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Eat, Play, Stay: The Magic of Melbourne by Fiona Harper



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Making regular red carpet appearances on Most Liveable City lists across the globe, Melbourne knows how to keep locals happy. The Victorian capital is pretty handy at showing visitors a good time too. Travel writer Fiona Harper finds out what makes the city so liveable and loveable.

EAT

It's an understatement to say that Melbourne does food exceptionally well. So much so that any guide purporting to showcase the city's best would need to be bigger than Texas to cover it all.

Suffice to say, sharpen up your taste buds, don your walking boots and prepare to be dazzled gastronomically. Try these for starters:

Taiwan Café - Swanston St. Cheap and cheerful, it's a favourite with the studiously-minded thanks to its location in the heart of Swanston Streets university precinct. Poky and crammed with tables so close you could easily reach over with your chopsticks and pluck a dumpling from your neighbours table. Not that I'd recommend such behaviour. But the pork dumplings (or xiao longbao to give them their correct name) are seriously that good.

Movida - Hosier Lane. I'd love to report that Movida lives up to its renowned reputation for serving some of the tastiest tapas in Melbourne. But as I didn't book 6 weeks prior to popping in, I can only say: it's time to open a bigger restaurant guys so we can all wrap our lips around marcona almonds with cured albacore tuna or twice cooked free range pork belly with braised lentils. Good luck getting a table!

Degraves Lane - (between Collins and Flinders Streets) a beguiling fusion of hole in the wall joints along with cafes serving tables on a central strip, if you can't find something to sate your hunger here then you're really not trying. Try The Soup Place for delicious homemade hearty soup like Moroccan lamb with lentils or spicy leek and potato.

Hardware Lane - (between Bourke & Lonsdale Streets) another locals favourite for a quick lunch or an intimate dinner serenaded by funky jazz, try Golden Monkey for Asian style tapas in a private dining room named the Opium Den.



PLAY

Melbourne probably holds as many festivals as there are days in the year so it's likely you'll find one that presses your buttons. Art, culture, fashion, sport, film, theatre, lifestyle and leisure all celebrate their shining stars.

From Fashion Week to the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival, the Comedy Festival, Moomba Waterfest, the Boxing Day Test and the Spring Racing Carnival are some of the big ones. But so too the Melbourne Running Festival where couch potato joggers line up with elite world class runners to cover distances varying from 2k to the ultimate endurance event, 42.2km.

Then there's the Flower & Garden Show and let's not forget the rev heads favourite with the Formula 1 Australian Grand Prix around Albert Park Lake.

One of the reasons Melbourne rates so highly as a liveable city is its network of cycle and walk trails. Many wind through beautiful parks and gardens or along the banks of the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers. For example, in less than an hour you could walk from South Yarra to the CBD, encountering no less than eight 'official parks'. March and April are particularly special as the avenues of deciduous trees (there are over 70,000 city council owned trees!) offer a kaleidoscope of autumn colours. Early morning is the best time to capture the sights and sounds of a city awakening.

STAY

As you'd expect in a city that hosted 3 million overnight visitors in 2013, Melbourne is no shrinking violet when it comes to accommodation. There's a plethora of choices from uber-luxe to hostels and everything in between.

Inner city apartment stays are a great alternative to cramped hotel rooms, particularly as heritage buildings are converted into residential properties. On central Collins Street, 19th century landmark building Treasury on Collins offers modern apartments inside the original exterior. One bedroom apartments (with kitchenette to allow self-catering) on level six have the added bonus of floor to ceiling double-glazed glass doors opening onto a small French-style patio. It's the perfect place for watching the city light up as the sun goes down.

Take a look at our complete Destination Guide for Melbourne.

Fiona Harper is a travel writer specialising in cruising, active and soft adventures. Follow her at www.travelboatinglifestyle.com

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