



# Boomerang Business

**B**artenders like it when there's a convention in Melbourne. Unlike locals who know that tipping is not required in town, visitors—used to a tipping life at home—gladly give extra cash to service industry professionals.

It's not just the service industry, though, that feels the positive effects of a citywide convention. Everyone feels the impact—from hotel construction workers to realtors encouraged by tourists considering relocation. But the biggest effects of a convention are post-convention stays and repeat business.

According to the Melbourne CVB, the average length of stay in the city is 5.87 nights, with 31 percent seeking accommodations in regional Victoria as part of a

YOUR SPOTLIGHT ON

## Melbourne, Australia

BY JASON HENSEL

Melbourne trip. In fact, 58 percent of delegates consider returning to the city in the next five years for a holiday—at their own expense. Not every city can inspire people to revisit, but then again—as any local citizen will happily tell you—Melbourne is a city with which people can develop a relationship.

### WHY MELBOURNE?

Melbourne is renowned as the sporting,

fashion and entertainment capital of Australia, says Craig Sargent, managing director for Melbourne-based Corporate Meeting Planners.

"An ever-growing city, Melbourne accommodates up to 200 ethnic communities with nearly 180 faiths and religions, giving it the ability to accommodate local and international visitors' personal requirements," Sargent said.

In recognizing the city's international



atmosphere, many facilities can accommodate a variety of meal requirements. Approximately 60 percent of hotels cater special Asian meals, with 25 percent also offering kosher and halal options, according to the Melbourne CVB.

Some restaurants are also flexible enough to be converted on the fly.

"Our biggest event was for more than 150 delegates, all in single accommodations, for five days," Sargent said. "The event was held regionally and required the services of two hotels for both accommodation and conference facilities. Being a weeklong event, the main conference room was converted to a restaurant, while the restaurant became the business center."

It's this type of flexibility and improv-

sation that can make Melbourne appealing to planners worldwide. Whether playing host to the Melbourne Cup—one of the world's largest horseracing events—or featuring a game at the 100,000-seat Melbourne Cricket Ground, the city knows how to handle events.

Melbourne can also handle smaller events and incentives.

"We like to suggest events that delegates would not normally do, such as trips to the Geelong region," Sargent said. "We often suggest delegates go for a marine safari and swim with dolphins and seals in the middle of Port Phillip Bay or visit the Goldfields, with a day at the Sovereign Hill gold-mining village where delegates can wear period costumes and pan for gold as

people did in the 1800s, theming activities around the nature of the event."

As with any destination visit, it's wise to seek local help in logistics planning for Melbourne events.

"For overseas or interstate planners, the answer is simple—engage the services of local professionals," Sargent said. "No one person can ever claim to have all the answers. Local professionals will know how best to move delegates from one point to another, from the airport to venue, local traditions and customs."

#### **I'M WALKING, YESIREE**

Much like Pittsburgh or Stockholm, Sweden, Melbourne (pronounced "Melbin") is a compact, clean city with several

## Melbourne, Australia By the Numbers

**Rooms:** 12,000

### Prominent Meeting Facilities

- Crown Towers (2,500 capacity)
- Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre (2,200 capacity)
- Melbourne Museum (2,000 capacity)
- Melbourne & Olympic Parks (1,900 capacity)
- Carlton Crest Hotel Melbourne (1,700 capacity)
- Grand Hyatt Melbourne (1,500 capacity)
- Telstra Dome (1,400 capacity)
- Melbourne Aquarium (1,200 capacity)
- Epicure at Melbourne Cricket Ground (1,000 capacity)
- Hilton on the Park - Melbourne (1,000 capacity)
- Sofitel Melbourne (1,000 capacity)
- ZINC at Federation Square (1,000 capacity)
- No. 12 Elizabeth Street Kensington (800 capacity)
- Crown Promenade (700 capacity)
- Park Hyatt Melbourne (600 capacity)
- RACV Club (600 capacity)
- Lexus Centre (500 capacity)
- Rydges Melbourne (500 capacity)
- The Cellars at the Wine Society (400 capacity)
- Langham Hotel Melbourne (400 capacity)
- Waterview Function Centre (400 capacity)
- Hotel Y (350 capacity)
- Crowne Plaza Melbourne (350 capacity)
- Rendezvous Hotel Melbourne (350 capacity)
- The Hotel Windsor (350 capacity)
- Comme (300 capacity)
- Royce Hotel (300 capacity)
- Golden Tulip Melbourne (250 capacity)
- Holiday Inn on Flinders (250 capacity)
- Quality Batman's Hill on Collins (180 capacity)
- The Westin Melbourne (160 capacity)
- Comfort Hotel - Elizabeth Tower (100 capacity)

## Know Before You Go

- **Transportation:** Melbourne Airport serves 20 international, five domestic and six freight airlines, such as Air China, British Airways, Emirates Airline, Qantas Airways, Singapore Airlines and United Airlines. Public transportation—buses, taxis and trams—are widely available throughout Melbourne.
- **Visas:** Visitors other than Australians and New Zealanders are required to obtain visas to travel to Australia. A business visa allows those attending conferences and meetings to make visits of up to three months.
- **Currency:** Australian dollar
- **Weather:** Southern Hemisphere seasons are opposite to Northern Hemisphere ones (e.g., summer in the Northern Hemisphere is winter in the Southern Hemisphere).
- **Electricity:** 220-240V, 50Hz
- **Time Zone:** GMT +10



Federation Square occupies a full city block and includes bars, restaurants, galleries, cinemas and event space.

## Getting Started

**Events Australia**

<http://events.australia.com>

**Melbourne CVB**

[www.mcvb.com.au](http://www.mcvb.com.au)

**Tourism Australia**

[www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com)

## What's New in Melbourne

- The **Melbourne Convention Centre** will open in 2009, offering a 5,000-seat auditorium, a connected Hilton hotel, the new Maritime Museum and retail space.
- **Eureka Tower** opened its events-only 89th floor in February and its 88th floor observation deck in March.
- **Indian Airlines** will start service between New Delhi and Melbourne in January.
- The 1,000-seat **Melbourne Recital Centre** and a 500-seat theater for the Melbourne Theatre Company will open in 2009.
- A 27,750-seat sports stadium is set for completion in 2009.

public art displays and affecting architecture that makes it conducive to walking.

From the Melbourne Exhibition & Convention Centre, visitors can cross over the Yarra River via the Sandridge Railway Bridge. The bridge features 10 moving steel sculptures representing groups of people that call the area home. Along with the sculptures, there are 128 glass panels highlighting Melbourne's varying nationalities.

From the bridge, the walkway takes visitors through Flinders Street Station, one of Melbourne's most recognizable buildings. Its squash-colored facade and row of clocks at the main entrance make it a favorite meeting spot. From there, the city unfolds like a giving hand.

Outside the station, visitors have several choice avenues worth exploring, and if walking isn't preferred, the free City Circle tram on Flinders Street takes passengers on a circular route throughout the city, stopping at the more heavily visited sites.

One popular attraction is the Melbourne Museum, located in the relaxing Carlton Gardens. Featuring a central forest, the museum houses an extensive collection of historical and Aboriginal artifacts, hands-on exhibits and a broad collection of stuffed and pinned species native to Australia. For events, the museum can accommodate up to 2,000 in its Touring Hall, while its Main Foyer can play host to up to 1,400.

From the Melbourne Museum, visitors can either walk or take the city tram along Latrobe to Swanston Street and head south. Just like Elizabeth, Queen and Russell streets, Swanston crosses Bourke Street, an outdoor pedestrian mall bulging with high-end retailers, buskers and ample people-watching opportunities.

Further south on Swanston and back along Flinders is Federation Square, a venue deemed somewhat controversial because of its quirky, angular glass design

set among historic Victorian architecture. Federation Square occupies a full city block and includes bars and restaurants, galleries, cinemas and event space, including the 500-seat BMW Event amphitheater, the 1,000-capacity Atrium and two function centers—Champions and ZINC @ Federation Square.

### OUTSIDE THE CBD

Melbourne also offers several intriguing areas outside the central business district, including St. Kilda, the Melbourne Docklands and No. 12 Elizabeth Street Kensington.

Adjacent to Port Phillip Bay, parrot-imbued St. Kilda is a beach and artistic community much like Venice, Calif. Restaurants and bars line the streets, many featuring alfresco dining. Popular attractions include the Esplanade Hotel and Luna Park, a theme park that offers event space for up to 450.

The Melbourne Docklands was formerly one of Australia's busiest commercial ports and is now the site of several eateries and watering holes with event space for groups of all sizes. Delegates can eat, stroll along the water, view several public art displays and then watch a fireworks display to end an event night.

Located approximately 15 minutes by car from Melbourne's central business district, No. 12 Elizabeth Street Kensington can fool the eye with its warehouse appearance. However, inside space proves to be grand, modern, versatile and able to accommodate most types of functions. Large-scale puppets are available for event rental, as is a 360-degree screen for projections. The venue can play host to up to 300 for a sit-down dinner or 800 for a cocktail reception.

### NIGHTLIFE ADVENTURES

Melbourne takes its fun as seriously as

it takes its business, sports and art. European in design, many restaurants, cafes and shops are located on laneways, such as Degraes Street and Hardware Lane. Bars and clubs are found down alleys or in basements, making bar hopping an adventure in more than just mixology.

Melbourne has hundreds of entertainment options, but two stand out in historic and contrasting ways.

The Young & Jackson Hotel is a pub frequented by visitors and locals since 1861. Located on the corner of Swanston and Flinders streets, this historic Victorian building's most famous attraction is "Chloe," a nude portrait located on the top floor, which can accommodate groups of up to 150.

Another popular venue opened last year off Collins Street on the Alfred Place laneway. The sleek Comme—best described by *Vogue* as "downtown Manhattan [New York] in the heart of Melbourne"—offers planners two venues for events, the 50-capacity Onyx Room and the 200-capacity Grand Room featuring high ceilings; a marble bar; and two green, serpentine Murano glass chandeliers.

### DAY TRIPS

Several companies, such as Big Stick Adventures and Link Tours, offer activities such as helicopter rides, koala spotting, swimming with seals and vineyard touring on the Mornington Peninsula.

Along with outdoor and sightseeing activities, other cities—such as "Victoria's Surfing Capital" Torquay and Geelong, with its massive waterfront destination—on the Great Ocean Road offer visitors an array of options from shopping and eating to museums and spas, all available within a few-hours drive from Melbourne. **TMP**

JASON HENSEL is associate editor of *The Meeting Professional*.