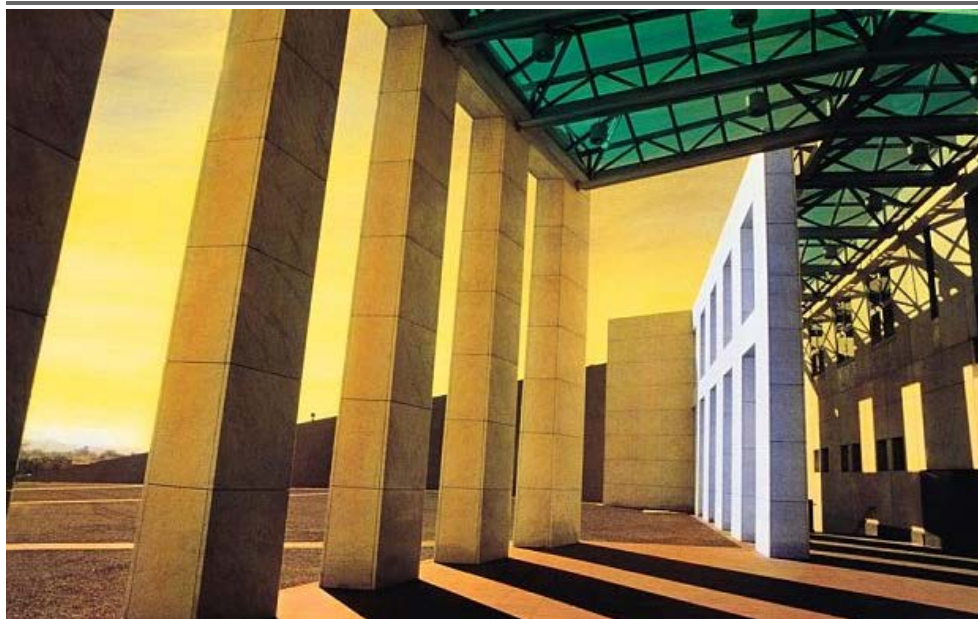


HOME » TRAVEL » DESTINATIONS » AUSTRALIA AND PACIFIC AUSTRALIA

## Australia: Is Canberra finally getting cool?

The purpose-built Australian capital, Canberra, may just be on the cusp of shedding its drab image



Australia's New Parliament House is one of Canberra's most distinctive buildings Photo: Alamy

By **David Whitley**

10:51AM BST 09 Oct 2014

3 Comments

Until very recently, admitting to rather liking Canberra would provoke snorting howls of laughter from Australian friends. Data released by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) suggested that the much-mocked Australian capital is the best place in the world to live - but that doesn't mean most Australians would want to live there.

When Bill Bryson suggested the marketing slogan of "Canberra: Why wait for death?", the majority of Aussies agreed whole-heartedly. Most still seem to regard it as an embarrassing cousin they'd really rather ignore. At best it has been seen as a handily distant quarantine pen for politicians and the thundering bores who accompany them.

Canberra exists because, when Australia federated in 1901, Sydney and Melbourne's bickering one-upmanship required a compromise. So a horizon of cow pastures around the Molonglo River was chosen, and a city was built according to the plan of Walter Burley-Griffin – a Chicagoan who never saw a circle he didn't instantly adore.



**Australia**  
[Travel »](#)  
[Australia and Pacific »](#)  
[Travel News »](#)



The world's most liveable cities

Telegraph  
**TRAVEL**  
COLLECTION

- ✓ BEACH ESCAPES
- ✓ ESCORTED TOURS
- ✓ CRUISE
- ✓ HOTELS
- ✓ CITY BREAKS
- ✓ CULTURAL ESCAPES

[VIEW OUR COLLECTION >>](#)

How to see Australia  
Ten great ways to see Down Under

More From The Web»



Today's debt busters

FIXED LOAN	VARIABLE LOAN	PERSONAL LOAN	CREDIT CARD
------------	---------------	---------------	-------------

### CUA Fixed Rate Loan



**5.26%**  
comparison rate

- ✓ 4.69% p.a. 3 year Fixed Rate
- ✓ No monthly account keeping fees
- ✓ Interest only repayment option for investment loans

[GO](#)

[Compare all home loans >](#)



The view from Parliament House (Alamy)

On first impressions, Burley-Griffin's vision can seem like little more than an enormous storage facility for roundabouts. But from the top of Mount Ainslie, everything lines up. The Australian War Memorial is directly below, while the monument-flanked ANZAC Parade points directly at Parliament House on the other side of Lake Burley Griffin, the man-made centrepiece of the city.

**Related Articles**

- [Darwin city guide](#) 22 Oct 2013
- [How to see the New Year's fireworks in Sydney](#) 02 Oct 2014
- [Traveller engrossed in his iPad sparks security alert](#) 30 Sep 2014
- [How to see an Australian Rules Football game](#) 12 Sep 2014
- [The art of Australia](#) 29 Nov 2012
- [Australia's Kimberley from above](#) 26 Nov 2012

One of the very best things about Canberra, however, remains the view from the other direction. Parliament House ([aph.gov.au](http://aph.gov.au)) has a gloriously Australian attitude to access. You can go in, park yourself on a sofa and read a book all day if you like. You can also grab a sandwich in the café, then head up to the grassed roof to enjoy an impromptu picnic. You look at out at the lake, and your backside points at the senators below.

The lake is a conduit for Canberra's wholesome outdoorsiness. Walking and cycling tracks loop for 35km around its shore, passing bird-thronged wetlands, architecturally ludicrous foreign embassies and thousands of intriguing oddities. Joggers can stop to look at a globe-shaped water feature that maps the routes of Captain Cook's voyages while congenitally nosy black swans glide up to the shoreline.

The dismissive contempt the rest of Australia feels towards Canberra is tinged with unspoken bitterness. When building an artificial capital, there's a need to stuff it with goodies to prop up its status. As a result, Canberra has by far the best museum collection in the country. Embracing the inner geek and settling in for days of unabashedly worthy educational nourishment is by far the best way to tackle the city.



12 of Australia's most surreal landscapes



Australia's 'Big Things'



Australia by Instagram



10 great free things to do in Sydney



Twenty destinations for 2014: Darwin, Australia

**More From The Web»**

Hot New LG G3 \$53/Mth on Optus

Stunning new LG G3 starting at \$53/Month Min. Total Cost \$1,272 over 24 months

Deals powered by WhistleOut

**EDITOR'S CHOICE**

**The wild pleasures of Australia's 'other' reef**



Matt Swaine takes his children to Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia for one of the country's great wildlife

experiences  
Comment

Down Under - for less than £150,000

A wildlife quest on Kangaroo Island

Great Ocean Road, Australia: Trip of a Lifetime

Australia by Instagram

**More From The Web»**

mozo-powered

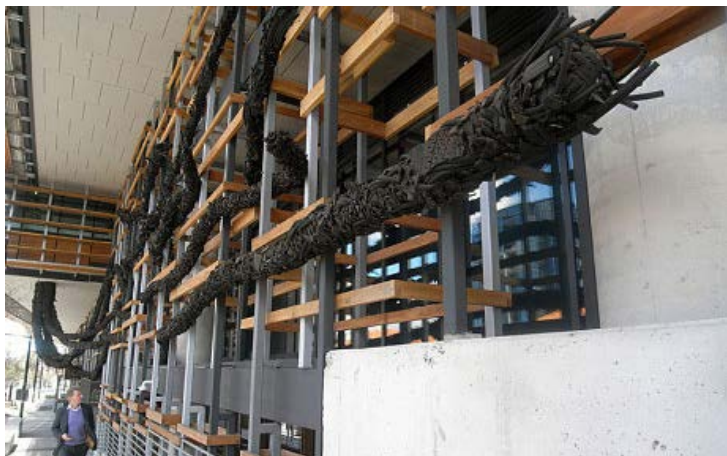
**Today's Home Loans**

Comparison Rate			
	loans.com.au Dream Home Loan Variable	4.56%	GO
Comparison Rate			
	bankmecu Basic Home Loan Special	4.61%	GO
Comparison Rate			
	Bank of Queensland Clear Path Variable Rate Home Loan	5.00%	GO

Compare all home loans ▶

**Promoted stories**





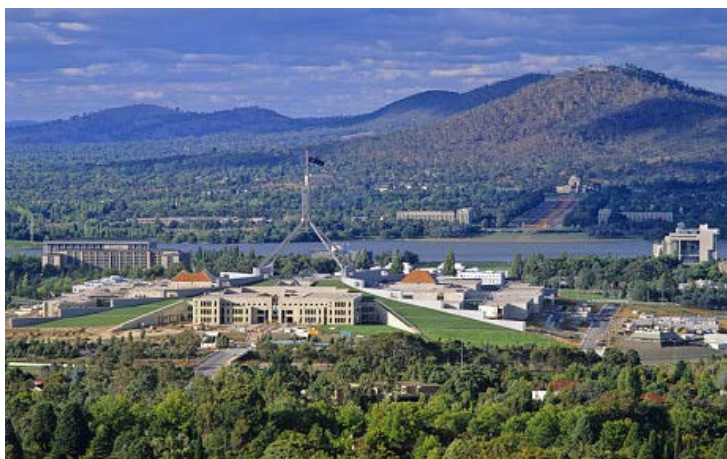
Public art on display in New Acton, Canberra's bohemian district (Alamy)

The National Library of Australia is a delightful hors d'oeuvre, with its Treasures Gallery using surprisingly salvaged documents to tell remarkable stories that peg out the country's history. Captain Cook's log book is mixed in with the first letter ever written by an Aboriginal man and diaries from comically disastrous outback expeditions.

The humungous, and mercifully riveting, National Museum of Australia ([nma.gov.au](http://nma.gov.au)) captures the tales of a diverse continent through carefully selected people and places. It leaps in bite-sized chunks from investigating how platypuses work to wheat specially bred to grow in Australian conditions. It then moves to gold rush towns that prompted immigration floods and gargantuan outback mineral mines.

But even in such a jewelled collection of majestically-presented nerdiness, the Australian War Memorial stands out. For British visitors, the First and Second World War galleries provide immersion in the 20th century's greatest conflicts from a very different perspective. Gallipoli, Rabaul, Tobruk and the Kokoda Track take precedence over Normandy, the Somme and the Blitz.

At 5pm, the Last Post ceremony is both intensely moving and cleverly personalised. Before the lone bugler plays each day, the story of a different Australian who died serving his or her country is read out, their photograph displayed next to the Pool of Remembrance.



Of course, having a lot to see and do doesn't prevent a city from being frighteningly dull. Thankfully, a large student population prevents Canberra from entering a deep sleep the moment the sun goes down – and new developments are in danger of making the city look uncharacteristically cool.

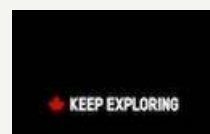
Now, the usual media derision towards Canberra seems to be shifting.



**Making the most of the space you have**  
(Domain Blog)



**Sydney's Top Restaurants**  
(Sydney.com)



**He's a Natural! Watch As This Canadian Black Bear Takes A Stab At...**  
(Visit Canada)



**Is it smart to take advantage of the early bird airfares to Europe...**  
(Traveller)

Recommended by 

Sydney's Daily Telegraph recently asked whether [Canberra is the new Melbourne](#) for stylish weekend breaks, while the travel editor of Melbourne's Age has gone on record to say "the most dowdy and unloved city in the country has been reborn".

There's both truth and hyperbole in this sudden reassessment. The NewActon precinct – all double take-inducing public art installations, buildings that resemble hormone-injected Jenga sets and bakeries-cum-restaurants with fire-charred walls – is the poster child for top-down planning vision. But it's the Braddon area's happy accidents and stubbornly creative whims that are really giving Canberra's reputation a vigorous purge.

The car yards and mechanics' shops that once made Braddon so forlornly functional have been turned into kale-obsessed, perma-brunching cafés. Tiny shops, often selling jewellery or clothes made by the person manning the till, are crammed under the former garage roof at Lonsdale Street Traders. The Bent Spoke microbrewery has just opened up on the corner of Mort and Elouera Streets, giant tanks dwarfing the fashionably bearded bar staff.

Fustiness is in very short supply – a sign that the compromise capital is beginning to strike out on its own. And, as a Down Under detour, Canberra's growing confidence is making it more than a mere guilty pleasure.

---

## Essentials

### Getting there

Canberra International Airport was named in a bout of wild-eyed optimism – no international flights land there. So getting to Canberra from the UK will involve at least two stops. Etihad (0345 6081225; [etihad.com](#)) flies from Heathrow or Manchester via Abu Dhabi to Sydney or Melbourne, with Virgin Australia codeshare connections on to Canberra. Emirates (0344 800 2777; [emirates.com](#)) offers similar, via Dubai and codesharing with Qantas, from six UK airports – including Glasgow, Newcastle and Birmingham. Return prices tend to start at around £900.

If hiring a car and driving from Sydney, the phenomenally tedious 287km grind down the Hume and Federal Highways can be completed in just over three hours of unrelenting monotony. Most major rental firms are represented at both Sydney and Canberra airports. Use the likes of [carrentals.co.uk](#) or [vroomvroomvroom.com.au](#) to shop around for the cheapest deals.

### Stay

Canberra's most enjoyably anti-cookie cutter accommodation options are in the NewActon precinct.

The terrifically tongue-in-cheek QT (00 61 2 6247 6244; [qtcanberra.com.au](#)) keeps just on the right side of knowingly kitsch, with pop art-style pictures of politicians on the key cards and wooden cut outs of world leaders' faces used as mirror frames. Doubles cost from \$155 (£84).

Architecturally bold Hotel Hotel (00 61 2 6287 6287; [hotel-hotel.com](#)) best embodies Canberra's new daringly cool streak, though. The darkly-lit lobby/ bar/ restaurant has both wow factor and near-permanent buzz from people just hanging out there. Rooms cost from \$248 (£135), and pull off a high-tech, luxurious, warehouse-meets-industrial chic.

### Must-dos

Get a better idea of Walter Burley-Griffin's city design – and spot kangaroos hopping below – on an early morning hot air balloon flight. Balloon Aloft ([canberraballoons.com.au](#)) will take you up for \$290 (£158).



Visit the giant dish antennae – including the one that received and relayed the first images of Neil Armstrong landing on the moon – at the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex ([cdscc.nasa.gov](http://cdscc.nasa.gov)).

Find out how and why Canberra was chosen as capital, plus see the designs for the city that didn't win the competition, at the National Capital Exhibition ([nationalcapital.gov.au](http://nationalcapital.gov.au)).

Take a guided tour around the Australian Institute of Sport ([aussport.gov.au/ais](http://aussport.gov.au/ais)), from where Australia hopes future Cathy Freemans and Ian Thorpes will emerge, with one of its budding athletes.

Head down to the Kingston Foreshore on a Sunday morning for the markets in the old bus depot ([obdm.com.au](http://obdm.com.au)), then have a go at making your own glass art in the Canberra Glassworks ([canberraglassworks.com](http://canberraglassworks.com)).

#### Further information

Australia.com and [VisitCanberra.com.au](http://VisitCanberra.com.au)

#### Telegraph Travel's expert guides to Australia

[Sydney city guide](#)

[Melbourne city guide](#)

[Perth city guide](#)

[Brisbane city guide](#)

[Tasmania city guide](#)

[Darwin city guide](#)

[Adelaide city guide](#)

#### Win one of 40 holidays worth £800,000

Telegraph Travel Awards 2014: vote for your favourite destinations and travel companies for the chance to win one of 40 luxury breaks worth a total of £800,000.

#### Travel Guides app

Download the free Telegraph Travel app, featuring expert guides to destinations including Paris, Rome, New York, Venice and Amsterdam

[Follow Telegraph Travel on Twitter](#)

[Follow Telegraph Travel on Facebook](#)

[Follow Telegraph Travel on Pinterest](#)

[Follow Telegraph Travel on FourSquare](#)

#### Visit the Telegraph cruise shows

Come along to the Telegraph Cruise Show in Liverpool (October 11-12, 2014) and London (January 9-11, 2015). Book tickets and sign up for the newsletter at [telegraph.co.uk/cruiseshow](http://telegraph.co.uk/cruiseshow)