

New Zealand

Dunedin shows off its design credentials

This New Zealand city has put itself firmly on the fashion map, writes **Briar Jensen**

FANCY sipping champagne in the front row at the longest catwalk in the southern hemisphere?

Then head to Dunedin for iD Dunedin Fashion Week on March 8-14, a celebration of New Zealand's nationally and internationally acclaimed clothing and jewellery designers, which culminates in gala fashion shows held on the platform of the city's historic Flemish-Renaissance railway station.

That's a 110m catwalk running the length of the platform – magically transformed with fabric and fairy lights – where guests are seated in open-sided train carriages or on the platform itself. It's one huge fashion soiree and everybody's welcome.

Best of all, you can go out and buy what you see on the catwalk, which is not just for the frivolous or well-heeled. They are seriously wearable fashions for men and women of all tastes and ages, from edgy street fashion to neoclassical tailoring.

Now in its 11th year, iD Dunedin Fashion Week is enthusiastically embraced by the community.



Fashion-themed activities include film nights, behind-the-scenes library tours, jewellery exhibitions and “starlight shopping” – when local fashion retailers open late, offering specials and mini-parades.

Susie Staley, chairwoman of the iD Fashion Committee, says it’s an event that punches well above its weight. “It’s a people-friendly, real experience. It’s not just for fashionistas.”

You might think “why Dunedin?”, a city renowned for its well-preserved colonial architecture and conservative Scottish heritage. But “Dunners”, as it is affectionately known, is a university town with a subculture that incubates design. Home to Otago Polytechnic’s School of Fashion, it has bred many of New Zealand’s top labels such as Nom*D and Zambesi.

Fashion Week also nurtures the next generation of talent through the iD Emerging Designer Awards, which attract entrants from fashion schools around the world.

The 2010 finalists come from 10 countries and include Australians Paula Kyle Walden from Queensland University of Technology (jewellery) and Sam Hazelton from Ultimo TAFE’s Fashion Design Studio (fashion).

Finalists are paraded at a show held early in the week, where the winners are announced to a crowd dominated by enthusiastic fashion students.

Tickets to both events sell out within hours, so you need to be quick, though the 2010 iD Fashion Show (including labels Nom*D, Carlson,



Mild Red, Cherry Cotton Candy and a special guest designer yet to be announced) is now being held over two nights due to unprecedented demand. So grab your mum, partner, girlfriends or fashion-conscious mates (there’s heaps of menswear) and make a week of it.

Shopping in Dunedin is a breeze with the easily walkable fashion precinct radiating from the city’s central plaza, The Octagon. Pick up a copy of the f*INK guide to Dunedin’s arts and fashion (available from the i-SITE Visitor Centre in The Octagon) and combine clothes shopping with innovative jewellery, art and homewares.

Start in George St, home to designers Tanya Carlson and Annah Stretton, and check out boutiques Belle Bird, Slick Willy’s, Plume and Stir for a range of local and international labels. There’s some great vintage gear in the Recycle Boutique and unusual homewares and handbags in design store Loft.

Lure in Stuart St showcases six contemporary jewellery designers in their workshops, including Lyn Kelly, whose recent collection is botanical-themed, and Victoria McIntosh who

CITY CENTRE: The Octagon in Dunedin.

works with found objects such as kitchen utensils.

Dada, in Moray Place, is run by Marie Strauss, who stocks Karen Walker among other labels, and her own designs.

The home of local designer Charmaine Reveley in Dowling St is a working studio and you can browse the racks while chatting to Reveley as she cuts patterns and her seamstress works in the corner. (Tip: she has a sale the night before the parades.)

Out of town, the gorgeous blue-stone buildings of Port Chalmers house art, interior design shops and fashion, including Seriously Twisted, a company making garments from mohair, merino and possum fur.

For a change of focus, a Dunedin Gourmet Walk with Zest Food Tours covers boutique beer, chocolate, ice cream, local cafes and restaurants.

If you love history and culture as much as fashion, join Athol Parks on a City Walks tour to hear the stories behind Dunedin’s Victorian and Edwardian architecture.

When you need a break from

Wish you were here

Getting there

Air New Zealand flies to Dunedin via Christchurch from all major cities in Australia. One-way fares, a person, including taxes, start from \$321 ex Melbourne. To book, visit www.airnewzealand.com.au

Play

iD Dunedin Fashion Week, March 8-14. Tickets go on sale on January 26 at TicketDirect venues (NZ), ph 0011 +64 0800 4 TICKET or online at www.ticketdirect.co.nz

shopping and walking, visit the tranquil Chinese Garden or the stunning grounds of Larnach Castle on the Otago Peninsula.

Continue to Taiaroa Head and take a tour of the fur seal and albatross colonies.

But make sure you allow plenty of

Ticket prices range from \$NZ90 (\$A72) for front row to \$NZ60 (\$A48) for fourth row. Emerging Designer Awards tickets \$NZ40 (\$A32).

For more information see www.id-dunedinfashion.com City Walks runs 90-minute and two-hour tours from October to April, adults \$NZ25 (\$A20), high-school students \$NZ10 (\$A8), younger children free, see citywalks.co.nz

Zest tailors food tours to your culinary preferences. Half-day tours, including tastings and lunch, \$NZ179 (\$A145), see zestfoodtours.co.nz

time to pimp and preen before the shows, and get into the party spirit at one of the many bars and restaurants within easy walking distance of the railway station.

The writer was a guest of Tourism Dunedin and Air New Zealand.

5 things you must do in New Zealand

1 Get your heart pumping with a range of adventure activities in Queenstown and surrounds. The city on the banks of Lake Wakatipu on the South Island offers bungee jumping, mountain bike riding, heli-skiing, paragliding, canyon swings, quad biking, jet boating, whitewater rafting, horse trekking and cave rafting.

2 Take a dip in the hot thermal springs at Rotorua. Geysers, mud pools and thermal springs have been attracting visitors to the area since the 1800s. Kuirau Park is home to boiling mud pools and crater lakes while hissing steam escaping from roadside vents is evidence of Rotorua’s volcanic history.

3 Swim with wild dolphins at Paihia in the Bay of Islands. Whales, sea birds and penguins are other wildlife you can encounter on one of the many cruises, or by chartering a yacht or hiring a kayak. You can also try game fishing for marlin, snapper and kingfish.

4 Discover the spectacular scenery captured on film by Peter Jackson in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Tours to “Middle-Earth” where you go on a 4WD adventure on to Edoras itself are available from Christchurch. You can also see the Misty Mountains and the area that formed the backdrop to Helms Deep.

5 Explore Wellington’s lanes and bars. Known as the culinary capital of the country, as well as being the capital city, it has more than 300 bars, restaurants and cafes speckled throughout the city. The World of Wearable Art Awards are also held there in September.