Melbourne walks
walk number 6
sports and entertainment

Walking time: 2 hours
Distance: 4.75 Kilometres

Birrarung Marr, Royal Botanic Gardens and Melbourne’s famous sports precinct.

From Federation Square, step down to the Ferry Landings on Princes Walk. Walk along the avenue of Moreton Bay Figs, following the bluestone edging on the Yarra bank that shows where the river was widened to prevent flooding. Continue through the tranquil riverside until you arrive at Birrarung Marr.

Melbourne’s 21st century riverside park. ‘Birrarung’ means ‘river of mists’ in the language of the Wurundjeri people who originally lived here. ‘Marr’ was their name for the side of river we are on. Today, Melbourne’s residents and visitors come to enjoy the great outdoors and soak up the superb city views.

Walk from the Sea Wall to the Footbridge and Federation Bells on the middle terrace. Pass over Redgum Gully, planted with the type of trees that lined the Yarra before Europeans arrived. The Billabong beside the river symbolises the lagoons that once dotted the area.

To the left of the Billabong, under the trees, is Speakers Corner. From the 1880s to the 1960s, Prime Ministers, communists, evangelists, suffragettes and ordinary citizens gathered here to state their case. Look around the mounds for the Speakers Sculptures that interpret the site.

Continue past the Floating Landing near Swan Street Bridge. To your left is Melbourne Park, home of the Australian Open. Rod Laver Arena is named after the Australian tennis great who won the ‘Grand Slam’ twice. Today, audiences at the Open top half a million every year. The park also includes the state-of-the-art Vodafone Arena that hosts tennis, basketball and cycling.

Further on, across the footbridge, still on the left, is Yarra Park, where Australian football evolved in the 1850s with gum trees as goal posts. Look for the light masts and soak up the ‘G. Every September crowds of over 100,000 come to watch the finals and Grand Final of Australian Rules Football. In the summer, cricket fans laze in the sun at Test matches which run for up to five days.

The MCG was also the legendary stadium of the 1956 Olympics. If you have time, take a tour and discover more about its place in sporting history.

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Continue along the river, under the bridge, past Olympic Park. Athletics, cycling, soccer, speedway, rugby league, even greyhound races have been held here. Alongside Olympic Park you are walking above the underground CityLink Expressway, over the Burnley Tunnel (3.4 km long and 60 metres deep) and the shallower Domain Tunnel (1.6 km long).

Follow the elms to Morell Bridge, built over dry land in 1899 before the river was diverted underneath. Cross over to the Royal Botanic Gardens and enter through Gate A under the magnificent Durmast Oak. Stroll down to the old river bend, now an Ornamental Lake. The River Red Gum on your right is a remnant of the natural vegetation that grew here before the Gardens were first planted in 1846.

Walk straight ahead to the Separation Tree Rest House. Opposite the rest house is The Separation Tree, where Victorians in 1850 celebrated news of their coming independence from New South Wales (which became effective in 1851).
Follow the signs to the elegant Terrace Tea Rooms (1) and relax with a drink and a snack. Enjoy the sweeping views over the Ornamental Lake (2). Spot the bird life, eels in the lake, and Government House where Victoria’s Governor lives.

Stroll on past the William Tell Rest House (2) and over the bridge, hugging the lake. The lake system was progressively developed from the 1850s and incorporates a natural lagoon and an old river bend that remained after the Yarra River was straightened between 1897 and 1900.

Arrive at Gate H, near the rare plants of the Southern Chinese Collection. Look for the Aboriginal Heritage Plaque and the Garden Directors’ Names (3) on a rock face near the gardens exit.

Through Gate H, look up to the Temple of the Winds (3) as you jog the ‘Tan’ track for an easy 100 metres, then cross Alexandra Avenue to a Melbourne institution, the Yarra Barbecues (4).

Walk under Swan Street Bridge (2) and continue along the river towards the city. Look out for cyclists, roller bladers and power walkers passing by. In the early morning and late afternoon, you’ll see rowers here. Pass the Judge’s Box (5) (1930) then round a bend to the boatsheds. The first building, with its picturesque tower, was built in 1908 for the 50th anniversary of Melbourne University Boat Club (6) (Australia’s oldest rowing club).

Walk up the ramp to Princes Bridge (7) and return to Federation Square (8).

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**Melbourne Walks**

There are a number of self-guided walks in this series. These walks have been developed by Federation Square and the City of Melbourne.

For more information
Call City of Melbourne Hotline 9658 9658
Visit www.thatsmelbourne.com.au
Or visit the Melbourne Visitor Centre, Federation Square
Cnr Swanston and Flinders Streets, Melbourne
Federation Square Management
Telephone 03 9655 1900
www.fedsq.com