

Five Reasons to Visit Melbourne whilst you're in Australia

Many Japanese tourists love to come to Australia and it's easy to see why. It is a beautiful country with vast, open spaces, gorgeous beaches, fascinating animals, plenty of things to do and lots of very friendly people. Australia is also home to the Great Barrier Reef, one of the seven natural wonders of the world.

Unfortunately due to time constraints, many Japanese tourists are only able to see very little of our attractive country and these places usually include Sydney (New South Wales), Queensland and Ayers Rock (Northern Territory). These are certainly wonderful destinations, but I can't help feeling disappointed that Melbourne is not on the list. You may think I am biased being a Melburnian myself, however I am clearly not the only one who believes this city is amazing. For the fourth year in a row now, my hometown of Melbourne has been named the world's most liveable city by The Economist Intelligence Unit Survey. Here are a few reasons why:

1. Food



Melbourne is a multicultural city with people living here from all over the world. Our community comprises people from Somalia, South Korea, New Zealand, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, Italy, India, Greece and Japan. Many Chinese came to Melbourne when gold was discovered in the 1850s. There is an area around Little Bourke Street called Chinatown where there are many restaurants serving delicious, authentic Chinese cuisine. From the 1920s to 1950s many Italians immigrated to Melbourne. If you love Italian food, Lygon Street is a must see with lots of Italian eateries.

Victoria Street is also a great place to visit. You can try some Vietnamese food, for example pho soup, as there is a strong Vietnamese community in this area. Almost every type of food is represented in Melbourne and there are restaurants to suit every budget from fine dining to casual. There is a real culture of eating out in Melbourne, so if you love to try different food then this is the place for you!

2. Parks



Melbourne is a city with a population of 4.35 million. It is a leading financial centre for Australia and the Asia Pacific. Therefore, there are lots of high-rise apartments and office buildings in the central business district. Despite this however, there are an abundance of picturesque parks and gardens. My personal favourites are Birrarung Marr, on the Yarra River's north bank, the Royal Botanic Gardens and St Vincents Gardens. St Vincents Gardens is located in Albert Park about 10 minutes from the Melbourne CBD and is walking distance from my home. It is a lovely, peaceful garden with big trees and an English style design. My family often visit for picnics, cricket, football, tennis, bowls and even birthday parties. My two children often enjoy playing on the swings, slides and playground equipment. With or without children this park is highly recommended to all Japanese tourists to Melbourne.

3. Sports



Many Melburnians are passionate about playing and spectating various sports. Thousands of people gather in world-class facilities to watch the tennis at the Australian Open, netball and basketball at the Hisense Arena, soccer at AAMI stadium and cricket or Australian rules footy at the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground). The Australian Rules football final is scheduled for the last Saturday in September and there are anticipated to be 100,000 excited spectators. As our team "the Swans" are in the grand final, we are hoping to attend on this day. Most events such as this are supported by entertainment and facilities around the stadium. There is almost always a real festival atmosphere. Even if you're not an avid sports fan, it is definitely worthwhile attending at least one major sporting event to appreciate the culture and spirit of Melbourne.

4. Melbourne Cup



The Melbourne Cup is a 3,200metre horse race for thoroughbreds three years and over. The race is hosted at the Flemington Racecourse in Melbourne on the first Tuesday in November every year. The race is known as “the race that stops the nation” and is a public holiday in Melbourne, although almost everyone in Australia and New Zealand stop working at 3pm to watch the broadcast. Everyone who attends on the day dresses formally and the women all wear hats. There is a large prize for the best-dressed man and woman on the day. Many people gamble by placing bets on the race or participating in workplace “sweeps”. This year there are two horses from Japan, Admire Ratki and Bande, due to compete in the race. So if you’re travelling to Australia in November and are lucky enough to visit Melbourne, be sure to come along to the Melbourne Cup, enjoy the festivities and support your home country.

5. Transport



The final reason why Melbourne is a must when you are in Australia is because of the transport system. Most of the attractions are within walking distance of each other so its very convenient and you can see many different places in a short time. Alternatively you can hop on and off the free tourist tram, called the City Circle, or a train. I'll be honest with you though, the public transport system is not as reliable as Japan. If you have just a little more time, there are also some fabulous attractions not too far outside of Melbourne. These include the Great Ocean Road, Philip Island, Mornington Peninsula, Yarra Valley Wineries, Gippsland and the Snow Country. These are all easily accessible by tour bus or car. As we drive on the same side of the road as Japan i.e. the left side, self-drive is another option – although some of the roads can be quite windy. There are countless things to see and do in and around Melbourne and the fact that they are all easily accessible makes it a perfect destination for Japanese tourists!