

# Mad about Melbourne

**CHRISTINE KNIGHT** takes in the sights of Melbourne on a solo mother-daughter trip.



The ever-cool city of Melbourne calls to us often with its trendy cafes, incredible museums and stunning parks. It's the place we go for a hit of culture and history, and we always end up wishing we could stay just a day or two longer.

## Making history

We kick off our most recent visit with some penal history at the **Old Melbourne Gaol**. As well as housing some of Australia's most infamous offenders (I'm looking at you here, Ned Kelly), it's also one of Melbourne's oldest buildings. We run around trying to solve clues to "escape" - the jail's latest family activity - managing to end up on the right side of the bars at the end.

The nearby **State Library of Victoria** is Australia's oldest public library, as well as one of the first free public libraries in the world. After our run in with Ned Kelly at the jail, we decide to pay a visit to his armour, which is housed in the library, before shooting off to the children's Play Pod area and finally settling in for a game of chess under the soaring domed roof of the La Trobe Reading Room.

A short stroll away is the **Melbourne Museum** in World Heritage-listed Carlton Gardens. We stop by the fountain on our way through the gardens, past the stunning (also World Heritage-listed) Royal Exhibition Building. We love the Melbourne Museum and never have enough time to see everything in the one visit. We always visit the dinosaurs and blue whale skeleton and, after saying a quick hello to the taxidermied Phar Lap upstairs, head to the Children's Gallery. It includes both an indoor play area and outdoor

garden with a water feature, sand pits to dig for fossils and little hidden creatures to discover.

## Art and about

We visit the **National Gallery of Victoria**, Australia's oldest and most visited public art museum and one of our favourite Melbourne attractions. With its dedicated interactive kids' space, garden and climbing structure, it's always a challenge to get my little one to leave.

When she tires of climbing rocks and hiding in the bushes, we head to our hotel via Federation Square and the **Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI)**, stopping for a peek at the displays that celebrate a topic we both love: TV and movies.

We are a family of LEGO-lovers, so a visit to Australia's first **LEGOLAND Discovery Centre** in **Chadstone Shopping Centre** is a must. The indoor LEGO playground is a cornucopia of brick delights, with incredible attention to detail. We build and build in the five LEGO play-and-build zones until we can build no more, then treat ourselves to a shopping fix afterwards.

Even more LEGO excitement will be on offer in Melbourne over the coming months with a brand new life-size Harley-Davidson made entirely from LEGO, among other enormous creations, all on display at **Brickman Awesome**, a new exhibition at **Melbourne Museum Plaza**.

Riding a creative high from our art-filled morning, we decide to complement the sensation by heading to the Docklands precinct and the **Melbourne Star Observation Wheel**. Here, we soak up a 360-degree unobstructed view of



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Victoria from what is the only giant wheel in the Southern Hemisphere. Another sky-high hit with my little one is **Eureka Skydeck 88**, the highest viewing platform in the Southern Hemisphere, where she loved the protruding glass cube over the city.

### Animal magnetism

Melbourne has a great range of animal attractions and we're hard-pressed to choose between them all. We're keen to meet the lemurs and get up close to other animals from Australia and around the world at **Melbourne Zoo**, but we're just as eager to go on an African safari at **Werribee Open Range Zoo**, bottle-feed lambs at **Collingwood Children's Farm**, meet the gorgeous gentoo penguins at **SEA LIFE Melbourne Aquarium** and peruse a platypus at **Healesville Animal Sanctuary**. If we only had time to do it all!

In the end, we decide on a day trip to **Phillip Island** for the Penguin Parade.

Watching the little penguins come in at sunset is an incredible experience that won't soon be forgotten. My daughter is so enamoured I check the car before we leave to make sure there aren't any penguins stowed away.

### Park life

We love exploring parks, so drop by **Fitzroy Gardens** to find **Captain Cook's Cottage**, play on the dragon slide and climb on the dolphin fountain. The winding paths also take us to a carved fairy tree and miniature Tudor village, all in the one park.

The Melbourne section of the **Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria** is across the road from the National Gallery of Victoria, and proves irresistible on a hot day with its large, shady trees. We head straight for **The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden** where I lose my daughter immediately among the windy paths through the bamboo forest and plant tunnels.

### Where to stay

#### PEGASUS APART'HOTEL

For families planning to explore the best of Melbourne, Pegasus Apart'Hotel offers long-stay apartments, ideally located just down the road from Flagstaff Gardens Playground and Queen Victoria Market. The kids are sure to love the themed bedrooms in the two-bedroom family suites.

[pegasussuites.com.au](http://pegasussuites.com.au)

#### OAKS HOTELS & RESORTS

Oaks Hotels & Resorts offers a choice of serviced apartment accommodation conveniently dotted throughout the CBD. Choose from locations on Collins, Lonsdale, Market and William streets, in leafy South Yarra or in the growing entertainment hub of Southbank. Select properties also offer a babysitting service, should parents wish to enjoy a little of Melbourne's famous nightlife.

[minorhotels.com/en/oaks](http://minorhotels.com/en/oaks)



It's a bit of a drive to the next attraction, but train-lovers can't miss **Puffing Billy**, a 100-year-old preserved steam railway that winds through the **Dandenong Ranges**, an hour east of Melbourne.

Our last stop before ending our adventure is the Cranbourne branch of the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, where we marvel at the Red Sand Garden, spot a bandicoot in the bushes and get silly in the water feature.

Melbourne, you've outdone yourself yet again. We adore this artistic, eclectic and historic city, and can't wait to return. ●

### Melbourne Report Card



Info [visitvictoria.com](http://visitvictoria.com)

**Getting there** Qantas flies daily to Melbourne from all Australian capital cities and major regional centres. [qantas.com](http://qantas.com)

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