



Melbourne gratis

Have only a few days in the city and don't want to fork out Australian dollars to see the sights? Here are some complimentary options.



Royal Botanic Gardens: After checking out the flora and fauna, have a picnic and a snooze

The capital of Victoria, Melbourne, is a Mecca for travellers looking for a bit of rest and recreation. Sitting on the shores of Port Phillip Bay with the Yarra River bisecting it, Melbourne has plenty of attractions to keep the visitor happy. An eight-hour flight from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Melbourne is a popular destination among Malaysian travellers. Whether it's the galleries, parks, shopping or nightlife, Melbourne has something to please every traveller. However, it can be an expensive holiday destination — the airfare and accommodation costs and the unfavourable exchange rate can leave you somewhat strapped, especially if you're on a modest budget. So what do you do if you only have a few days in the city and just a few dollars in your pocket? Here are some of the things Melbourne has to offer, for free.

City Circle Tram

Melbourne is a city of trams: For the visitor, the sight of trams, cars and pedestrians occupying one street space is an amazing one, and it's said that the city has one of the largest tram and light-rail networks in the world. While travelling on the Metlink, Melbourne's public transport, is a great way to get around the city (a two-hour Zone 1 Metcard costs A\$2.80), the first-time visitor to the city should hop on any one of the City Circle Trams. Free of charge, the City Circle Tram is a great way to get around central Melbourne as well as to get acquainted with some of the city's attractions. If it's your first time in the city, this is the best way to familiarise yourself with the major streets and get your bearings.

The tram takes you past shopping malls and major attractions like Parliament House, Federation Square

and the Princess Theatre, and there is useful on-air commentary on the sights and attractions that lie just beyond the tram stops.

Trams run in both directions every 12 minutes, seven days a week between 10am and 6pm daily (except Christmas Day and Good Friday), and during daylight saving (from end-October to early April) extended hours between 10am and 9pm every Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Federation Square

Hop off the tram and check out Federation Square, developed to commemorate 100 years of Australian nationhood. Described as an "architectural tour de force", the buildings here are nothing if not jaw-dropping for the sheer creativity, genius and perhaps even absurdity that went into their designs. Linking

the city centre with the Yarra River and Southgate, Federation Square is home to the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia; Australian Centre for the Moving Image; BMW Edge at Federation Square; National Design Centre and Champions: Australian Racing Museum Hall of Fame.

The Melbourne Visitor Centre is also located here, a must-stop for information on what to see and do in the city. The visitor centre can also assist in booking accommodation for the traveller.

Just next to Federation Square is the Flinders Street Station, so it's no surprise that the square teems with people at almost any hour of the day. It's a convenient meeting place and the many restaurants and bars around means that it's also a great place to people-watch!

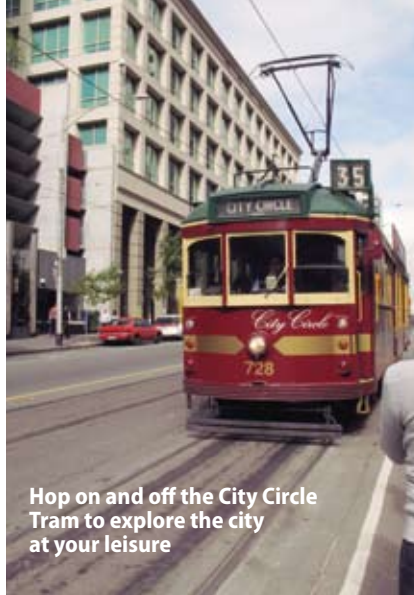
Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia

A mouthful of a name, the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia in Federation Square is part of the National Gallery of Victoria, which also comprises NGV International located on St Kilda Road. The gallery space at the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia is itself an architectural wonder, with massive steel and glass webbing for the ceiling and walls. The gallery space is dedicated to Australian art, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. While entrance to the permanent collection is free, there is a fee for some of the visiting exhibitions.

Visit www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvaustralia/ for more information.

Queen Victoria Market

Another meeting and focal point of the city is the Queen Victoria Market, easily accessible via the City Circle Tram. With a history spanning 130 years, the market has, over the years, undergone various



Hop on and off the City Circle Tram to explore the city at your leisure

Melbourne happenings

There always seems to be something happening in Melbourne, whether it's a Maroon 5 or Matchbox Twenty concert (which I was too early for, unfortunately) or the many shows and festivals that the city plays host to throughout the year. To check out what's going on during your visit, pick up a copy of the free city guide, this week in Melbourne, for more than a week's worth of happenings. Alternatively, the following websites also offer a listing of ongoing and upcoming events: www.onlymelbourne.com.au; www.thatsmelbourne.com.au; and www.visitvictoria.com.

refurbishment and restoration works. Popular among visitors and locals, the market is best known for its variety of fresh produce, from fruits and vegetable to seafood, meat and grains. There is also a deli hall where you can get cold cuts, sausages, various cheeses as well as a variety of dips. Besides fresh food, the market also has speciality stores and is popular among locals as the place to shop for bargains, whether it's clothes, shoes, handicrafts or souvenirs. The market is open daily except Monday and Wednesday. Check www.qvm.com.au/home.php for opening hours.

Royal Botanic Gardens

Covering some 38ha and boasting more than 52,000 plants representing about 10,000 different species from the world over, the Royal Botanic Gardens is one of the many parks and gardens in Melbourne. Said to be one of the world's finest botanic gardens, it boasts camellias, cacti, roses, perennials, palms, Southern Hemisphere conifers and indigenous flora of the Lower Yarra River, to name but a few. If you're travelling with junior in tow, the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden is a great place for him or her to learn about plants. The many open spaces and lawns also make the gardens a great spot for a picnic or simply to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. To make the most of your visit, do check out the gardens' seasonal brochure for information on plants that are in bloom as well as current guided walks and events. For more, check out www.rbg.vic.gov.au/

St Kilda

If you have the time, do check out Melbourne's many suburbs. St Kilda, located in one of the more picturesque sections of Port Phillip Bay, is just a short tram ride away from the city centre. While there was a time when this area was shunned for its dodgy activities and the people who used to hang out there, today it's one of the more fashionable suburbs with grand houses lining many of its streets. The cafés and restaurants by the bay are great places to soak up the sea breeze while tucking into a calamari salad or fish and chips. But do save space for the divine cakes and desserts that can be found at the many pâtisseries that line Acland Street. En route to St Kilda, don't miss the laughing face at Luna Park, a St Kilda icon and one of the country's oldest fun parks (it's almost 100 years old). ■