



# A tale of two laneways

Adelaide's once-sleepy CBD is filling fast with cool new bars and restaurants

WORDS KRYSIA BONKOWSKI

"WELCOME TO ADELAIDE LADIES and gentlemen," the pilot announces as the plane tilts over Gulf St Vincent. "You'll need to turn your watches back 30 minutes, and your lives back 30 years." He gets a wry laugh from everyone on board, including the locals. It's a sentiment Adelaideans are used to – the place has long had a reputation as exciting as its alias, "the city of churches". But that is threatening to change.

In the past couple of years, two pint-sized lanes in the city have been quietly filling with oh-so-cool bars and bustling eateries fronted by young locals who didn't follow their peers interstate. Peel and Leigh Streets – blink-and-you'll-miss-them offshoots of the sometimes gritty Hindley Street – are now the go-to spot for a night out.

Things got interesting back in 2013, when the state government reviewed the liquor licensing laws that had largely limited Adelaide's scene to big nightclubs and refurbished pubs. A more cost-effective and flexible licence was created for

venues with a capacity of less than 120, designed to foster small bars, restaurants, galleries and live music spots.

As soon as the laws were passed, small bars started springing up in alleyways and rooftops throughout the city. In the past two years, more than 50 venues have been approved. The West End has become the epicentre, most visibly on Peel and Leigh streets.

The Ginos Group, which owns Leigh Street and a substantial building on Peel, has been instrumental in the metamorphosis, renting to small businesses with big ideas. Behind the heritage sandstone and bluestone facades of the two streets, the new venues are cheek by jowl. You can't swing the proverbial cat here without hitting a wine bar or cocktail den.

"The new laws are giving smaller operators without big budgets a chance to open up and show their wares," explains Ben McLeod, co-founder of restaurant Peel Street. Many of the owners are also the chief operators, meaning they are ➤





#### ON THE STREET

From top: Out the front of Clever Little Tailor, chefs hard at work in Gondola Gondola, inside Clever Little Tailor

deeply invested in giving every person who walks through their doors the best possible service.

Whenever a bar scene starts to flourish in one of Australia's smaller capitals, the inevitable comparisons to Melbourne and Sydney ensue. But the transformation of Peel and Leigh is not just an exercise in mimicry – there's a distinctly local feel. All of Adelaide is behind the revival, with the tangible enthusiasm of a close-knit community.

The renowned wine regions and gourmet produce on Adelaide's doorstep have provided a strong foodie foundation. Ollie Margan, bar manager and part owner of upstairs/downstairs venues Maybe Mae and Bread and Bone Wood Grill (both found at

Fielke, co-founder of acclaimed bar Clever Little Tailor, credits the supportive relationships between venues for the area's success. "We're all happily pushing each other ... all pushing up quality," he says.

Here, owners working seven-day weeks have their knock-off drinks at competitors' venues. When leases come up, they encourage friends to take them. "Every new, well-run bar that opens on the strip just solidifies its place as a great spot to come for a fun night out" says Rob Dinnen, co-owner of wine bar Udaberri. Adelaide's small-town mentality is working in its favour. As Ben from Peel Street says, "Everyone knows everyone, but you know, that's Adelaide anyway." ✱

## The inevitable comparisons to Melbourne and Sydney ensue...

15 Peel Street), praises the denizen's daring palates. "The receptiveness we have seen to pushing the boundaries as far as flavours and textures in drinks has been unreal, and it makes Adelaide such an excellent place to run a bar," he says.

The community support helps explain the vibe of Peel and Leigh Streets. Locals migrate for a drink here, a nibble there. Small venues are not trying to be hipper than the next, but conspiring to create the perfect bar hop. Crispian

#### Did you know?

Few would recognise the subject of the jolly bronze statue at the end of Leigh Street, though he lives on in the language. Australian comedian Roy "Mo" Rene, born a stone's throw away on Hindley Street, gifted us with those great Aussie wisdoms "Don't come the raw prawn with me" and "You beaut".

#### Travel Info



Jetstar has great low fares to Adelaide from Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane, Hobart and Darwin.

Visit [jetstar.com](http://jetstar.com) to book





## SMALL BUT MIGHTY

### For a killer cocktail

All polished wood and rough-hewn stone, **Clever Little Tailor** (19 Peel Street) might be small, but there's nothing diminutive about it. Co-owners Crispian Fielke, Joshua Baker and Dana Whyte have created a haven for those with an appreciation for high-quality tipples. "We obsess about things in house," Crispian says, "and we hope that translates to the quality."

The same team has recently opened **Pink Moon Saloon** (21 Leigh Street), nestled in the incongruous setting of a former bin alley. This "house of fire and drink", consisting of two pitched-roof cabins linked by a courtyard, is a playful answer to Clever Little Tailor's high-end feel.

### Basement bar

It's easy to pass the entrance of subterranean bar **Maybe Mae** (15 Peel Street). Behind an archway in a tiled corridor linking Peel and Leigh, steps lead down to an unmarked door in a wall carved with art deco whorls. "We intended to create a small vacuum in the CDB," says co-owner Ollie, "a

place that you can stumble upon and be taken away to a completely different setting as far as time and place are concerned."

Well before the late-night crowd converges on the streets above, the rounded green-leather booths are filled with pretty young things sipping cocktails made with produce from the Adelaide Central Market.

### Fine wine and a good time

**Udaberri** (11-13 Leigh Street) was inspired by evenings whiled away in the Spanish seaside town San Sebastian. They offer a rotating tapas menu, Old and New World wine and 19 incarnations of the G&T.

Rough wooden beams arch rib-like over the dimly lit bar, while a brick courtyard is enlivened by a mural by Beastman and Vans the Omega. Udaberri might be sophisticated, but that doesn't translate to aloof. "[Adelaide] people are genuine and friendly, and we like to employ staff that exemplify those traits," Rob says. "You won't find many places that aim to be too cool for school doing well out here."

### For a caffeine hit

The baristas at **Coffee Branch** (32 Leigh Street) take their craft seriously. The narrow space, hung with the ubiquitous fixie bike, fills with city workers drawn by carefully sourced brews.

Behind a sunny yellow door, the charms of **La Moka** (16a Peel Street) help with the transition from daytime café to night-time watering hole. Dapper waiters ferry espressos and aperitivi to patrons at the open front window or streetside tables.

### Dinner next door

**Peel Street** (9 Peel Street) restaurant has been booked solidly since opening in 2013. Head chef Jordan Theodoros borrows flavours from around the world to create the sharing menu.

Behind an 1800s bluestone exterior, **Kaffana** (23 Peel Street) offers a hearty dose of old-school Serbian hospitality. Across the way, **Bread and Bone** (15 Peel Street) plies diners with upscale American dude food.

And **Gondola Gondola's** (1 Peel Street) sake and hawker-style sharing menu will help keep you going into the wee hours.

