Cafe** in **Cullen Bay**, with fantastic water and marina views; **Hanuman** on **Mitchell Street** downtown for **Thai, Indian and Nonya**; and **Char Restaurant** on the **Esplanade** for steaks. **Thalicious**, upstairs and overlooking **Mitchell Street**, is fun, **Kate** says, as is the offbeat **Nirvana** (**Dashwood Crescent**), with an eclectic menu and jazz-blues most nights.

It’s **Mindil Market** season (**Thursday and Sunday**), **Kate** says, but do check out the **laksas** at the year-round **Saturday morning Parap Village Market**.

A **Swiss chef** turns out great pastries at **Bar Espresso** (on **Mitchell Street**), she says, and after dark make for **Monsoons** (“having a bit of a renaissance”) or the **Sand Bar** in the **Sky City Casino** for cocktails.



James Cunningham, at Brisbane's Emporium Hotel, is a mine of information about the city's best eateries and other attractions



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