Melbourne Walks

3 On the Waterfront

Spectacular bridges, Indigenous history, sculptures, Southbank Promenade, Melbourne Aquarium and the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre feature on this walk of discovery along the north and south banks of the Yarra River.

Walking time 2 hours
Distance 4.75 Kilometres

Federation Square is a centre of cultural activity for Melbourne. Positioned on the city’s busiest intersection across the road from Flinders Street Station and the most prominent section of the city’s busy tram network, it brings together several creative institutions, cafes, bars and is home to the Melbourne Visitor Centre.

From Federation Square, walk south along Princes Bridge over the Yarra River and follow the ramp down to the riverside in Alexandra Gardens and then walk under the bridge. There have been three bridges on this site, each larger than the last. The first was built of timber and named after the Prince of Wales in 1845.

You will pass the giant steel sculpture ‘Dervish’ the 1981 work of Melbourne-born sculptor Clement Meadmore, which has a current market value of around $500,000.

If you have time, take a boat’s eye view of the city with a leisurely scenic cruise, romantic gondola or water taxi ride. Ask for tickets and information at one of the information booths along the riverside.

Walk past Southgate Restaurant and Shopping Centre along Melbourne’s Southbank Promenade. Before European settlement, this area was a lush wetland teeming with fish and birdlife, extending from the banks of the Yarra to what is now Albert Park and supporting the Indigenous peoples of the Woiwurung and Bunurong communities. But in the 1850s it became ‘Canvas Town’, where migrants and gold seekers first pitched their tents. Today, it’s a booming stretch of apartments, offices, hotels, shops, restaurants, squares, visitor attractions and urban art – once again a meeting and socialising place as it was for the original inhabitants of the area for thousands of generations.

Cross the Southbank Pedestrian Bridge which marks where a significant creek, or tributary into the Yarra River once flowed. Elizabeth Street now covers where a three-metre waterfall originally prevented saltwater from entering the river. It was also the only place for miles where Aboriginal people could cross the river over a reef of rocks. They believed the falls were created by Bunjil (the eagle hawk), and in its original form the area was a habitat for animals and resources that weren’t found anywhere else.

In 1835 John Pascoe Fawkner’s ‘Enterprize’ sailed up the Yarra from Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) to create a commercial settlement. For the Indigenous people who had lived along the river for thousands of years, the landscape would change forever.

Heading west along Flinders Walk, pass under Sandridge Railway Bridge and you come to Queen’s Bridge just beyond the Banana Alley Vaults. In 1910, some 20,000 people watched Houdini dive into the river from this bridge, locked in chains. After 25 seconds, he came up laughing. Houdini’s spot was well chosen.

The river is shallow here, where a three-metre waterfall originally prevented saltwater from entering the river. It was also the only place for miles where Aboriginal people could cross the river over a reef of rocks. They believed the falls were created by Bunjil (the eagle hawk), and in its original form the area was a habitat for animals and resources that weren’t found anywhere else.

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The Yarra’s waterfall was destroyed in the mid-19th century to allow the tall ships access to the wide basin or ‘pool’ of the Yarra, now recreated near Enterprize Wharf. Five carved figureheads titled Constellation evoke the spirit of these ships. However, the destruction of the waterfall also ruined the ecology of the area with salt water now flowing into the freshwater wetlands.

Early port facilities were also located here, as well as bond stores and the Customs House, now the Immigration Museum. After gold was discovered in 1850 in Warrandyte, north east from Melbourne, thousands of people from all over the world descended on the city in their quest for fortune, and this natural harbour was their first port of call. The impact on the local Kulin population was devastating – the destruction of natural food sources and the introduction of diseases meant that the 1839 population of 1225 Indigenous people was reduced to just 181 by 1863.

Enterprize Park is the site of the ‘Scar Project’. Traditionally, Indigenous people would take pieces of bark from some trees to make canoes, shields or baby cradles, and these ‘scar trees’ would serve as a signpost for other clans to know they had entered the land of another community. These trees are rare today, but for Aboriginal people they are very precious. The ‘Scar Project’, located here on the ‘pool’ of Melbourne, is representative of these scar trees and was constructed by Indigenous artists who used original wharf poles from Queens Bridge.

Walk past the popular SEA LIFE Melbourne Aquarium that features a breathtaking underwater wonderland where children and adults can enjoy ‘fish-eye’ views of sea life and its many different creatures.

Then cross to Batman Park and take Spencer Street Footbridge to South Wharf, and follow the river concourse to Dukes and O’Rors docks (1875), now home to Polly Woodside.

The Seafarers Bridge next to Dukes Dock will take you across the Yarra to the southern end of Docklands, Melbourne’s newest community, now home to thousands of residents and headquarters for several of Australia’s most successful companies. There’s a fantastic collection of outdoor public art throughout Docklands, and a growing number of restaurants and bars, events and parks and gardens.

On South Wharf, continue to the spectacular Webb Bridge – a snaking pedestrian and cycle link between the Southbank promenade at Yarra’s Edge and the Docklands. Designed by Melbourne artist Robert Owen with Architects Denton Corker Marshall, the design is an analogy of Koorie fishing traps, drums, baskets and the gestural flow of the river below.

Walk back along the river past the many retail outlets and restaurants located in South Wharf. The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre made up of convention and meeting spaces and a huge exhibition hall, it is the first ‘6 Star Green Star’ convention centre in the world and is a technological marvel designed with the environment in mind using fresh air, natural light and solar power. The entry-level foyer has an 18-metre-high glass wall facade overlooking the Yarra River. Every angle and level provide spectacular views of the city.

Take a leisurely stroll along the river as you walk back to Fed Square.

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia

**Arts and Culture**

**ArtPlay**

Bookings essential. artplay.com.au

Tel: 9664 7900

**Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI)**

Mon to Sun

10am to 5pm

**NGV Studio**

Sun to Wed

10am to 5pm

Thurs to Sat

10am to 10pm

**No Vacancy**

Project Space

Tue to Sat

11am to 5pm

Sun 12pm to 5pm

**The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia**

Tue to Sun

10am to 5pm

**Restaurants, Cafes and Bars**

**Optic Kitchen & Bar**

Mon, Tues and Sun

8.30am to 6pm

Wed to Sat

8.30am to 10pm

**Aristi**

Mon to Fri

10am to late

Sat & Sun

9am to late

**Beer Deluxe**

Mon to Sun

7am to late

**Bachroy Tang**

Mon to Sun

11.30am to late

**Café Chinotto**

Mon to Sun

10am to 5pm

**Chocolate Buddha**

Mon to Sun

noon to late

**Fedish**

Mon to Sun

noon to late

II Pom Italian

Mon to Sun

11am to late

In a Rush Espresso

Mon to Sun

7am to 5pm

Riverland Bar and Café

Mon to Sun

7am to 5pm

Time Out Café

Mon to Sun

8am to late

Transport

Mon to Sun

11am to late

Taxi Kitchen

Mon to Sun noon to 3pm and 6pm to late

Transit Rooftop Bar

Sun, Wed & Thurs

From 5pm

Fri to Sat from 4pm

Mon to Tue closed

**Shops and Retail**

Best of Victoria

Best of Souvenirs

Open same hours as Melbourne Visitor Centre

Kirra Galleries

Mon to Sun

10am to 6pm

7-Eleven

Mon to Sun

Early to late

**Visitor Information**

Melbourne Visitor Centre at Federation Square

Open seven days a week 9am to 6pm (excluding Christmas Day)

Melbourne Visitor Booth in the Bourke Street Mall

Open seven days a week 9am to 5pm (excluding Good Friday and Christmas Day)

Fitzroy Gardens Visitor Centre

Open seven days a week 9am to 5pm (excluding Christmas Day)

This centre provides information services, touch displays, and free Wi-Fi and café facilities. Purchase your Coos’ Cottage tickets and merchandise, or take part in the free guided garden walk which departs from the centre every Saturday at 10am.

**City Ambassadors**

Keep an eye out for the City Ambassadors dressed in their distinctive red uniforms in the central city. Mon to Sat 10am to 4pm, Sun noon to 3pm (excluding Good Friday and Christmas Day).

Melbourne Greeter Service

Discover from a local what locals love about Melbourne. English orientations available seven days per week. Other languages on request. Bookings are essential. 03 9658 9658 (M-F only)

Melbourne Visitor Shuttle

Hop on and off at any of the 13 stops along the route at key city destinations, guided by an informative on-board commentary. The complete trip takes approximately an hour and a half. The bus runs every 30 minutes with the first service leaving Stop 1 at 9.30am and the last at 3.45pm daily excluding Christmas Day.

**Useful Numbers**

Best of Victoria Booking Service

9928 0000

Public transport queries

1800 800 007

Travellers’ Aid – Flinders St Station

9601 2030

Travellers’ Aid – Southern Cross Station

9670 2072

Airport Bus – SkyBus

9335 2811

Ticketmaster

13 6100

Ticketek

13 2849

Directory Assistance

1223

Emergency – police, fire and ambulance

000