

# THE GOOD LIFE FOOD & WINE

FIVE OF A KIND

**BACKPACKER BARS** Travellers lend an international air to a host of welcoming watering holes, writes **Chris Canty**.



## PINT ON PUNT

FOR locals, it's that pub we pass to and from work on a busy road, but for those who sleep in one of the 80 beds above it, it's their lively lounge room. The Irish theme is unmistakable, with nooks in which to sip pints on wooden whiskey barrels and Gaelic decorations on the wall. The kitchen serves hearty winter pub grub, with its grilled pork sausages from Kew's award-winning Paddy's Irish Butchers a favourite. Events throughout the week include Wednesday's Karaoke and Curry, but the biggest night is Sunday, when the Irish music starts. The pub sponsors local hurling and camogie (female hurling) teams, who customarily sing and dance the night away after matches.

**42 Punt Road, Windsor, 9510 3310, Tues to Sat noon-1am, Mon noon-11pm, Sun noon-midnight.**

## RED EYE BAR

"WHO needs to travel the world to meet and chat to internationals?" With four out of five patrons being a traveller, manager Matt Holman insists many locals don't know what they're missing. The large rectangular bar on the hostel's ground floor is sparsely decorated, hinting that space to dance is paramount. The biggest nights are Monday and Wednesday, when free all-you-can-eat pancakes and barbecue are on offer (non-guests included), though the \$5 Sunday roasts avert homesickness for many. The bar's popularity is simple, Matt says: "Top-40 music, mixed with cheesy tunes and something to win and a bargain, will keep people happy."

**Base Backpackers, 17 Carlisle Street, St Kilda, 8598 6200, Mon to Wed 3.30pm-midnight, Thurs to Sat 3.30pm-2.30am, Sun 3.30-11pm.**

## BLUE MOON BAR

OPENED last year, this lively venue is already making waves due to its cheap "specials" dishes and rumbustious theme nights. Located on the ground floor of the family-owned Space Hotel, which manager Yossi Gallor describes as a "new social hotel experience", the 86 per cent occupancy upstairs means the cosy, dark bar is rarely empty. Five-dollar pizzas and pastas are always available (try the Warnie Pizza: chicken, bacon and pineapple). With many British travellers staying upstairs, Wednesday nights are popular with an hour of free champagne for the ladies and "crazy backpacker games" such as jelly wrestling for those who want to make new friends.

**Space Hotel, 380 Russell Street, city, 1800 670 611, daily 4pm-midnight.**

## BERTHA BROWN

LOCATED under YHA's Melbourne Central Hostel, this expansive venue was once the historic Markillies Hotel but has resurfaced as a food-focused bar that is frequented by a mix of travellers and office workers. A small lounge area is ideal for happy hours (noon-2pm, 5-7pm), with a great selection of craft beers, but most of the space is taken up by tables for the diners. Guests upstairs get two-for-one meals and beverage deals every night but locals are entitled to a daily two-course lunch for less than \$20. Try the pork belly entree. The regular menu offers pub grub and pizzas. A stage out the back comes to life on Mondays when musicians turn up for open-mike night.

**562 Flinders Street, city, 9620 5007, Mon to Fri 11am-late, Sat noon-late.**

## THE VIC

ORIGINALLY built in 1863 and taken over in 1999 by the "Bev and Mick's" hostel company, owner Matt McMahon says that less than a third of the pub patrons would be local, especially on Mondays. "Tribes of Irish come to celebrate the fact that every second Monday is an RDO," he says. The pub has a well-worn, old-school feel with its 2500-year-old, six-tonne red gum bar, which comes from the Barmah Forest on the Murray River. "It's loved by all that see it," McMahon says. "They think it's so Australian to drink around a bar made from a tree." Drink specials are available each weeknight and outside takeaways (Queen Vic Market is across the road) are welcome.

**Bev and Mick's Backpackers, 312 Victoria Street, North Melbourne, 9329 7156, Mon to Fri 11am-11pm, Sat to Sun 11am-1am**