

# INTRODUCING SYDNEY

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Sydney doesn't care what you think of him; he knows he's fabulous. He's got it all – he's sporty, arty, sexy, successful, confident, good-looking and damn interesting.

His Australian siblings won't admit to being jealous, but who wouldn't be? You'd hate him too, if he wasn't so completely charming. He's got a sunny disposition, but can be rather dry. Sure, he's got his rough edges and his problems, but he keeps them all well hidden behind his dazzling façade. He's a bit Manly and a lot Darling (Harbour, Point, -hurst, -ton).

What's more, Sydney is easy. He's an easy city to visit – easy to get around, easy to strike good weather, easy to have a good time. There are no bushels hiding Sydney's talents – he knows what he's got and shows it off. The same can be said for his inhabitants. The stereotypical Sydneysider isn't demure. What's the point of a shirt if you've got abs you could wash clothes on?

The Sydney experience can be so many different things. It's the smell of frangipanis on a balmy summer night. It's knocking back a cold beer at a beachside pub. It's catching a show at the Opera House. It's the sound of a 10-year-old girl screaming 'smash him' as a rugby league player takes down an opponent. It's stumbling across an Aboriginal rock carving on a harbour headland. It's washing the salt from your hair after a day's body-surfing and body-watching at Bondi.

Most attractions are laid out around the metropolis' greatest natural asset, that glittering harbour. Jump on a ferry and Sydney's your oyster – the harbour prisms the city's two halves far enough apart to reveal an excess of pearls.

## CITY LIFE

Sydney is home to nearly 4.3 million people – the biggest city in Oceania, but not even scraping into the top 50 in the world. That doesn't disqualify it from being one of the planet's great cities.

Sydneysiders tend to be casual, forthright, irreverent, curious and friendly. The best things in life here are free – the beaches, the mountains, the parks and the much-loved harbour. The weather's reasonably moderate – although it can get stinking hot in the height of summer and chilly (but never freezing) in winter.

Water is a hot topic of conversation. When will the drought lift? Will we ever be able to wash our cars with a hose again? When it rains heavily, why does it only ever seem to put sewage into the harbour and not water into the dams?

State politics is another quagmire. Breakdowns in the political machine, along with the odd allegation of corruption, add to the feeling that Sydney's convict shackles haven't been completely shaken off. Most Sydneysiders would be happy with a transport system that didn't break down or cost a fortune in tolls, and a better public health system. The election in 2007 engendered a mix of apathy and despair. Many felt that the Labor party that has been governing NSW since 1995 didn't deserve to win, but were even more disillusioned with the opposition. Even returning Premier Morris Iemma implied in his acceptance speech that his return to power was in part due to Liberal Prime Minister John Howard's unpopular federal workplace reforms.

Other touchy subjects include race relations and immigration (see [p119](#)). The majority of Australia's immigrants make a beeline to this pot of gold, where a third of the population was born overseas. The city's mixture of pragmatic egalitarianism and natural indifference has made for a generally accepting environment. Most locals are happy to live in a cosmopolitan place with international cuisines to enjoy. But for others, attitudes harden to those who speak a different language or arrive as a refugee. The term 'un-Australian' is continually bandied about by politicians and the media at any perceived departure from traditional behaviour.

In the end, however, Sydney's relentlessly cheery attitude tends to bowl over any obstacle. A glorious display of fireworks over the harbour and a general back-thumping over how great the city is does wonders for everyone's spirits, and inadvertently slaps a quick band-aid over any ill that dares to rear its ugly head.

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# GETTING STARTED

Sydney may be easy, but it's also extremely popular. Planning ahead for accommodation is definitely recommended as occupancy rates run exceptionally high in summer and around key events. Booking well ahead will secure a cheaper deal in most of the bigger hotels – and often a better room.

It may seem silly, but serious foodies should consider booking top restaurants beforehand as well. Tetsuya's (p141), Sydney's most famous, books up months in advance. Likewise, if you're planning to attend big-name shows, theatre or concerts, it will pay to book ahead (see p168).

Anything else can be easily sorted out once you arrive.

## WHEN TO GO

Anytime in Sydney is a good time, but don't be fooled into thinking that it's eternally sunny and hot. The city may enjoy more than 300 clear days annually, but lying around beaches isn't an option in the winter. That said, the months of July through September offer plenty of crisp sunny days and the best of the sports season. By October it's starting to warm up, and November and early December are usually stunning.

The absolute peak season straddles the New Year, when accommodation is at its priciest. It's also when the temperature gets unpleasantly hot and bushfires can blanket the city in haze and soot. These cons need to be weighed against the major pro of witnessing the incredible New Year's Eve fireworks over the harbour. February and early March is Mardi Gras time, although the sizzle is sometimes tempered by heavy rain. In May and June Sydney heads indoors for fashion, film and art, braving the outdoors only for the annual clash of titans, the rugby league State of Origin.

## FESTIVALS

Sydney loves to celebrate, and any excuse will do. Events range from the bare breasts and buttocks of the Mardi Gras parade to the resolutely highbrow Sydney Biennale.

### January

#### SYDNEY FESTIVAL

☎ 8248 6500; [www.sydneyfestival.org.au](http://www.sydneyfestival.org.au)

This cultural festival is a big deal on the Sydney calendar, attracting about a million people to 300 performances held over three weeks. A wide range of events are scheduled, from art exhibits and street theatre to huge, free concerts in The

Domain. Any performance at the Opera House forecourt is worth looking into.

#### FLICKERFEST

☎ 9365 6888; [www.flickerfest.com.au](http://www.flickerfest.com.au);

Bondi Pavilion

Around a thousand entries compete for a slot in this 10-day international short film festival.

#### AUSTRALIA DAY

[www.australiaday.com.au](http://www.australiaday.com.au)

Australia's 'birthday' (the day the First Fleet landed) is 26 January, and Sydneysiders celebrate with picnics, barbecues, fireworks on the harbour and, increasingly, much nationalistic flag-waving. In less mood to celebrate are the Aboriginal community, who refer to it as Invasion Day or Survival Day. A Survival Day Concert takes place at Woomera Reserve in La Perouse. It's an alcohol-free event and runs from about 10am until sunset.

#### FERRYTHON

[www.sydneyfestival.org.au](http://www.sydneyfestival.org.au)

Part of the Sydney Festival, this mad contest is held on Australia Day (26 January) and sees four 'first fleet' catamarans, decorated with balloons and streamers, race from Circular Quay around Shark Island and back to the Harbour Bridge.

#### BIG DAY OUT

[www.bigdayout.com](http://www.bigdayout.com); Sydney Showgrounds

The biggest day on the calendar for music fans, this touring one-day alternative music festival hits Sydney on Australia Day weekend. It features a line-up of cutting-edge artists from all over the world, including some huge names and plenty of Australian acts. It's traditionally had a friendly, grungy, laid-back vibe, although recent years have

seen some loutish behaviour. Tickets go on sale in October and are snapped up quickly.

## February

### CHINESE NEW YEAR

[www.sydneychinesenewyear.com.au](http://www.sydneychinesenewyear.com.au)

*Kung hei fat choy!* Depending on the phase of the moon, this three-week celebration centred on Chinatown arrives with a bang (literally) in either January or February, featuring fireworks, a parade, dragon dancers, dragon boat races and oodles of noodles.

### TROPFEST

[www.tropfest.com](http://www.tropfest.com); The Domain

The world's largest short-film festival is viewed from picnic blankets in The Domain on the last Sunday in February. A compulsory prop appears in each entry (to discourage cheating and inspire creativity). World-famous movie stars are roped in for the judging – in previous years they've included Guy Pearce, Salma Hayek, Russell Crowe, Sam Neill, Samuel L Jackson, Keanu Reeves and Nicole Kidman. It's a big deal.

### SYDNEY GAY & LESBIAN

#### MARDI GRAS

[www.mardigras.org.au](http://www.mardigras.org.au)

This world-famous festival (p182) runs for a month, culminating in a spectacular (straight-friendly) parade along Oxford St (first Saturday in March) and the bacchanalian Mardi Gras party.

## March & April

### ST PATRICK'S DAY

On 17 March a large part of Sydney's population, swelled by every backpacker in town, adds an 'O' to their surname (if they don't have one already) and gets blotto on Guinness in The Rocks. Rowdy festivities start early in the morning and continue until well into the next. Wearing green and funny hats is de rigueur – full marks if you can score a 'who's your Paddy' T-shirt from one of the pubs.

### GOLDEN SLIPPER FESTIVAL

☎ 9930 4000; [www.theraces.com.au](http://www.theraces.com.au);

Rosehill Gardens

A month-long horse-racing carnival culminates in the world's richest race for two-year-olds (with a purse of \$3.5 million) on the Saturday before Good Friday.

### ROYAL EASTER SHOW

[www.eastershow.com.au](http://www.eastershow.com.au); Sydney Showground  
Ostensibly an agricultural show, this wonderful Sydney tradition is a two-week fiesta of carnival rides, showbags and sugary treats. The crowds are massive. Bring the kids.

### THE GREAT ESCAPE

[www.thegreatescape.net.au](http://www.thegreatescape.net.au); Newington Armoury  
Sydney's answer to Glastonbury, this three-day music festival featuring big-name local and international artists is a relative newcomer to the city's calendar but already a firm favourite. Bring a tent.

### EASTER CARNIVAL

[www.ajc.org.au](http://www.ajc.org.au); Royal Randwick Racecourse

This is Sydney's biggest horseracing carnival, spanning four glamorous race days, culminating with the Sydney Cup. There's a lively atmosphere, getting decidedly raucous on Derby Day, when the lawn party attracts former reality TV contestants, arrogant princesses in big hats and drunken blokes in ill-fitted suits.

## May

### AUSTRALIAN FASHION WEEK

[www.afw.com.au](http://www.afw.com.au)

Where the gaunt, pert and pubescent tread the catwalk in Circular Quay wearing local designer duds. Expect plenty of skin, impracticality and mundane bitchy gossip, plus the usual round of 'Australian fashion has come of age' PR speak.

### SYDNEY WRITERS' FESTIVAL

☎ 9252 7729; [www.swf.org.au](http://www.swf.org.au)

This excellent, week-long event is held in late May in Walsh Bay, bringing together local and international writing talent to discuss a broad range of literary topics.

## June & July

### STATE OF ORIGIN SERIES

[www.australianrugbyleague.com.au](http://www.australianrugbyleague.com.au)

Rugby league fanatics consider this gripping series of three matches between Queensland (the Maroons, or Cane Toads) and New South Wales (the Blues, or Cockroaches) the pinnacle of the game. Scheduled anytime from late May to July, either one or two games are played in Sydney depending on who won the series the previous year. It's

## ADVANCE PLANNING

Three months prior: book accommodation (p188); book a table at Tetsuya's (p141); make sure your passport, visa and travel insurance are in order. One month prior: book any other top restaurants; check to see if your visit coincides with any major events (p16, opposite) and book tickets (p168). A week prior: top up your credit cards; pay bills; check the Sydney news sites (opposite); who's looking after the cat? As you leave the house: tickets, money, passports!

worth catching for its dazzling displays of speed, tactics and bloody-nosed aggression. The fans go crazy.

## SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

[www.sydneyfilmfestival.org](http://www.sydneyfilmfestival.org)

Held in part at the magnificent State Theatre, this excellent, highly regarded film festival screens art-house gems from Australia and around the world. It starts in early June and runs for two weeks.

## BIENNALE OF SYDNEY

[www.biennaleofsydney.com.au](http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au)

In even-numbered years this two-month international arts festival showcases the bold, the brilliant and the downright mind-boggling. It's held around a number of city venues, including the Art Gallery of NSW.

## YULEFEST

[www.katoomba-nsw.com/yulefest.html](http://www.katoomba-nsw.com/yulefest.html)

The Blue Mountains in July is about as close to the Northern Hemisphere Christmas as Sydney gets. 'Tis the season when local hotels and restaurants cash in with traditional holiday beverages, roaring fires, a carol or two and Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. The Winter Magic Festival ([www.wintermagic.com.au](http://www.wintermagic.com.au)) is held in Katoomba on the weekend closest to the winter solstice. It includes a parade where participants wear rather more clothes than you'll see in the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras parade.

## August

### CITY2SURF RUN

<http://city2surf.sunherald.com.au>

On the second Sunday in August some 60,000 runners pound the 14km from Hyde Park to Bondi Beach; some are deadly

serious, some are in costume, and everyone gets their name and finishing position published in the paper. The all-time record to beat is 40.04 minutes, set by Steve Monaghan in 1991.

## September & October

### FESTIVAL OF THE WINDS

[www.aks.org.au](http://www.aks.org.au)

Held on the second weekend in September, this festival brings spectacular kites shaped like animals and aliens to Bondi Beach. The kids will love it.

### QUEERDOC

☎ 9332 4938; [www.queerscreen.com.au](http://www.queerscreen.com.au);

Chauvel Cinema & Dendy Newtown

Running over two weeks in mid-September, this is the only queer documentary festival in the world. The organisers also put on the Mardi Gras Film Festival in February and one-off screenings throughout the year.

### MANLY INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

[www.manly.nsw.gov.au/manlyjazz](http://www.manly.nsw.gov.au/manlyjazz)

This enjoyable event takes place on the Labour Day long weekend (early October). The music ranges from traditional and big band to fusion, bop and contemporary.

### SLEAZE BALL

[www.mardigras.org.au](http://www.mardigras.org.au); Hordern Pavilion & RHI

The Mardi Gras party is so fabulous that once a year isn't enough, with its sluttier spin-off taking place on the Saturday of the Labour Day long weekend. Proceeds go towards staging the annual parade.

### RUGBY LEAGUE GRAND FINAL

[www.nrl.com.au](http://www.nrl.com.au); Telstra Stadium

The culmination of the rugby league season is an atmospheric clash, held on the Sunday of the Labour Day long weekend. There's a carnival atmosphere, big-name entertainment and a fired-up crowd. It makes for great Sleaze Ball recovery.

## November

### SCULPTURE BY THE SEA

[www.sculpturebythesea.com](http://www.sculpturebythesea.com)

This outdoor sculpture exhibition utilises the spectacular Bondi to Tamarama cliff top to display stunning artworks from local and international artists. It's free, open 24 hours and great for starting debates.

## December

### HOMEBAKE

[www.homebake.com.au](http://www.homebake.com.au); The Domain

Held on the first Saturday in December, this one-day music fest is a showcase of the best Australian and New Zealand bands.

### CHRISTMAS PARTY

The international family of travellers have traditionally descended on Bondi Beach on Christmas Day. Because of out-of-control scenes in the past, alcohol has been banned on the beach and an organised party is staged at the Pavilion instead. It changes every year; previous years have seen a pricey Gatecrasher dance party.

### SYDNEY TO HOBART YACHT RACE

[www.rolexsydneyhobart.com](http://www.rolexsydneyhobart.com)

On 26 December Sydney Harbour is crowded with boats farewelling the international yachts competing in this race, a gruelling 628-nautical-mile course.

### NEW YEAR'S EVE

Join hundreds of thousands of revellers pouring into harbourside vantage points (make sure you can see the bridge) for magnificent fireworks. And yes, they really are worth the hassle of nabbing a spot hours beforehand.

## COSTS & MONEY

Sydney is not a cheap place to visit. If you bed down in dorms, eat takeaway and use public transport you'll still get little change out of \$60 per day. Sharing a double room at a budget hotel and sitting down for a nice

evening meal will kick this up to about \$100 per person. Bank on \$140 per person for a few more comforts (a shared three-star hotel room and three decent meals). At the upper end, the sky's the limit.

Most accommodation options have cheaper rates for stays of longer than a week and you can reduce your daily transport budget with weekly bus/train/ferry passes. If travelling with kids, look out for family rates on transport and attractions. And while some sights are downright pricey, there's plenty to do for free (see p56).

## INTERNET RESOURCES

There are dozens of websites offering the latest on upcoming events in the city. See also the ticketing sites on p168.

[www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au) Good for upcoming events, restaurant and bar reviews, and to take the pulse of the city.

[www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au) Visitor information, disabled access, parking, history and downloadable walking tours.

[www.visitnsw.com.au](http://www.visitnsw.com.au) Neighbourhood by neighbourhood visitors' guide.

[www.sydney.citysearch.com.au](http://www.sydney.citysearch.com.au) What's on listings.

[www.eatability.com.au](http://www.eatability.com.au) User-generated dining and bar reviews.

[www.inthemix.com.au](http://www.inthemix.com.au) What's on in the dance music and club scene.

[www.hht.net.au](http://www.hht.net.au) Exhibition and visitor information on 12 museums and historic houses.

[www.art-almanac.com.au](http://www.art-almanac.com.au) Extensive commercial and public gallery listings.

## SUSTAINABLE SYDNEY

Given Sydney's relative isolation, a sustainable alternative to air travel may not be possible. If you're heading on to other Australian destinations, consider using trains and buses but remember that the distances are vast.

There's really no need to hire a car in Sydney. The bus, train and ferry services will get you everywhere you want to go with less hassle. Consider hiring a bike (p217) to explore the eastern beaches, Centennial Parklands and the inner west.

By the time this book is published it's hoped that the drought that has gripped Sydney and much of Australia will have lessened, but this is unlikely to fix the city's water problems. Mandatory water restrictions are in place for

### HOW MUCH?

Litre of unleaded petrol \$1.30

Short train trip \$2.40

Short taxi ride \$10

Schooner of Tooheys New \$4

Litre of bottled water \$2.50

Flat white coffee \$3

Harry's Café de Wheels pie \$3.50

Souvenir T-shirt \$15

Movie ticket \$16

Hostel dorm bed \$25

residents, who are forbidden to use hoses to water their gardens or clean their cars. You can do your bit by being conscious of your water usage while in the city. Don't run taps unnecessarily – for instance, when brushing your teeth. Cut down on your shower time. Don't make your hotel wash your towels after every use. Use half flush on the loo.

Other small things you can do for the environment while in Sydney include saying no to plastic bags in shops, refilling water bottles from the tap and disposing of cigarette butts in the bin. If you stamp butts out on the street, they end up in the harbour with the next big rainfall. The same goes for other litter.

# THE AUTHORS

## Peter Dragicovich



Throughout the '90s Peter's pilgrimages to the Emerald City became more and more frequent, until he finally threw in the towel and took up residence in 1998. For the best part of the next decade he would call Sydney's

central suburbs home, while managing the city's most popular gay and lesbian newspaper and then a stable of glossy food, fashion and photography magazines. This is the sixth book he's co-authored for Lonely Planet.

### PETER'S TOP SYDNEY DAY

It's a lazy, sunny Sunday morning so I head up to Challis Ave in Potts Point to meet some friends for brunch. By some minor miracle I manage to nab a table outside Spring Espresso and I'm onto my second flat white before Kerri and Carly arrive. Carly commences an elaborate charade of discreet pointing and whispering before I realise that David Wenham is sitting at the next table.

After brunch we decide to go for a stroll, so we head down McElhone Stairs to glistening Woolloomooloo Bay and then up into The Domain. The Archibald Prize is on, so we drop into the Art Gallery to check out the weird and wonderful portraits and argue over favourites. The girls are keen to continue down to the Royal Botanic Gardens, but I've promised David and Barry that I'll join them at North Bondi so I head for the bus instead.

The beach is pumping. The boys have already claimed a patch of sand so I join them and spend the afternoon people-watching and bodysurfing. By late afternoon we're parched, so we head back to the flat to shower before decamping to the Green Park Hotel in Darlinghurst to rehydrate.

I've arranged to meet Jo for a cheap and cheerful dinner at Chu Bay in Surry Hills before the Grinderman gig at the Gaelic Club, so I farewell the boys and head on my way. The food and the show are both brilliant, but I'm not ready for the day to end just yet. Wandering back up to Oxford St, I have the feeling that it's going to be a messy night.

## Jolyon Attwool



Born in Sydney's King George V Memorial hospital, Jolyon spent his primary school years in Australia before upping sticks to England. This project was perfectly timed: during a recent Ashes series Jolyon *almost* supported the English

cricket team, an urge that thankfully subsided after time with his Sydneysider friends.

Jolyon wrote the Excursions chapter, the history and architecture sections of the Background chapter, as well as most of the walking tours in the Neighbourhoods chapter.

### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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