



La Dolce Vita!

Chocoholic Tours has been leading locals and travellers on indulgent trails through Melbourne's arcades and laneways since 1995. We skipped breakfast and joined a chocolate walk...

Suzie Wharton balances atop a set of antique scales in Melbourne's Block Arcade, rhapsodising about chocolate. She's clutching a silver tray overflowing with decadent dark and creamy milk chocolate buttons, champagne truffles for the adults and for our underage companions, mango truffles.

"Try the dark chocolate first," she urges. "Smell it, then taste a little. You'll find it has a well-rounded flavour, it doesn't have that bitter aftertaste you get with a lot of dark chocolate."

Slim and pixie-like, Suzie seems an unlikely chocoholic, but over the next two

hours she eliminates any doubts that she's the real deal. What's more, she comes from a family of chocoholics and claims her first word was "chocolate". So what's her secret? Eating small amounts of good chocolate slowly, she tells us. Conducting walking tours of Melbourne several times a week probably doesn't hurt, either.

The tour we've chosen begins at Haigh's, an Australian family-owned company founded in 1915. The iconic Haigh's emporium is located in The Block Arcade, which opens onto a laneway crowded with patrons drinking espresso under café awnings. It's like stumbling on a window to Europe in the middle of the arcade.

Built in 1860, The Block Arcade is modelled on Galleria Vittoria in Milan. The floor is paved with intricate mosaics and its high glass ceilings culminate in a stunning central dome. In its heyday it was a place for people to socialise and be seen, and there were manuals on promenade etiquette. These days it's a heritage-listed café and shopping hub, and an attraction in its own right.

Next we head to Koko Black in Melbourne's oldest arcade, the Royal Arcade. Koko Black's chocolatiers have their hands full sating the appetites of a line of chocolate lovers stretching out the door, so Suzie lets us in on a few secrets about the science of chocolate as we nibble Cointreau ganache-filled treats.

Suzie studied arts at university and was a volunteer tour guide at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) before founding Chocoholic Tours in 1995. She still volunteers at the NGV and has an art aficionado's eye for detail, and the warm, easygoing nature of a practised tour guide.

High above the Royal Arcade, mythical giants Gog and Magog chime the hour as we cleanse our palettes with watermelon sweets from Suga before heading south to the Collins Street headquarters of Swiss veterans Lindt. We try mouthwatering Delice macarons in flavours like hazelnut, passionfruit and hot cross bun before sauntering, slower now, past iconic Centre Place in all its graffitied glory, and onto the penultimate stop on our trail.

Master Chocolatier Arno Backes greets us at Gânache with a tray full of nutty Figaro pralines and the equally tantalising tale behind them. Named after a musician who travelled between northern Italy and Germany, the chocolates incorporate ingredients from both regions, including hazelnut praline and amarena cherries from Italy and almonds from Germany, and were whipped up in the kitchen above Gânache's South Yarra store.

A German native, Arno trained for nine years to earn his title and has endless stories about his craft. Like the time he spent 18 months travelling across South America in search of new ingredients, or the hundred-year-old rabbit mould in the window behind him,



**A LINE OF CHOCOLATE
LOVERS STRETCHES
OUT THE DOOR OF
KOKO BLACK**

which he bought at a flea market in Luxembourg when he was 16. Arno is passionate, and talks about his 400 creations (and the four new ideas he is bursting to get started on) with contagious zeal.

Winding down now, we come to Brunetti's. The original store in Carlton is a Melbourne institution, founded by Giorgio Angelé who came to Melbourne in 1956 as a chef for the Italian Olympic team and decided to stay. Somehow we find room for two kinds of slices (glazed chocolate mousse and sour cherry), before we raise rich hot chocolate shots and toast Suzie Wharton and chocolate, chocolatiers and this beautiful, labyrinthine city that we've seen with new eyes.

Tours depart Friday to Sunday. There are seven Chocoholic itineraries to choose from, each priced at AUD\$37 per person. Visit www.chocoholictours.com.au

**WHERE ELSE TO
GET YOUR FIX**

Loving Earth

Scott Fry, founder of Melbourne-based company Loving Earth, creates delicious raw chocolate bars and cacao products with uncooked, unprocessed chocolate in its pure, rich essential form (www.lovingearth.net).

Chocolate Rush Festival

Held annually in August, Chocolate Rush is an opportunity for chocolatiers to showcase their creations. Includes a chocolate market, masterclasses, short film festival and the Australian Chocolate Championships (www.chocolaterush.com.au).

Savour Chocolate & Patisserie School

Learn to craft delectable treats in a state-of-the-art kitchen. This Brunswick gem is the only school in the Asia Pacific focused solely on chocolate and pastries. It's also where Chocoholic Tours founder Suzie Wharton shops for chocolate essentials (www.savourschool.com.au).

Pannys Chocolate Factory

Just 90 minutes from Melbourne, Pannys Phillip Island Chocolate Factory is a shop, café, museum and interactive chocolate factory rolled into one delicious package. Learn how chocolate is made and create your own unique chocolate bar (www.phillipislandchocolatefactory.com.au).

TEXT: CASSY POLIMENI / IMAGES: GÂNACHE, KOKO BLACK, THE CHOCOLATE BOX, LORETTA GRANDE



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Haigh's Chocolates, The Block
Arcade; sweet treats from
Ganache; Koko Black ice
cream; selections from
Ganache
OPPOSITE PAGE:
Choices from The
Chocolate Box

