

Hot chocolate stores open in Edinburgh

Jens Knoop is on the point of opening his second hot chocolate store in Edinburgh in as many weeks, but it is barely cause for him to break step on his journey to “bring the best hot chocolate to everyone”.

When I sit with him in Victoria Street, sipping a 49% from Venezuela, I get the feeling this business is now a well-oiled machine with much more to the company than just the man who founded it. He says he is just the chocolate man and other people now deal with the property acquisitions and the finances. He said he realised quite quickly that he needed help to run the business to make it successful.

Knoopology is the name given to the process of making the hot chocolate which customers order their very own. The drink is made more interesting by the frothed finish on top which Knoop tells me is traditional and has been created in this way for 5,000 years. (It is easy to believe him when he explains that the froth is a gift to the gods).

With 15 other stores, all in England, the break into the Scottish market is deliberately in two high profile spots, one in the Old Town and one in the New Town where Starbucks used to be. The drinks are made by using chocolate buttons sitting in jars behind the counter – and that chocolate is made either

by the farmers or by other chocolate makers. Knoop hopes to announce a chocolate made in Scotland soon as the basis for the luxury drinks. Prices start at £3.75 for a small hot chocolate and the most expensive is £6.95. The higher the cocoa content the more expensive the drink so a regular 100% is around the top of the range.

Catering for vegans is de rigeur, with two thirds of the chocolates fitting into that category and while some of the chocolate may taste nutty the chocolates on offer are all nut free, and the drinks are also Halal.

Jens explains the process for making chocolate is more complicated than coffee with the process of fermentation, drying and roasting of the beans followed by recipe development by which the percentage is achieved.

The store has a menu on the back wall from which customers can choose their hot chocolate their way. The higher the percentage the more chocolate and the less sweet the drink. The shops also serve coffee and tea, but the focus is most definitely chocolate, and even for diabetics there is a lower sugar option available. With a disarmingly easy to use app for ordering in store or online, and well-trained staff in each location ready to help navigate the extensive options, the focus is also on the customer.



Jens began with the first shop in Rye. He explained the lightbulb moment was in 2012-13 when walking through Central London and finding that there were limited options for drinking hot chocolate of any kind.

He said: “There was no choice on offer and so I felt there was a niche. I was already living in East Sussex where through various contacts I found a pretty building, a former photography gallery overlooking the marsh with a lot of heritage. I had no food and beverage background, but I used to work as a technical adviser and as a videographer for international consumer research, so everything in my past led me to this moment. When I travelled the world I repeatedly heard a lot about the “small affordable luxury” something people could treat themselves to without breaking the bank.”



The properties where Knoop's branches are situated are important. Jens likes the big windows in Victoria Street saying that people need to see the "theatre inside and the menu board which is really visible".

Knoop now knows more than most about chocolate and visits the farms where the cocoa beans grow in Venezuela or West Africa, with a hope of expanding to Indonesia soon. He visits the farms to understand the farming process and the post harvest process.

A Knoop's farm might sometime be a "wonderful" addition to the company perhaps with an educational side while producing small batch cacao in a collaboration with a farmer. He already knows where every bean comes from – and the product is about more than Fair Trade. He says he has gone beyond that by forging links with the farmers. He said: "After all Fair Trade is a label not every farmer can afford. I think it is more important to understand where the beans are coming from rather than reading a label. We prefer to trade directly with each farmer and then I can bring that story back to customers.

"But the main thing is that it tastes good."

One of the other things that is key for him is authenticity so when any of his 250 members of staff are asked what their favourite drink is he likes them to answer honestly. He breaks off to explain what one customer had just ordered – a mocha which is 54% chocolate with a double shot espresso and that is "really popular in the morning".

Jens said: "I am delighted that Knoop is expanding into Scotland and more people in the UK will be able to experience Knoopology and our chocolate drinks. I'm thrilled to continue our growth journey and keep giving customers, new and old, their highly personalised chocolate drinks."

The shop offers hot chocolate, cold drinks, and milkshakes. There are 20 different percentages of chocolate on the menu from 28% White to 100% Extra Dark. The milk (all charged at the same price) varies from dairy to plant-based and a range of extras like chilli or sea salt can be added to make it your own. For an extra energy boost add a marshmallow, or take some chocolate flakes home with you.

There is limited seating in the Victoria Street shop with a larger area to sit down and either catch up with friends or do some work in the New Town where Knoop acknowledges the clientele will be very different.

With Easter coming up chocs and chocolate are already on the shelves for innovative gifts and the shops also stock equipment for you to also make your best hot chocolate at home.

Knoop is already open at 11-15 Victoria Street next to Virgin Hotels Edinburgh and opens the doors (with some free hot chocolate available) at 106 George Street on Friday 15 March.

CEO William Gordon-Harris said: "Embarking on our journey beyond the borders of England is a significant milestone for

Knoops. Edinburgh is the perfect next city for the brand, with its historic charm and rich cultural heritage, so it is fitting that we open here in two iconic locations, in close succession. We are excited to start on this new chapter and are looking forward to bringing something new and different to the food and drink scene of the city.”

<https://knoops.co.uk>



Victoria Street



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