ARTS AND CULTURE IN SYDNEY

Cultural and artistic offerings in Sydney reflect a multicultural, global city which also has its own unique cultural heritage. From the world-famous Sydney Opera House, which attracts about eight million visitors a year, to sleek harbourside theatres, art galleries and museums featuring interactive exhibits, there’s plenty on offer. Add a dynamic calendar of arts and culture events and you’ll see why the state received more than 10.3 million international and domestic cultural and heritage visitors in 2014 (for the year ending September 2014).

A WORLD HERITAGE JEWEL: THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

When the seed was planted in 1954 to build an opera house as a home for culture, the arts and performances from around the world at Sydney’s Bennelong Point, it’s unlikely a World Heritage listing was discussed. But today this iconic building is recognised as an architectural jewel of the 20th century, preserved forever on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

While there are many ways to experience the beauty of this landmark – by seeing a world-class show, or enjoying the harbourside atmosphere in a bar or restaurant – joining a backstage tour is a real highlight. Explore an architectural masterpiece that has played host to tens of thousands of performances since its official opening by Queen Elizabeth II in 1973 to fireworks and the strains of Beethoven. The Sydney Opera House Backstage Tour reveals the real-life dramas behind this busy performing arts centre. On its busy stages, see performances by world-class resident companies that include the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Bell Shakespeare, Opera Australia, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Theatre Company, and The Australian Ballet as well as other presenters.

One of Sydney’s most anticipated restaurant openings of 2015 is Bennelong at the Sydney Opera House (expected to open late June). The new restaurant will feature the Peter Gilmore dining experience, a cultured-and-cured section offering oysters, crustaceans and fish, a casual restaurant/bar for pre- and post-show dining, a private dining area and a unique chef’s table with harbour views.

VIBRANT, VIVID, AUDACIOUS: SYDNEY’S BEST ART GALLERIES

Australia’s bespoke venue for modern art, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) is the only public museum in the country dedicated to exhibiting, interpreting and collecting contemporary art from across Australia and around the world.
Poised in a spectacular position overlooking Circular Quay, the MCA hosts exhibitions of contemporary art in all its forms, including performance, sculpture, photography and digital art as well as painting. For 18 nights from May to June each year, *Vivid Ideas Exchange* takes over the inside of the MCA with public talks and debates from leading global creative thinkers, while the façade of the building is illuminated as part of *Vivid Light*. And from December 10, 2015 to May 1, 2016, the MCA will exhibit the work of British artist *Grayson Perry* as part of the *2016 Sydney International Art Series*. The winner of the Turner Prize in 2003, Perry is known for his intricate ceramics and tapestries.

**The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW)** is the state’s leading public art gallery, with five floors of creative brilliance that showcase some of the legends of the creative world. It includes The John Kaldor Family Gallery, the largest single donation to an Australian public gallery with 200 pieces of contemporary art. The AGNSW will feature *The Greats*, Masterpieces of Western art from the National Galleries of Scotland as part of the *2016 Sydney International Art Series* from October 24, 2015 to February 8, 2016. The exhibition will cover a period of 400 years (1490-1932) and include works by Titian, Vermeer, Monet, Rembrandt and Cezanne.

**CHIPPENDALE, SYDNEY’S NEWEST ARTS PRECINCT**

Just ten minutes south of the city centre, Chippendale is Sydney’s newest food, shopping and arts neighbourhood. This inner-city suburb is home to galleries with loft-like spaces that repurpose the suburb’s former warehouses and workshops, now featuring sculpture, photography and digital art. Curious Sydneysiders and visitors are welcome to explore Chippendale’s *Central Park* where an $8 million public art collection appears on walls, floors, facades and parks hidden from public view for the past 150 years. Small galleries worth visiting include the *NO Art Gallery, Pine Street Creative Arts Centre, MOP* and UTS: Gallery, which showcases the work of graduates, staff, students and guest artists at the University of Technology Sydney. While here, check out Frank Gehry’s ‘paper bag’ creation, *The Dr Chau Chak Wing Building*, which is the first building in Australia designed by one of the world’s most influential architects. Nearby is *The Tin Sheds Gallery*, a large contemporary art space with regular exhibitions.

Pulling in connoisseurs of contemporary Chinese art, the *White Rabbit Gallery* is one of the world’s largest private collections of this emerging and exciting genre, representing more than 200 Chinese artists. The gallery also includes a Chinese Tea House and library and hosts regular talks and events for arts lovers. Don’t miss the art-inspired knick-knacks at the gallery shop.

A good way to discover the latest art trends, collectives and galleries is with a local guide. *Sydney Art Tours* has a three-hour guided walking tour of Sydney’s coolest neighbourhoods while *inART* also provides a unique entrée into Sydney’s rich contemporary art scene as well as food and wine experiences. *Sydney Art Walks and Tours* offers guided walks to Sydney’s best public art including a sculpture tour by night to see how lighting can add a further dimension to the works. With one of the helpful City of Sydney downloadable maps in *The Sydney Culture Walks* series, you’ll discover hidden laneways and new neighbourhoods while learning about the city’s past and the stories behind the city’s most loved public artworks.

**EXPLORE SYDNEY MUSEUMS**

Use the *Sydney Museums Pass* to discover the best Sydney heritage attractions at your own pace. The pass gives you three months of unlimited entry into 12 museums and heritage properties, including the World Heritage-listed Hyde Park Barracks Museum, the Justice and Police Museum, Vaucluse House, Government House and Susannah Place Museum. Other museums worth a visit include Sydney Jewish Museum in Darlinghurst, the Nicholson Museum at the University of Sydney and the Sydney Harbour Bridge Pylon Lookout and Museum.

**Western Sydney** has an equally eclectic mix of interesting cultural sites to visit. Parramatta is home to a UNESCO site, *Old Government House and Domain*, part of the group that makes up the World Heritage Australian Convict Sites. Take time to walk or cycle along Governor Macquarie’s original carriageway in pretty *Parramatta Park* and visit *Experiment Farm Cottage*, a former colonial residence and working farm.

**ABORIGINAL ART AND CULTURE**

For those who love the work of Aboriginal artists, there are plenty of opportunities to see both traditional styles and contemporary works in Sydney. A good place to start is at the AGNSW’s *Yiribana Gallery* which features a compelling collection of traditional bark paintings, contemporary art and photography. As you enter the *Museum of Sydney*, you’ll walk through the Edge of the Trees, an evocative sculpture linking the colonial site to the original inhabitants; inside, artefacts, paintings, film and soundscapes evoke contemporary Aboriginal perspectives on Sydney’s past.

If you’re keen to buy authentic Aboriginal art or souvenirs, you’ll find art galleries located in and around the city centre. In The Rocks, *Argyle Gallery* and *Gannon House Gallery* both sell a wide a range of styles, from contemporary Aboriginal paintings to traditional bark paintings from regions as diverse as Arnhem Land.
and Utopia to the Western Desert. Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery is located at Bondi Beach while The Artery Aboriginal Art and The Australian Art Print Network are in Darlinghurst. Rozelle’s Kate Owen Gallery has a stunning collection of top quality, contemporary Australian Aboriginal art, with a guarantee to add that ‘wow factor’ to modern interiors. Tali Gallery, also in Rozelle, has an amazing collection of beautiful paintings, prints, sculptures and glass.

CULTURAL FUN FOR KIDS
Some of Sydney’s best attractions for kids also offer a cultural experience. But don’t tell the kids! In Ultimo, the Powerhouse Museum’s diverse collection, spanning science, technology, fashion and contemporary culture, will keep youngsters enthralled while young astronauts can turn their gaze heavenwards at Sydney Observatory, which offers specialised tours, including night-time viewing experiences. For a ghostly experience, join Ghost Trackers at Manly’s Q Station, the city’s former quarantine station. Lurk in shadowed halls, hear spooky stories, listen and watch for ghostly apparitions. At the Sydney Opera House, the annual Kids at the House program offers a fantastic line-up of shows for kids aged two to twelve. Take your baby to the popular Baby Proms program or Out of the Blue, where you can introduce your young ones to the magical world of theatre. On a behind-the-scenes tour at the Australian Museum the kids will be amazed by the sight of a Tasmanian tiger, just one of 140 specimens of extinct species in the museum’s collection. You can also book ahead for a traditional didgeridoo and dance performance accompanied by a guided tour of the Aboriginal Australians exhibition.

CULTURAL EVENTS COMING UP


Sculpture by the Sea, October 22 – November 8, 2015: Returning to the spectacular coastal walkway from Bondi Beach to Tamarama Beach, this popular free, outdoor art event transforms the path into a 2km-long temporary sculpture park featuring more than 100 sculptures by artists from Australia and across the world.

Sydney Festival, January 2016: This summer festival presents the best of world talent in the performing arts and is staged in diverse venues from the CBD to Parramatta.

Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour, March – April 2016: The success of the past three operas staged on Sydney Harbour has led to ongoing support for three more stunning events to be staged by Opera Australia in Sydney.

20th Biennale of Sydney, March – June 2016: The Biennale is on show at five venues across Sydney, including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Artspace, Carriageworks, Cockatoo Island and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. A program of talks, forums, guided tours and family days are all free to the public. Held every two years, the next Biennale will again be held in 2018.

Vivid Sydney, May – June 2016: A celebration of light, music and ideas includes a mesmerising free public exhibition of outdoor lighting sculptures; a cutting-edge contemporary music program and the spectacular illumination of the Sydney Opera House and harbour foreshore. One of the signature events in the NSW events calendar, Vivid Sydney is owned and managed by Destination NSW on behalf of the NSW Government.

Sydney Film Festival, June 2016: The 63rd Sydney Film Festival showcases the best in cinema from across Australia and around the globe. More than 190 films screen from over 50 countries in an inspiring collection of features, documentaries, short films, retrospectives, restorations, animations and more.

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