

ARTS

top picks

- Rooftop Cinema at Curtin House (p163)
- MSO Metropolis concert (p16)
- Chunky Move (p164)
- Opera in the Bowl (p163)
- A classic musical at the Princess Theatre (p165)
- A new Australian play at the Malthouse (p164)

Melbourne's landscape belongs to the arts. Its architecturally designed buildings plot the city's social and political history. The CBD is a fertile ground for the arts, with art growing out of most surfaces: in the underground walkways at Flinders Street Station, sprouting out of the sides of buildings in laneways across town, stencilled on walls and thriving on city pavements. It's mostly watered with public funds, and breathes stimulating life into the city. The city's Arts Centre stretches along St Kilda Rd between the National Gallery of Victoria and the concert venue, Hamer Hall, with Federation Square across the road commanding the Flinders St corner.

The arts in Melbourne are highly accessible, both for the sheer number of art spaces and their appeal to a broad audience. For most Melburnians, seeing a film or exhibition is part of an average week. Do some digging, though, and you'll discover there's also a keen enterprising side to Melbourne's arts scene that's less visible but no less important.

CINEMA

Cinema multiplexes are spread throughout Melbourne city and the suburbs and belong either to the **Hoyts** (hoyts.ninemsn.com.au), **Dendy** (www.dendy.com.au), **Village** (villagecinemas.com.au) or **Greater Union** (www.greaterunion.com.au) chains. Tickets cost around \$15 and screening times are published in the daily newspapers. The Australian cinema-goer's ritual embraces the standards of postmix soft drinks and popcorn, but includes the unique choc-top – an ice-cream cone covered in hard (and often oddly tasteless) chocolate. Village and Hoyts offer a 'premium' cinema experience with cushy seating and three-course meals and alcohol available in their Gold Class and Director's Suites respectively. See the websites for details.

Melbourne's truly independent cinemas are few and far between, but for arthouse, foreign-language and otherwise interesting films, check out the following:

ASTOR Map pp88–9

☎ 9510 1414; www.astor-theatre.com; cnr Chapel St & Dandenong Rd, St Kilda; ☎ Windsor; ☎ 64 This rep cinema screens all the classics in stunning Art Deco surrounds. The Astor is magic: the candy-bar staff appear to have stepped out of a film noir set, and the Astor cat makes celebrity appearances. Double features screen most nights.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR THE MOVING IMAGE Map pp52–3

ACMI; ☎ 9663 2583; www.acmi.net.au; Federation Sq, Melbourne

ACMI's cinemas screen an incredibly diverse range of films. It programs regular events and festivals for film genres and audiences,

as well as screening one-offs. Check the website for information on what's coming up.

CINEMA NOVA Map pp78–9

☎ 9347 5331; www.cinemanova.com.au; 380 Lygon St, Carlton; ☎ 1, 8

Nova has the latest in art-house, documentary and foreign films, and has cheap Monday screenings: sessions before 4pm cost \$6 and after 4pm \$8 (except public holidays). Special events include Script Alive – readings of unproduced screenplays – and cry-baby sessions for parents with young children.

CLASSIC CINEMA Map pp48–9

☎ 9524 7900; www.classictheatre.com.au; 9 Gordon St, Elsternwick; ☎ Elsternwick; ☎ 67

Arthouse classics screen in what is Melbourne's longest-running cinema (it housed a Yiddish theatre troop in 1950s). They also host an annual festival of Jewish cinema.

DENDY KINO Map pp52–3

☎ 9650 2100; www.kinodendy.com.au; Collins Pl, 45 Collins St

The Kino screens art-house films in its comfy licensed cinemas. Monday is cheap (all tickets \$7) and there's a seniors' special (\$6.50 for the first session from Tuesday to Friday). Kino also participates in special events such as festivals and 'Reel Mums' screenings for parents and carers of small children.

IMAX Map pp78–9

☎ 9663 5454; www.imaxmelbourne.com.au; Melbourne Museum, Carlton Gardens; ☎ 86, 96 Who'd have predicted that 3-D films would be relegated to kid-friendly genres?

Animal and adventure films in 3-D screen on a grand scale here, with movies specially made for these giant screens.

PALACE COMO Map pp84–5

☎ 9827 7533; www.palacecinemas.com.au; cnr Toorak Rd & Chapel St, South Yarra; ☎ South Yarra; ☎ 8

Arthouse and foreign language favourites are shown across four new luxury cinemas with a plush foyer and bar and café. One of the hosts of the annual Italian and Greek film festivals.

PALACE GEORGE Map pp88–9

☎ 9534 6922; www.palace.net.au; 135 Fitzroy St, St Kilda; ☎ 16, 96

The George is small but is a well-loved part of St Kilda life. Apart from screening arty-type major releases, it's a venue for the St Kilda and Short Film Festivals and VCA film and TV graduate screenings. It's also fully licensed.

Outdoor cinemas are popular in the summer; check the websites for seasonal opening dates and their program details. These include:

Moonlight Cinema (Map pp84–5; www.moonlight.com.au; Gate D, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, Birdwood Ave, South Yarra; ☎ 8)

Rooftop Cinema (Map pp52–3; www.rooftopcinema.com.au; Level 6, Curtin House, 252 Swanston St, City)

St Kilda Open Air Cinema (Map pp88–9; www.stkildaopenair.com.au; St Kilda Sea Baths, 10-18 Jacka Blvd, St Kilda; ☎ 16, 96)

CLASSICAL

Following are a few of the city's main players. These groups play at various venues across town. Check their websites or the local press for venues and concert dates. Melbourne also has a number of small, independent and often very innovative classical groups. Check the *Age* for listings.

MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

MSO; www.mso.com.au

Averaging 130 performances a year, the MSO has a loyal following. Their reach is broad: while not afraid to be populist (they've done sell-out performances with Burt Bacharach, Neil Sedaka and the

Whitlams), they can also do edgy. The Metropolis series premieres new Australian composition and challenging works from international contemporary composers. The well-regarded Melbourne Chorale has joined forces with the orchestra and is now known as the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chorus. The MSO performs regularly at Hamer Hall (see boxed text, p147), but also at other venues around the city, including the Malthouse (p164) and St Paul's Cathedral (p59).

MUSICA VIVA

<http://musicaviva.com.au>

National group Musica Viva stages ensemble music and performances around once a month at Hamer Hall (see boxed text, p147) and includes preshow talks. Its Ménage chamber concert series, where pioneering new music is performed in informal venues, is specifically aimed at 18- to 35-year-olds. They also hold midweek morning 'coffee' concerts at the Collins St Baptist Church.

OPERA

Melbourne has nurtured internationally acclaimed opera singers and continues to stage world-class productions. People do dress up for a night at the opera, especially opening and weekend nights of Opera Australia, but no one will blink an eyelid if you don't.

CHAMBER MADE THEATRE Map pp78–9

☎ 9329 7422; www.chambermade.org.au; Arts House, Meat Market, 1 Blackwood St, North Melbourne; ☎ 55, 59

Founded in 1988, Chamber Made productions showcase contemporary music and music-based performance art. Performances aren't usually more frequent than quarterly, though they supplement productions with work in progress presentations.

MELBOURNE OPERA

☎ 9614 4188; www.melbourneopera.com; 401 Collins St

A not-for-profit company that performs a classic repertoire in the stunning Atheneum Theatre (p357). Prices are reasonable.

OPERA AUSTRALIA

www.opera-australia.org.au

The national opera company performs with some regularity at Melbourne's

Victorian Arts Centre (p64). The company also performs a springtime Opera in the Bowl concert at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, which is worth looking out for if you are in town; it's free and unticketed. OzOpera, the company's education and access arm, tours schools and regional centres. Check the website for upcoming performances, as well as tips and recommendations for first timers.

VICTORIAN OPERA

www.victorianopera.com.au

This relatively new company is dedicated to innovation and to accessibility, with B reserve tickets under \$60 and a subscriber's 'balcony club' that has seats for \$25. Their program pleasingly doesn't always play it safe. They also tour to regional cities.

DANCE

Melbourne's dance scene has companies specialising in both traditional ballet performances and genre-busting modern pieces; see also p35.

AUSTRALIAN BALLET

Map pp64–5
☎ 1300 369 741, 9669 2700; www.australianballet.com.au; 2 Kavanagh St, Southbank

Based in Melbourne and now more than 40 years old, the Australian Ballet performs traditional and new works at the State Theatre at the Victorian Arts Centre. See p35, or visit the website for an extensive history as well as pending performances. The Southbank centre also includes a school. You can take an hour-long tour that includes a visit to the production and wardrobe departments as well as the studios of both the company and the school. It's \$10 per person and bookings are essential.

CHUNKY MOVE

Map pp64–5
☎ 9645 5188; www.chunkymove.com;
111 Sturt St, Southbank

The state's contemporary dance company performs at its sexy venue behind the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Chunky Move's pop-inspired pieces are internationally acclaimed. The company also runs a variety of dance (contemporary, ballet, funk, breakdance), yoga and pilates classes; see the website for details.

KAGE PHYSICAL THEATRE

Map pp78–9
☎ 9328 2474; www.kagephysicaltheatre.com;
Meat Market, 8/5 Blackwood St, North Melbourne;
☎ 19, 59

This modern dance company works between theatre and dance. This is witty and innovative stuff, well worth a look if you're not after a straight narratives. Check the website for performance details.

THEATRE

There is no distinct theatre district in Melbourne: individual companies and theatres are spread across town. Tickets start at about \$20 for independent productions, and \$30 upwards for mainstream theatre. See p35 for more on Melbourne's theatre scene.

LA MAMA

Map pp78–9
☎ 9347 6948; www.lamama.com.au; 205 Faraday St, Carlton; ☎ 19

La Mama is historically significant to Melbourne's theatre scene. This tiny, intimate forum produces new Australian works and experimental theatre, and has a reputation for developing emerging playwrights. For a profile of La Mama see boxed text, p36.

MALTHOUSE THEATRE

Map pp64–5
☎ 9685 5111; www.malthousetheatre.com.au;
113 Sturt St, South Melbourne; ☎ 1

The Malthouse Theatre Company often produces the most exciting theatre in Melbourne. Dedicated to promoting Australian works, the Malthouse tours nationally and to Asia. Housed in the atmospheric Malthouse Theatre since 1990, it includes a number of theatre spaces of varying sizes and includes the Tower Theatre.

New Theatres

At time of going to press the rhythmic sounds of construction were the only music to be heard taking place on the corner of Sturt St and Southbank Blvd, the site of the new [Melbourne Recital Hall](#) and the [Melbourne Theatre Company's](#) eventual Southbank home. That is set to change when they open in 2009. The 1000-seat recital hall will bear the name of arts philanthropist Dame Elisabeth Murdoch and will be a world-class venue for chamber music. The MTC's 500-seat space promises to break the 'brass and carpet' theatre aesthetic and will embrace new technologies with gusto.

CURTAINS UP

Blockbuster musicals have the good fortune of playing in Melbourne's graceful old theatres, including the following. Book tickets through one of the agencies listed on p357.

Athenaeum (Map pp52–3; ☎ 9650 1500; www.ticketmaster.com.au; 188 Collins St) The old dame dates back to the 1830s and the theatre now hosts Melbourne Opera and the International Comedy Festival

Comedy Theatre (Map pp52–3; ☎ 9299 9800; www.marrinertheatres.com.au; 240 Exhibition St) This midsize 1920s Spanish-style venue is dedicated to comedy theatre and musicals.

Her Majesty's (Map pp52–3; ☎ 8643 3300; www.hmt.com.au; 219 Exhibition St) On the outside Her Maj is red-brick Second Empire; on the inside it's 1930s Moderne. It's been the home of musical comedy since 1880 and is still going strong.

Princess Theatre (Map pp52–3; ☎ 9299 9800; www.marrinertheatres.com.au; 163 Spring St) This gilded Second-Empire beauty has a long and colourful history. It's reputed to have a resident ghost – that of singer Federici, who died as he descended through the stage trap in 1888 after playing Mephistopheles in the opera *Faust*.

Regent Theatre (Map pp52–3; ☎ 9299 9500; www.marrinertheatres.com.au; 191 Collins St) The Regent, a Rococo picture palace from the 1920s, is used less as a venue than the Princess, but when it hosts musicals and live acts, it's a fabulous opportunity to experience its elegant grandeur.

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

Map pp64–5
MTC; ☎ 9684 4500; www.mtc.com.au; Victorian Arts Centre, 100 St Kilda Rd

Melbourne's major theatrical company performs at the Victorian Arts Centre. The MTC stages around 15 productions each year, ranging from contemporary and modern (including many new Australian works) to Shakespearean and other classics.

RED STITCH ACTORS THEATRE

Map pp88–9
☎ 9533 8082; www.redstitch.net; rear,
2 Chapel St, St Kilda

This independent company of actors stages new international works that are often premieres in Australia. The tiny black-box theatre, opposite the Astor (p162) and down the end of the driveway, is a cosy, intimate space.

THEATREWORKS

Map pp88–9
☎ 9534 3388; www.theatreworks.org.au;
14 Adand St, St Kilda; ☎ 64

Theatreworks is a community theatre dedicated to supporting a range of arts practitioners, housed in a parish hall that looks like it's straight out of *The Vicar of Dibley*. The company has been around for 25-odd years.

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

top picks

- **Australian Rules Football** (p168)
See the big men fly at the MCG during the AFL season
- **Cricket** (p169)
Join the capacity crowd at the Boxing Day Cricket Test
- **Jogging** (p174)
Do the Tan: run, jog or walk
- **Lawn Bowls** (p172)
Barefoot bowl with a pot in hand
- **Football** (p169)
Be part of the Melbourne Victory cheer squad for a night

Cynics snicker that sport is the sum of Melbourne's culture, although they're hard to hear above all that cheering, air punching and applause. Sport is undeniably the most dominant expression of common beliefs, practices and social behaviour. Melbourne is the birthplace of Australian Rules football and hosts a disproportionate number of international events, including the Australian Open, Australian Formula One Grand Prix and Melbourne Cup. The city's arenas, tracks, grounds and courts are regarded as the world's best-developed and well-situated cluster of facilities.

Sport is promoted and followed with such fervour in this city that the attendant surge of humanity is a spectacle in itself. And that's exactly why people love it: sporting attendance brings Melbourne's disparate communities together for the single resounding purpose of following their team. Sport acts as a social glue that binds communities.

Australians are frequently perceived as 'armchair experts', and experts they invariably are. And while spectating may be perceived as an entirely passive pastime, think about the intense concentration and outpouring of emotion expended. There may not be too many muscles moving but a good game is sure to raise a heart rate, and the brain will be working overtime to scrutinise every nuance, decision, kick, call and turn.

Media attention fuels the culture of celebrity surrounding Melbourne's sporting heroes. There's an incessant hunger for snippets of players' private lives, and sportspeople are often used to endorse commercial products. Sporting heroes have sung the praises of products ranging from milk and watches to hair-replacement therapy and toilet paper.

There's some spectacle in the city's sporting calendar whatever month or week you're in Melbourne. Getting along to some sport is an often exhilarating way to witness Melbourne culture.

Exhilarating in a different way, activities including canoeing, cycling and sailing are super options for seeing the city and its surrounds. Melbourne's landscape is flat as a tack, so cycling can be as leisurely as you like. Traversing the city's waterways offers a unique perspective on equally unique surrounds.

Personal fitness can range from a weekly walk in one of Melbourne's many parks to a boot camp-style regime at a nearby gym. If you insist on exercising while on holiday, there are plenty of ways to work out. Of course, not all healthy activities involve exertion; see Day Spas (p173) for some suggestions for healthy indulgence.

SPECTATOR SPORT

Underneath the cultured chat and designer threads of your typical Melbournian, you'll find a heart that truly belongs to one thing: sport. The city takes the shared spectacle and tribal drama of the playing field very seriously; at the same time, it's also seen as an excuse to get together with some mates. Sport is promoted and followed with such fervour in this city that the crowds are often entertainment in themselves.

AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL

Understanding the basics of Australian Rules Football (AFL, or just 'the footy') is definitely a way to get a local engaged in conversation, especially between March and September, when the game is played. Melbourne is the national

centre for the sport, and the Melbourne-based [Australian Football League \(AFL; www.afl.com.au\)](http://www.afl.com.au) administers the national competition.

During the footy season, the vast majority of Victorians become obsessed: entering tipping competitions at work, discussing groin injuries and suspensions over the water cooler, and devouring huge chunks of the daily newspapers devoted to mighty victories, devastating losses and the latest bad-boy behaviour (on and off the field) of the sport's biggest stars. Monday night disciplinary tribunals allocate demerit points for every bit of blood and biff, and players can then be banned from playing. Fans follow these proceedings with almost as much attention as the games themselves. One thing is certain: footy fans always know better than the umpires, who have been a longstanding target for hecklers. Once disparagingly referred to as 'white maggots'

because of their lily white uniforms, they're now decked out in bright-coloured livery so players can spot them in the thick of the game. Now fans just call them 'maggot' for short.

The MCG, affectionately referred to as the 'G', has been the home of football since 1859 and its atmosphere can't be replicated. The AFL now has teams in every mainland state but nine of its 16 clubs are still based in Melbourne (as well as the regional team Geelong). Since the demise of the local grounds, all of these teams will play their home games at either the MCG or Telstra Dome; the current MCG tenant clubs are Melbourne, Richmond, Collingwood and Hawthorn, the rest, besides Geelong, reside at the Dome. Games are held on Friday or Saturday nights, as well as Saturday or Sunday afternoons. Those between two Melbourne teams ensure a loud, parochial crowd. Tickets are reasonably priced, with reserved seats from \$33 a pop, and unreserved admission even less. For sustenance, there are meat pies and hot chips at half-time. Thirsts are quenched with beer sipped from plastic cups at quarter time and three-quarter time. (A BYO thermos of tea and a sandwich is a perfectly acceptable substitute, particularly if you're of a certain age.) Barracking has its own lexicon and is often a one-sided 'conversation' with the umpire. When the siren blows, and after the winning club theme song is played (usually several times over), it's off to the pub. Supporters of opposing teams often celebrate and commiserate together. Despite the deep tribal feelings, and passionate expression of belonging that AFL engenders, violence is almost unheard of pre-, post-, or during games.

For game fixtures, see the AFL website or check the *Age* newspaper. Reserved ticketing for the MCG, Telstra Dome and Skilled Stadium in Geelong can be purchased from [Ticketmaster](http://www.ticketmaster.com.au) (1300 136 122; www.ticketmaster.com.au).

AUSTRALIAN TENNIS OPEN

The last two weeks of January is tennis time in Melbourne, when the city hosts the [Australian Open \(www.australianopen.com\)](http://www.australianopen.com) tennis championships. The world's top players come to compete at [Melbourne Park \(p67\)](http://www.ticketmaster.com.au) in the year's first of the big four Grand Slam tournaments. With daily attendance figures breaking world records (well over half a million people come through the turnstiles over the two weeks) a carnival atmosphere prevails around the grounds. While there are picnics and musical

diversions in the sunshine, there's a hushed respect during key matches. National tensions between fans have been met with heavy-handed policing in the past, but the most disruptive element is usually the elements themselves. The chance of at least one 40°C scorcher is high. Tickets are available through [Ticketek \(premier.ticketek.com.au\)](http://www.ticketmaster.com.au) and range from about \$25 for ground passes to well over \$100 for finals.

CRICKET

For any cricket fan, seeing a game at the [Melbourne Cricket Ground \(p67\)](http://www.ticketmaster.com.au) is a must-do-before-you-die rite of devotion. International test matches, one-day internationals and the Pura Cup (formerly the Sheffield Shield, the national cricket competition) are all played here. Warm days, cricket's leisurely pace and gangs of supporters who've travelled from far and wide often make for some spectator theatrics (the good, the bad and the ugly). The cricket season in Australia is from October to March. General admission to international matches starts at around \$30 and reserved seats start going from \$45 to upwards of \$100, with finals costing more and usually requiring a booking. The cricket event of the year is the traditional Boxing Day Test (held on 26 December, and for many bigger than Christmas). It sells out fast. Tickets can be purchased from [Ticketmaster](http://www.ticketmaster.com.au) (1300 136 122; www.ticketmaster.com.au).

FOOTBALL

With so many other codes to compete with, the original game of football is most often referred to as soccer in Australia, despite the Football Federation of Australia's official assertion of the football tag. Despite all the competition, the game's rise in Melbourne has been spectacular. A new A League national competition was formed in 2005 and with it came a large supporter base and a higher profile for the game. Australia's solid performance in the 2006 FIFA World Cup also contributed to its new-found popularity, as does its status as the 'world game'. There are eight teams in the national competition (including a team from honorary 'state' New Zealand). After winning the FFA Grand Final in 2007, Melbourne Victory did not fare so well in 2008. The team has amazingly vocal supporters (including a British-style cheer squad); with the Dome's cauldronlike acoustics it makes for some atmospheric play. Melbourne Victory plays its

home games at [Telstra Dome](#) (p66) and the season runs from October to May. Go to Melbourne Victory's website (www.melbournevictory.com.au) for more details.

RUGBY LEAGUE

Northern import rugby league attracts a moderate following, with around 11,000 fans showing up to cheer on the National Rugby League's (NFL) only Melbourne team, the [Melbourne Storm](#) (www.melbournestorm.com.au), although crowds rise to between 20,000 and 30,000 for key clashes. The team had an incredibly successful year in 2007, losing only three games and going on to comprehensively defeat favourites Manly in the 2007 NFL Grand Final. The Storm also played in the 2008 World Club Challenge, losing to the Leeds Rhinos. Rugby league is an acquired taste (one which we admit to), and its proud supporter base tends to be drawn from the northern states and from across the Tasman. The Storm's home ground is [Olympic Park](#) (p67) and the season runs from April to September.

RUGBY UNION

Rugby union does not have a professional league in Melbourne, but draws surprisingly large, often sell-out, crowds to international matches at the Telstra Dome. The stadium recorded its highest sporting attendance (56,605) during a Wallabies tour. But it's a long time between drinks for Melbourne union fans, with only one or two nights out per year. Visit www.rugby.com.au for more details.

HORSE RACING

They're racing every Saturday at either Flemington, Caulfield, Moonee Valley or Sandown. Every Friday the *Age* and *Herald Sun* newspapers publish what's happening around the fields. For a long-term calendar, visit the website of [Racing Victoria](#) (www.racingvictoria.com.au).

The Melbourne Cup, watched by 700 million people in over 170 countries, is the feature event of Melbourne's Spring Racing Carnival, which runs through October and culminates with the Cup in early November. The whole city's a-jitter, and milliners, fashion retailers, beauty therapists and caterers hit pay dirt during this time. The carnival's major races are the Cox Plate, the Caulfield Cup, the Dalgety, the Mackinnon Stakes and the Holy Grail itself, the Melbourne Cup. Apart from these

racers, the ultrasocial Derby Day and Oaks Day feature prominently on the spring racing calendar.

The 2-mile (3.2km) Melbourne Cup, always run on the first Tuesday of November at Flemington Racecourse, was first staged in 1861. The Cup brings the whole of Australia to a standstill for the three-or-so minutes during which the race is run. Serious punters and fashion-conscious racegoers (who spend an estimated \$54.5 million on clothes and accessories) pack the grandstand and lawns of the racecourse. The city's once-a-year gamblers each make their choice or organise Cup syndicates with friends, and the race is watched or listened to on TVs and radios in pubs, clubs, TAB betting shops and houses across the land.

FLEMINGTON RACECOURSE [Map pp48–9](#)

☎ 1300 727 575; www.vrc.net.au; 400 Epsom Rd, Flemington; 📍 [Flemington Racecourse](#)
Home of the Victoria Racing Club and the Melbourne Cup, Flemington has regular race meets. During the Spring Racing Carnival, Flemington's roses bloom, the lawns are manicured and the bars are groomed for the thousands who visit at this time of the year.

MOTOR SPORTS

The [Australian Formula One Grand Prix](#) (☎ 9258 7100; www.grandprix.com.au/cars), held in March, has the kind of figures that make petrolheads swoon: 300km/h, 950bhp and 19,000rpm. The 5.3km street circuit around normally tranquil Albert Park Lake is known for its smooth, fast surface. The buzz, both on the streets and in your ears, takes over Melbourne for four fully sick days. The fortunes of Australia's own F1 hero Mark Webber have been mixed of late, but his presence generates a lot of local interest. If the F1 and F3 cars aren't enough, October brings their two-wheeled counterparts to town, with the [Motorcycle Grand Prix](#) (www.grandprix.com.au/bikes) on Phillip Island.

BASKETBALL

The [National Basketball League](#) (www.nbl.com.au) follows the American model, with cheerleaders and odd music grabs. Melbourne's [Tigers](#) (www.tigers.com.au) has been around for 70-odd years. Its biggest asset was Andrew Gaze; now retired from the game (though now a lively commentator), he's played the most NBL games (611) of any player and played in the Australian Olympics team five times.

The Melbourne Tigers claimed the 2007/08 National Basketball League (NBL) championship, beating the Sydney Kings. The season runs from October to March and the Tigers play at the State Netball and Hockey Centre in [Royal Park](#) (p80), Melbourne.

ACTIVITIES

CANOEING & KAYAKING

[Yarra Bend Park](#) (p73) stretches 12km north of Richmond. It's within easy cycling distance of Southbank along the Main Yarra Trail. [Studley Park Boathouse](#) ([Map pp48–9](#); ☎ 9853 1972; www.studleyparkboathouse.com.au) hires two-person canoes for \$28 for the first hour. Further out, try [Fairfield Boathouse](#) ([Map pp48–9](#); ☎ 9486 1501; www.fairfieldboathouse.com), which rents a variety of leisure craft, including canoes and replicas of the Thames craft used in the 19th century – poetry and parasols are optional. Prices per hour range from \$15 to \$30. Both boathouses have cafés, open for breakfast and lunch.

Sea-kayaking is popular along Victoria's beaches and bays, with lots of opportunities to spot sea lions, gannets, penguins and dolphins. Close to town try [East Coast Kayaking](#) (☎ 9597 0549; www.eastcoastkayaking.com). Apollo Bay offers some beautiful scenery and the chance to see fur seals. Contact [Apollo Bay Surf & Kayak](#) for details (☎ 5237 1189; www.apollobaysurfkayak.com.au).

CYCLING

You're cycling beside the river through a grove of trees, bellbirds are singing, and rosellas are swooping low over the path. You're miles from anywhere, right? No, you're on the Main Yarra Trail, one of Melbourne's many inner-city bike paths along the riverside green belts. Melbourne's bike lane network is a great way to actively appreciate the city. Disused railway lines have also been turned over to cyclists, with a number of rail trails in greater Melbourne providing excellent touring possibilities.

Maps are available from the Visitor Information Centre at Federation Sq ([Map pp52–3](#)) and [Bicycle Victoria](#) (☎ 8636 8888; www.bv.com.au). The urban series includes the Main Yarra Trail (35km), off which run the Merri Creek Trail (19km), the Outer Circle Trail (34km), the Maribyrnong River Trail (22km) and the western beaches. At least 20 other long urban cycle paths exist, all marked in the [Melway Greater Melbourne Street Directory](#). In addition, [VicRoads](#) (www.vicroads.vic.gov.au) has print-

able maps of Melbourne's cycle paths on its website. You'll not be alone on the roads either. There is a large club scene, with the less hard-core as into the postride café breakfasts as much as the ride itself. Spoke(n), a cult St Kilda bike shop, lists events and clubs on its website (www.spoken.com.au/events/).

Wearing a helmet while cycling is compulsory in Melbourne (as it is in the rest of Australia).

DIVING

Diving the reefs and wrecks along Vic's coast reveals a wealth of underwater critters including weedy and leafy sea dragons. Port Phillip Bay has the richness of a tropical reef due to nutrient-rich waters. The sponge communities at the heads of the bay rival their coral counterparts in colour, shape and endless variation. Popular diving sites are located off Portsea (p208) on the Mornington Peninsula and Queenscliff on the Bellarine Peninsula (p220). Both have dive centres that operate dive boats and courses for those wishing to learn or add another level of qualification to their dive belts.

GOLF

Melbourne's golf courses are rated among the best in the world. The illustrious Sandbelt refers to 10 courses stretching along the bay; they're built on a sand base, creating perfect conditions year-round. Among them are [Royal Melbourne](#) (www.royalmelbournegc.com), Australia's best and rated No 6 in the world, [Huntingdale](#) (www.huntingdalegolf.com.au), home of the Australian Masters tournament, and [Kingston Heath](#) (www.kingstonheath.com.au), ranked No 2 in Australia and host to high-profile tournaments. Unfortunately, many are private courses: you'll need a letter of introduction from your own club, and often a verifiable handicap, to get a hit.

For public courses, it's best to book ahead. Green fees cost around \$25 for 18 holes during the week, and all courses have clubs and buggies for hire. You'll find a summary of the state's courses at www.ausgolf.com.au. Some good public courses close to town include the following.

ALBERT PARK GOLF COURSE

[Map pp92–3](#)

☎ 9510 5588; www.golfvictoria.com.au; Queens Rd, Albert Park; 🌅 dawn-dusk; 📍 3, 5, 6, 16, 64, 6
This 18-hole championship golf course is set on the fringes of Albert Park Lake (p91),

just 2km from the city. Located alongside the Australian Formula One Grand Prix racing circuit, a separate **driving range** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 9696 4653; Aughtie Dr; ☎ 7am–10pm) allows golfers to hit off from 65 two-tier all-weather bays.

BRIGHTON GOLF COURSE

Off Map pp48–9

☎ 9592 1388; www.brightongolfclub.com.au; 232 Dendy St, Brighton; ☎ dawn-dusk

One of the adored Sandbelt courses for which Melbourne is known, this 18-hole course keeps golfers on their toes with water hazards and deep bunkers. It's about 10km southeast of the CBD.

YARRA BEND GOLF COURSE

Map pp48–9

☎ 9481 3729; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Yarra Bend Rd, Fairfield; ☎ dawn-dusk

Yarra Bend is just 4km from the city, and affords views of the Yarra River. It's an 18-hole course that also offers instruction, and a Japanese-speaking staff member is on hand.

INDOOR ROCK CLIMBING

HARDROCK@VERVE Map pp52–3

☎ 9631 5300; www.hardrock.com.au; 501 Swanston St; ☎ noon–10pm Mon–Fri, 11am–7pm Sat & Sun Not the bar franchise but an indoor climbing centre with naturalistic surfaces to 16m and city views. With a few storeys of glass frontage, the city gets to view you too.

IN-LINE SKATING

The best skating paths are those around Port Phillip Bay, particularly the stretch from Port Melbourne south through St Kilda to Brighton. **Rock'n Skate Shop** (Map pp88–9; ☎ 9525 3434; Suite 3, 22 Fitzroy St, St Kilda; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–7pm Sat & Sun summer, 11am–6pm daily winter) hires skates and padding for \$10 for the first hour, \$5 for every hour after that. Overnight hire, with pick up after 5pm and return before noon, costs \$15, while 24-hour hire is \$25. You'll need an Australian drivers license, a passport or a credit card as ID.

LAWN BOWLS

Formerly the domain of senior citizens wearing starched white uniforms, bowling clubs have recently been inundated by younger

types: barefoot, with a beer in one hand and a bowl in the other. With a game costing between \$5 and \$10 (including bowls' hire), and cheap beer on tap, bowls makes for a leisurely afternoon with mates.

NORTH FITZROY BOWLS

Map pp48–9

☎ 9481 3137; www.fvbowls.com.au; 578 Brunswick St, North Fitzroy; ☎ 112

Officially known as the Fitzroy Victoria Bowling & Sports Club, this centre comes equipped with lights for night bowls, barbecues and a beer garden. The dress code is neat-casual, with slippers or thongs acceptable. Phone to make a booking and for opening times, which vary from day to day.

ST KILDA BOWLING CLUB

Map pp88–9

☎ 9537 0370; 66 Fitzroy St, St Kilda;

☎ noon-sunset Tue–Sun; ☎ 16, 96

The only dress code at this popular bowling club is shoes off. So join the many others who de-shoe to enjoy a beer and a bowl in the great outdoors. This club provides bowls and a bit of friendly instruction for first timers; Francophiles can opt for *boules*.

SAILING

With about 20 yacht clubs around the shores of Port Phillip, yachting is one of Melbourne's most popular passions. Races and regattas are held on most weekends, and the bay is a memorable sight when it's sprinkled with hundreds of colourful sails. Conditions can change radically and without warning, making sailing on the bay a challenging, and sometimes dangerous, pursuit. Other popular boating areas around the state include the sprawling Gippsland Lakes system, the water-sports playground of Lake Eildon (p311) and the low-key cruisey Mallacoota Inlet (p295) near the border.

If you want to feel the wind in your hair, **Hobsons Bay Yacht Club** (Map p96; ☎ 9397 6393; www.hbyc.asn.au; 268 Nelson Pl, Williamstown) welcomes volunteers on Wednesday nights (arrive by 5.30pm). In summer you can stow away with the **Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron** (Map pp88–9; ☎ 9534 0227; www.rmys.com.au; Pier Rd, St Kilda) on Wednesday nights (\$15); arrive by 4.30pm. Be sure to wear nonmarking shoes and take along waterproof gear if you have it.

Melbourne's two main ocean races are the Melbourne to Devonport and Melbourne to Hobart events, held annually between Christ-

mas and New Year. The Melbourne to Hobart race goes around Tasmania's wild western coast; the more famous Sydney to Hobart event runs down the eastern coast.

SURFING

One of the few places you'll feel at home wearing a skin-tight black rubber suit is among the waves that crash along the Victorian coast. The closest surf beaches to Melbourne are those on the Mornington (p204) and Bellarine Peninsulas (p220), both about an hour's drive from the city. The best stretches are further out along the Great Ocean Rd (p224) and Phillip Island (p200). Boards and wetsuits are available to hire from seaside shops, as are lessons on how to carve up the swell. The **Rip Curl Pro** (www.ripcurl.com/?prohome_en) is held at legendary Bells Beach (or wherever the surf is pumping nearby) each Easter. Visit the website of **Surfing Australia** (www.surfingaustralia.com.au) for a list of competitions and surf schools, as well as the ever-important rules of local etiquette.

TENNIS

It's not just as spectators that Melbournians really dig tennis. You'll find enthusiastic clubs and beautifully sited courts scattered throughout the inner city. The **East Melbourne Tennis Centre** (Map pp68–9; ☎ 9417 6511; cnr Simpson & Albert Sts, East Melbourne) charges between \$20 and \$30 for court hire depending on the time of day and week, including rackets, for the hour. **Melbourne Park** (Map pp68–9; ☎ 9286 1244; www.mopt.com.au; Batman Ave), venue of the Australian Open, has 23 outdoor and five indoor courts; prices are per hour and vary depending on the time of day and week. Indoor court hire ranges from \$34 to \$40 and outdoor courts cost between \$26 and \$34, plus racquet hire.

WINDSURFING & KITE-SURFING

Elwood, just south of St Kilda, is a popular sailboarding area. **RPS – the Board Store** (Map pp48–9; ☎ 9525 6475; www.rpstheboardstore.com; 87 Ormond Rd, Elwood) hires gear and offers tuition. A 1½-hour group introductory lesson in kitesurfing costs \$70. A three-hour introductory course in windsurfing costs \$130. All gear is included; courses are weather-dependent and mainly limited to the summer months. Book at least a week ahead.

HEALTH & FITNESS DAY SPAS

Melbourne has some luxuriously indulgent day spas that offer the usual range of 'treatments' that go way beyond the basic massage/mani/pedi formula. The trend is definitely to the organic and the spiritual, though there is nothing aesthetic about any of the following places.

For day spas in the Daylesford & Hepburn Springs area, see the boxed text, p261. Or you could try a spa in Koonwarra (see p278), Lakes Entrance (see p288), Mt Buller (see p300), Mt Hotham (see p302), Falls Creek (see p304) or Mildura (see p325).

AESOP SPA

Map pp84–5

☎ 9866 5250; www.aesop.net.au; 153 Toorak Rd, South Yarra; ☎ appointments 10am–2pm Mon–Fri; ☎ South Yarra, ☎ 8

The intensely pleasurable facials offered by this local skincare guru raise the bar. Choose from five basic treatments (as well as your preferred musical accompaniment); your lactate surge or detox overhaul will be further customised to your skin while you're wrapped up in a mohair blanket on a cotton futon.

AURORA SPA RETREAT

Map pp88–9

☎ 9536 1130; www.auroraspairetreat.com; Prince Hotel, 2 Adland St; ☎ 96, 16, 112

There's an enormous and creative menu of wellness treatments that range from water-based massage and full-body wraps, all within a beautiful setting. But the staff's hard sell on product can rattle after you've just reached a max relaxation mode.

CHUAN SPA

Map pp64–5

☎ 8696 8111; www.chuanspa.com; Langham Hotel, 1 Southgate Ave, Southbank; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Sat, to 6pm Sun

This is a spin-off from the Hong Kong spa of the same name. Its Chinese garden-themed ambience is designed to 'liberate your reflective Yin side from its more active Yang counterpart'. It offers a full range of treatments, including water-based ones, and has a steam room and swimming pool.

CROWN SPA

Map pp64–5

☎ 9292 6182; www.crowntowers.com.au; Crown Towers, Southbank

Miles of marble and plenty of pamper at this traditional hotel spa. You can't go past

the luxuriously large (25m) indoor pool and two Rebound Ace tennis courts; your serve might be off but the views are breathtaking.

HEPBURN SPA AT ADELPHI Map pp52–3

☎ 8080 8888; www.hepburnspa.com.au; 187 Flinders Lane, Melbourne; ☎ 10am–10pm

This new spa is run by spa-country old-timers. Treatments, using the Australian botanical range LITYA, are relaxation-oriented and usually an hour plus, so not an on-the-run option. It offers Turkish-style *rasul* (mud treatments) too.

JAPANESE BATH HOUSE Map pp74–5

☎ 9419 0268; www.japanesebathhouse.com; 59 Cromwell St, Collingwood; bath \$26, shiatsu from \$44; ☎ 11am–10pm Tue–Fri, to 8pm Sat & Sun, ☎ 109

Urban as the setting may be, it's as serene as can be inside this authentic *sentō* (bath-house). Perfect for some communal skin-ship, a shiatsu and a postsoak sake in the *tatami* lounge.

RETREAT ON SPRING Map pp52–3

☎ 9948 8331; www.retreatonspring.com.au; 49 Spring St, Melbourne; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon & Tue, 10am–8pm Wed & Thu, 10am–7pm Fri, 9.30am–6pm Sat, 10am–5pm Sun

Retreat on Spring is an Aveda outfit, so toes a gently new-age line. The relaxing lounge area looks over Treasury Gardens and the treatment rooms are simple and luxurious. If you don't want a full treatment it also offers waxing services and has a nail bar.

YOGA & PILATES

Both yoga and Pilates are popular in Melbourne and you'll find studios offering either one or both spread through the city and suburbs. Yoga studios will usually have at least some casual classes on their timetables. There are both general studios as well as specialist Iyengar, Ashtanga and Bikram studios. Well-regarded studios include the **St Kilda Iyengar Yoga School** (Map pp88–9; ☎ 9537 1015; www.skys.com.au; 11/82 Acland St); **Bikram's Yoga College of India** (Map pp68–9; ☎ 9429 2112; www.bikramyogamelbourne.com.au; lvl1, 179 Bridge Rd, Richmond), and the **Ashtanga Yoga Centre of Melbourne** (Map pp74–5; ☎ 9419 1598; www.ashtangamelbourne.com.au; Level 1, 110–112 Argyle St, Fitzroy). Check the Find Yoga website

(www.findyoga.com.au) for a comprehensive listing.

Some Pilates studios will allow visitors to do casual mat classes, although you will often need to have some experience. **Aligned for Life** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 9642 4500; www.alignedforlife.com.au; 1/99 Queen St, Melbourne), which has fully qualified, professional staff, does offer small group mat classes; book ahead. See the Find Pilates website (www.findpilates.com.au) for a listing of more studios around town.

GYMS

Most gyms are open only to members, but sometimes offer casual fitness classes as well as yoga and Pilates to the general public. A casual gym visit at the charismatic **Melbourne City Baths** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 9663 5888; 420 Swanston St; gym visit \$18) includes a swim, sauna, spa and locker.

JOGGING

Favourite locations for a run include the Tan track around the Royal Botanic Gardens (4km; p82), the path around Albert Park Lake (5km; p91) and the sweeping paths of Fitzroy Gardens. The bicycle tracks beside the Yarra River and along the bay are also good choices; see Cycling, p171.

The **Melbourne Marathon** (www.melbournemarathon.com.au) is held in October. For those wanting something gentler, the popular **Run Melbourne** (www.theageruntotheg.com.au), better known as the Run to the G, offers a 5km run/walk, 7.5km walk, 10km run or a half-marathon in June. Or there's the national charity event, the **Mother's Day Classic** (www.mothersdayclassic.org), held in May with 8km, 4km and walking events.

SWIMMING

In summer do as most Melburnians do, and hit the sand at one of the city's metropolitan beaches. St Kilda, Middle Park and Port Melbourne are popular patches, with suburban beaches at Brighton and Sandringham. Public pools are also well loved.

FITZROY SWIMMING POOL Map pp74–5

☎ 9417 6493; Alexandra Pde, Fitzroy; adult/child \$4.20/1.80; ☎ 112

Between laps, locals love catching a few rays up in the bleachers or on the lawn; there's also a toddlers' pool. The pool's Italian 'Aqua Profonda' sign was painted

in 1953 – an initiative of the pool's manager who frequently had to rescue migrant children who couldn't read the English signs. The sign is heritage-listed (misspelled and all – it should be 'Acqua').

HAROLD HOLT SWIM CENTRE

Map pp48–9

☎ 8290 1678; 9 High St, Glen Iris; adult/child \$4.90/3.80; ☎ 72

There's an indoor pool and a 50m heated outdoor pool open daily. The pool has lovely shaded grassy areas. The swimming centre is oddly named in honour of Harold Holt, the Australian prime minister who went missing at Portsea surf beach – presumed drowned.

MELBOURNE CITY BATHS Map pp52–3

☎ 9663 5888; www.melbournecitybaths.com.au; 420 Swanston St, Melbourne; casual swim adult/child/family \$4.90/2.25/11, gym \$18; ☎ 6am–10pm Mon–Thu, 6am–8.30pm Fri, 8am–6pm Sat & Sun The City Baths were literally public baths when they first opened in 1860 and were intended to stop people bathing in and drinking the seriously polluted Yarra River.

They now boast the CBD's largest pool (it's 30m), plus you get to do your laps in a 1903 heritage-listed building. There is also a public spa, the full complement of gym facilities and squash courts.

MELBOURNE SPORTS & AQUATIC CENTRE Map pp92–3

☎ 9926 1555; www.msac.com.au; Albert Rd, Albert Park; adult/child \$5.90/4.40; ☎ 96, 112

In the parklands of Albert Park the Aquatic Centre features everything you could want in a pool. A 50m outdoor pool was added for the 2006 Commonwealth Games, plus there's a 25m lap pool, wave pool and water slide.

PRAHRAN AQUATIC CENTRE

Map pp84–5

☎ 8290 7140; 41 Essex St, Prahran; adult/child \$4/3.20; ☎ Oct–Apr; ☎ 72, 78, 79

This glam 50m heated outdoor pool is surrounded by a stretch of lawn. Families love the toddlers' pool, inflatable crocodile and teeny water slide. The on-site café is a must for the locals that can't do without their latte, seminaked or not.

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