

TOP FIVE ... CITY BAKERES

CAFE VUE

If only one could eat at Vue du Monde restaurant daily. Thank goodness there's Cafe Vue, where the bread is baked daily on site. The queues are often lengthy but it is worth the wait to get stuck into one of the wonderful crunchy/soft baguettes, the classic salad sandwich, creamy croque monsieur or Tom Cooper smoked salmon on a dill brioche with caper mayonnaise. And then there are pastries: perfect croissants and danishes, an excellent pear tart and, if you are lucky, a single-serve pudding of varying fillings. **Open for breakfast. 430 Little Collins Street, 96913899**

Commercial Bakery

With Con Christopoulos' trademark sophisticated retro-Euro style, this new bakery quickly found its niche last year. The display case behind the front window shows what's up for the day, such as a strudel with ricotta, pine nuts and sultanas, or tiny chocolate tartlets, or a beautiful caramelised pear danish. For savouries, there are usually a couple of pizza varieties — big, flat squares — and an excellent spanakopita. The beetroot, onion jam and goats' curd sandwiches on white sourdough are delicious.

Rear of 360 Little Collins Street, 96707214

Dinkum Pies

This place continues to hold its own against the onslaught of adjacent groove-traps. And so it should. Large and airy with swivel chairs and glass display cases, a great variety of very hot, honest, tasty pies nestle in the metal pie-warmer — the steak, cheese and bacon is my favourite but the tomato and cheese and the Thai chicken are also superb. You will find family pies to take home in large cardboard boxes, too, and a full sweets cabinet with old-fashioned treats such as neenish tarts, rum balls, custard tarts, scones, finger buns and an impressive raspberry brulee.

29 Block Place, 96546792

Little Cupcakes

Tucked up Degraeves Street, this weeny shop is bright and cheerful, with a small but lovely array of prettily decorated cakes. Cupcakes are the sweet du jour and hopefully will not go the way of the poor old muffin — that once-tasty object that is now difficult to find in any form other than perplexingly large, over-sweet and impossible to masticate. Here the



cupcakes have gone the other way: little bite-size ones come in simple flavours with a creamy dollop of rich icing on top — there's even a chocolate one being ridden by a tiny teddy. Other flavours include strawberry, mocha and vanilla.

Shop 7, 250 Flinders Street, 90770413

Chain gangs

There is something to be said for the impressive high-end mini-chains that now tout their own breads and pastries about town in competition with their mediocre suburban cousins. Breadtop, Laurent and Brunetti are somehow able to retain a sense of personality while at the same time branching out. Breadtop's fresh, inexpensive pastries really hit the spot — the pain au chocolate and almond croissants are particularly good — and it is a fabulous place to try some Asian specialties, tempered with buttery French-style patisserie cooking, such as the black bean bun, the barbecued pork bun, the purple sticky rice loaf and the chicken and mushroom doughnut. Laurent is a little pricey but its pastries and filled baguettes are generously sized. Brunetti's Italian sweets are the best examples of that genre to be found in the inner suburbs.

Breadtop, shop 1, 200 Bourke Street, 96713788 (other branches at QV, La Trobe and Swanston streets).

Laurent, 2/306 Little Collins Street, 96541011, Brunetti 214 Flinders Lane, 96638085

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