

Holidaying here this summer? Get out and about with these capital ideas

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It's been a tough year for Australia's capital cities, with the pandemic rendering some of our CBDs virtual ghost towns for interminable stretches. But summer is here and there's a buzz in the air. While we were hunkering down watching Netflix, the final touches were being applied to hip new cocktails bars and snazzy restaurants, curators were hanging precious artworks and event organisers were corralling talent and leaping logistical hurdles. Now they've flung open their doors and are ready for business. Here's a hit list of things to do this summer in Sydney and the other capitals.

SYDNEY

FROM FAMINE TO FEAST

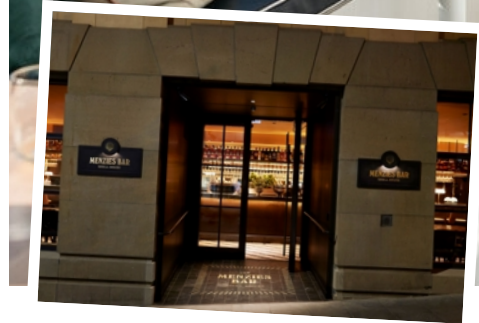
What better way to revitalise the CBD than through arts extravaganza Sydney Festival, brimming with 133 events scheduled over 25 days. After our collective Covid-induced cultural starvation, it's time to gorge ourselves on live events. Highlights? There are so many. *Girl from the North Country* centred around Bob Dylan's music and starring Lisa McCune. *Wudjang: Not the Past*, a collaboration between Bangarra Dance Theatre and Sydney Theatre Company. *Thaw*, in which a *Legs on the Wall* performer is suspended 20m above the harbour on a 2.5 tonne of ice as it slowly melts. New to the scene is *Speaker's Corner*, in front of St Mary's Cathedral, where music and comedy acts will perform to audiences of 1000; January 6-30. sydneyfestival.org.au

ON THE WATERFRONT

Almost as enjoyable as the food and location at eastern suburbs diner The Boathouse are the design and decor essentials masterminded by Pip Goldsmith, creative director of the hospitality group. The cool white and marine palette, brightened with massive flower arrangements, is as triumphantly Sydney as the harbour beyond. On the Rose Bay marina site of the former Regatta, this new iteration has a kiosk, reorganised spaces that include up-stairs and deck seating options, and a menu from group executive chef James Brownrigg that celebrates seafood and seasonal produce. *Scampi linguine with pipis, chilli oil and caviar* is a clear summer favourite and who could resist the ornamented plate on which it's served, also for sale at Pip's homewares store at Palm Beach headquarters or online. theboathouserosebay.com.au

SHELL CHIC

Lobster rolls are the star turns during Martini Hour (4pm-6pm) but Menzies Bar & Bistro at Shell House is a convivial CBD hideaway in which to linger much longer for cocktails with names as wink-wink as *In-Cider Trading*, share plates and superior wagyu burgers. Ice is cut in shards from huge countertop blocks and there's an elegant, almost NYC-inspired grandeur to the look in this restored heritage building near Wynyard Station, thanks to architectural firm Woods Bagot and interior stylist Anna Hewett. There's a blackened steel bar, an eccentric overhead "hamper" that holds 1300 bottles of spirits, marble floors, and comfy leather booths. Just opened for party-season frolics are the multifaceted and freshly transformed Shell House's rooftop Sky Bar, Clocktower Bar, Dining Room



and Terrace. shellhouse.com.au
JETTY SET

New to the Pier One concourse beside Ovolo Woolloomooloo, Il Pontile is already proving a neighbourhood favourite, especially for lazy lunches. But summer evenings are a joy here, too, for prettily plated dishes such as battered zucchini flowers filled with burrata and semi-dried tomatoes or a richly sauced rigatoni alla Genovese. Restaurateur and chef Mario Percuoco (son of restaurateur Armando Percuoco of Buon Ricordo fame) hails from Naples, the menu is unashamedly Italian, and the overall feel of the semi-open, two-level space is calming. Expect parchment-pale colours, stone floors and a lack of themed artifice; the glassed-in "cellar" at ground level contains wine chosen to match regional dishes and the name Il Pontile translates to "the pier". Perfetto. ilpontile.com.au

BEST IN SHOW

More than 100 works from Centre Pompidou in Paris are on display at the Art Gallery of NSW exhibition *Matisse: Life & Spirit* until March 13. It's a terrific assembly of Henri Matisse masterpieces, further enlivened by flickering archival footage of the artist in his atelier making gouache cut-outs and working on boldly coloured, decorative paintings of domestic interiors and odalisques. A representation of his *Chapel of the Rosary at Vence* has been designed by Australian architect Richard Johnson alongside life-sized maquettes for its stained-glass windows. There's a lovely intimacy to the flow of exhibits and a clear sense of the progression of Matisse's travels in Oceania and northern Africa, all places of intense and transforming light. Until April 3, the supplementary, non-ticketed homage, *Matisse Alive*, extends the experience. artgallery.nsw.gov.au

ACCESS ALL AREAS

Cultural Attractions of Australia operates a range of insider-access tours of the Sydney Opera House but *Tour and Dine*, in particular, is a fascinating potted experience that takes visitors back of house for 60 minutes to discover and learn more about the Concert Hall, Drama Theatre and other performance spaces. My tour group's guide, Nick, is full of facts and stories, peppering his spiel with smoke-and-mirrors talk of sprung floors, trap doors and hydraulic safety walls. It feels privileged and even a tad secretive to explore the bowels, as it were, of the famous harbourside building. Then up for air and a stroll along the western promenade to Matt Moran's Opera Kitchen for a casual lunch. A poke bowl of salmon sashimi, edamame, avocado, shiso and sesame hits the spot. *Tour and Dine* three times daily, Thursday-Monday; adults, \$80; children, \$45. Lunch included. culturalattractionsofaustralia.com

TASTES OF TEL AVIV

There's a sense of anticipation on arrival at Israeli restaurant Shaffa, where upbeat music draws guests down a narrow entrance tucked beside a former church in Surry Hills. Step inside the glass-roofed cavern to find an open kitchen bustling with activity, piles of glossy fresh produce and happy diners sipping cocktails such as charred negronis and a riff on a Tom Collins made with pomegranate arak. You can choose to sit among the action or take a table within the historic walls of what was once Apple Tree Inn, circa 1850. The set menu *Feast* (\$65; add \$37 for bottomless rose and Goldstar beer), available for two-hour brunch on weekends, is a parade of zingy Middle Eastern flavours. Burnt eggplant labneh, housemade hamutzim or pickles, roasted spiced cauliflower, lamb koftas: it's all familiar fare yet delightfully different. Also open for dinner Tuesday to Sunday. shaffa.com.au

CHEEKY GIN

Ciara Doran and Eoin Daniels, the pair behind whisky bar The Doss House in The Rocks, have done it again. This time it's gin and cocktails on the menu in another charac-



The Boathouse at Rose Bay, top, showcases seafood, inset; Menzies Bar & Bistro at Shell House, left; Matisse exhibition, above; seared tuna from Il Pontile, inset

ter-filled sandstone building in the historic district. Named for Doran's great uncle Frank, who was a charismatic fixture of his village pub in Ireland, the 1840s watering hole still looks like the kind of place sailors straight off a tall ship would frequent. However, those seafarers of yore might think they'd died and gone to heaven on discovering more than 100 varieties of gin on the shelves, including exotic iterations from Moldova, Belgium, Sweden and Japan. Martinis are considered an art form here, and explanations of dry versus dirty are available from the knowledgeable bar staff. Settle into one of the leather lounges and choose your poison. Share plates and snacks available. frankmacs.com.au

TIME AND PLACE

Water squirts from a series of elevated pipes into a white pool standing in a mound of dirt and rubble on the floor of the Museum of Contemporary Art. The rhythmical drips start slowly, eventually climaxing in a veritable downpour before the cycle begins again. Doug Aitken's ambitious installation *Sonic Fountain II* is part of *New Era*, a Sydney-exclusive exhibition on the Californian artist at the MCA until February 6. The works are equally mesmerising and unsettling, exploring concepts of time, nature, technology and place using mirrors, photographs and video footage, which is captured on a grand scale and displayed on vast screens. Don't miss *Migration (empire)*, in which various animals – a buffalo, a horse, a beaver among them – are filmed in shabby motel rooms. mca.com.au



MELBOURNE

ART AND SOUL

After a two-year transformation the 19th-century Collingwood Technical School is set to shimmer this summer as Collingwood Yards, the city's newest arts and culture hotspot. Home to artist studios and independent organisations from record labels to galleries, over the summer months there will be video projections (Thursday-Sunday) by resident artists, open studios and exhibitions, and night markets on the last Saturday of each month. There's fine food, natural wines and live-streamed radio at Hope St Radio and a new rooftop bar, Runner Up, in an old caretaker's cottage above Johnston Street serving up drinks and DJ sets with sunset views over the inner city.

collingwoodyards.org

IN THE PINK

The National Gallery of Victoria's annual architectural installation has transformed its internal garden into a pink wading pool where gallery goers are welcome to cool off over summer. Designed by architects Taylor Knights and artist James Carey, Pond[er] is a reflection pool of sorts, prompting visitors to consider our fragile ecology. Inspired by Victoria's colourful salt lakes and fringed by Indigenous gardens, it's a magical spot for a break between viewings of the NGV's col-



Centre Court, Melbourne Park, top; NGV installation Pond[er], above

lection and its summer blockbuster, Gabrielle Chanel: Fashion Manifesto, showcasing pieces from the designer's influential career (with bonus free audio guide by Tilda Swinton).
ngv.vic.gov.au

LOVE ALL

Melbourne's never more alive than when the tennis comes to town. The combination of (usually) great weather, crowded streets and the chance to spot some of the world's top athletes lends the city a carnival atmosphere for the fortnight of the Australian Open, January 17-30. After being banned last year due to Covid fears, spectators will return to Melbourne Park to find special attractions such as a "beach" – complete with sunlounges, bathing boxes and big screen – at Garden Square, and renowned chefs such as Ben Shewry and Scott Pickett serving up meals courtside.

ausopen.com

SONG AND DANCE

Last year's inaugural Live at the Bowl program of Covid-safe performances returns this summer to the Sidney Myer Music Bowl with an all-ages line-up of shows. Anchored by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's free concert series (a staple of the city since 1929), the 2022 program includes big-name concerts (London Grammar, Flight Facilities, Crowded House), daytime and night-time dance parties and even Shaun the Sheep's Circus Show, a family-friendly original – it's Shaun's first outing in an open-air theatre – to kick off festivities in January.

liveatthebowl.com.au

KENDALL HILL

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