

# Dining out – when service makes the difference

In these cash-strapped times, dining out is a treat that should create lasting memories. While exciting new venues constantly emerge on Edinburgh's vibrant culinary scene, it's often the establishments that nail both exceptional food and outstanding service that keep diners coming back.

Recently, an experience with an unnamed restaurant (which had garnered praise for its "food cooked with love") highlighted how crucial customer service is to the dining experience. Despite the acclaimed cuisine, their frigid response to a booking mix-up and reportedly cold dining space (so chilly that reviewers kept their outerwear on throughout lunch) has led my own group of six food enthusiasts to take our custom elsewhere. It's a reminder that even the finest cooking can be overshadowed by poor hospitality.

The winning formula in hospitality is truly the sum of its parts. Beyond exceptional food, it's about creating an experience through ambiance, a thoughtfully curated wine list, attentive yet unobtrusive service, and those finishing touches that elevate a meal into an occasion.

Here are some Edinburgh establishments that consistently deliver on all fronts and that I'm happy to return to time and time again:

**Divino**, part of the Tony Crolla restaurant family and managed by son Alberto, exemplifies Italian hospitality at its finest. This warm, intimate venue pairs outstanding cuisine with an impressive wine programme featuring an Enomatic system – a state-of-the-art wine dispenser that allows them to offer 32 premium wines by the glass, including unique varieties typically only available by the bottle through their Coravin offering.

The Crolla family really have the whole package nailed, so much so that in one weekend, I visited not only Divino twice for the most amazing celebratory meal but then again on a Sunday evening for one of their bi-monthly wine tastings, which I can highly recommend. I also visited Vittoria's for a Sunday lunch, when our plans had to be changed due to a fire alarm in our initial planned restaurant. Their loss, the Crollas' gain.







**Divino**

*Small Wines 125ml/4.2oz*

**Il Palombara, Castello del Normale - Toscana**  
50% Palombara, 50% Chardonnay, 20% Malvasia  
20% Malvasia Bianca  
£12 Glass £18 Bottle £50 Bottle  
Pairing: Wood-roasted Beef Tenderloin, Tomato Sauce

**Vespuciale Riserva, Corte Giara - Veneto**  
75% Corvina, 25% Rondinella  
£11.5 Glass £15.5 Bottle £48 Bottle  
Pairing: Carpaccio Filetto, Pickled Walnut

**Chianti Classico Riserva, Botteghe - Toscana**  
100% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot  
10% Cabernet Sauvignon  
£11.5 Glass £16.5 Bottle £27 Bottle  
Pairing: Roasted Vegetables, Honeybarley, and Bay Leaf

**Montefalco Rosso, Tenute Lunelli - Umbria**  
70% Sagrantino, 15% Sangiovese, 15% Merlot  
£5.5 Glass £14 Bottle £48 Bottle  
Pairing: Gamberi Fritti, Rosemary Pear

**Saint-Estéphe, Château Lélan Ladouys -  
Bordeaux, France**  
62% Merlot, 33% Cabernet Sauvignon,  
3% Petit Verdot, 2% Cabernet Franc  
£15.5 Glass £22.5 Bottle £76 Bottle  
Pairing: Capocollo, Sun-Blushed Tomato





**Fazenda** continues to impress with its Brazilian rodizio concept. While it's paradise for meat enthusiasts, their extensive salad bar ensures vegetarians and vegans are well catered for. The drinks offering shines with an extensive wine list (including Coravin offerings) and expertly crafted cocktails.



Slightly off the beaten path in Tollcross, **Yamato** delivers exceptional Japanese fine dining. Their extensive menu accommodated my seafood allergies alongside their carefully curated sake selection and elegant design makes it a standout choice for special occasions.

My influence as a food writer came full circle recently in the most delightful way. An old flatmate, whom I hadn't seen in a decade, stumbled upon my review of Yamato and was so convinced by my write-up that she booked it for her own belated birthday celebration. What made it even more serendipitous was that we share the same birthday (albeit years apart), and as I scrolled through her social media posts, I couldn't help but smile – she had ordered nearly every dish I'd recommended. They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but seeing my words translate into someone else's memorable dining experience? That's the true reward of having your opinion count.









**Dishoom**, the Bombay-style establishment that's been drawing crowds since 2017, proves its staying power through consistent excellence. Their breakfast naan (the Wrestler's naan is a

personal favourite) paired with house-made chai has become a city institution. Whether visiting for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or cocktails, they've mastered the art of making every guest feel valued.



# Eat Out Is Back

Speaking of city-wide dining experiences, the welcome return of Eat Out Edinburgh this March 2025 offers an excellent opportunity to explore our city's diverse culinary landscape. This month-long food festival, which began in 2022, supports local hospitality businesses while allowing diners to experience special occasion restaurants at attractive prices. From weekend brunches to business lunches and dinner with drinks, it's a perfect excuse to reconnect with friends, family, and colleagues while supporting Edinburgh's vibrant hospitality scene.

In an era where every dining out experience counts, it's heartening to see so many Edinburgh establishments understanding that true hospitality goes beyond what's on the plate. These venues demonstrate that when exceptional food meets warmth, attention to detail, and genuine customer care, diners don't just leave satisfied – they start planning their return visit before they've even finished their meal.

After all, in a city blessed with such culinary riches, it's the restaurants that master both the art of food and the art of hospitality that truly stand the test of time. As we all navigate tighter budgets and carefully choose where to spend our dining pounds, these venues prove that investing in the complete dining experience pays dividends in customer loyalty.

<https://edinburgh.org/event/eat-out-edinburgh/>