

Lowdown Coffee – consistently excellent

Lowdown Coffee on George Street is regularly mentioned as [one of Edinburgh's best specialty coffee places](#). The café first opened in 2016 and has built a reputation steadily since. It's a prime example of consistent coffee excellence.

In the wake of the lockdown there was a sense that specialty coffee places in Edinburgh's city centre might not have a future. The closure of Castello (Castle Street), Fortitude's York Place café, Williams & Johnson at Waverley and Cairngorm's basement place on Frederick Street seemed to indicate some sort of hollowing out.

In contrast, trade at cafés in suburbs such as Bruntsfield, [Marchmont](#), and Stockbridge increased in this period. Lowdown managed to survive the downturn in city centre trade and is now clearly thriving with consistently good reviews ("exceptional coffee shop, a must visit when in the city centre", "one of the best avocado toasts I had in my life") and a constant flow of customers.



Lowdown Coffee sits in a prime tourist and shopping area, on George Street. A café located there that served decent, but not top class coffee, would do perfectly well. Lowdown's ambition and standards are higher and they want to offer customers something really exceptional.

The various beans which Lowdown use produce really interesting and memorable flavours. Something a little different is served here, something that will surprise your taste buds. This desire to find something new and innovative is a key aspect of specialty coffee culture. It is for example, markedly different from Italian coffee culture which promotes consistency of flavour. Lowdown is consistent in terms of

quality, but the flavour profiles of the beans they use vary from month to month.

The sleek basement café is generally busy. When I was last in, the place was packed, though perhaps not quite as hectic as during the August peak: “Even busy days feel quiet after the Fringe”. The calming, minimalist décor helps ensure it’s an enjoyable place to sit, even on the busiest days.



Despite the flow of customers, they maintain a high standard of espresso. Things are carefully measured and there’s an unhurried precision about the way the baristas work. This is something that is consistent across the very best coffee

places. Good coffee is well worth waiting for. Lowdown is reminiscent of some of the best places in [London](#) where the barista teams are sizeable. Having a larger team helps maintain the “division of labour” that helps maintain quality. Café owners are only able to afford such a team if they are busy throughout the day.

The baristas at Lowdown work collaboratively and with precision (“how was the shot?”. “spot on I think”). There’s a real sense of energy and passion about the team of baristas and the sense that they are tuned in to the Scottish coffee scene. On my most recent visit, some of them were planning a trip to Dundee for a “cupping” (tasting) event. Lowdown themselves also hosts such events, where they offer a chance to sample brews from beans from their own (new) roastery, Module.



Lowdown Coffee is able to cater to a more mainstream audience, as well as the real coffee geeks. The former can simply enjoy excellent coffee. Those customers who show a real interest in different beans (“this one has rose water hints”) and different brewing methods are welcomed into the conversation, and their feedback sought. “This is proper delicious – very floral” was one customer’s feedback on his pour over.



Because it's relatively small and in such a busy area, tables are always at the premium. The staff regularly have to tell customers "I'm afraid we're full up at the moment". Some will move on to another café (Black Sheep and Starbucks are right beside Lowdown) but many are prepared to wait. As I overheard one queuing customer say to her friend, "We could go elsewhere but the coffee here is just so good". In addition to the coffee, Lowdown offers a good selection of breakfasts, brunches, pastries and cake. It's very much not just the location which draws customers in large numbers down the steps to Lowdown.

[Lowdown Coffee](#), 40 George Street, EH2 2LE.