

GAY & LESBIAN MELBOURNE

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Richard Watts

Melbourne's gay and lesbian community is well integrated into the general populace; spread throughout the densely populated inner-city suburbs that encircle the CBD, rather than clustered into a single gay ghetto.

The majority of clubs and bars are found in two distinct locations on the north and south sides of the Yarra River – a distance easily traversed by a 15-minute taxi ride come nightfall.

South of the river, the area known colloquially as 'Southside', takes in the fashionable suburbs of St Kilda, South Yarra and Prahran. Commercial Rd, which separates the latter two suburbs, is home to numerous gay clubs and cafés. Glamour and style reign supreme on the Southside, with the locals described as debonair sophisticates or shallow devotees of the body beautiful, depending on who you speak to.

North of the Yarra, more commonly known as 'Northside', you'll find the lesbian enclave of Northcote with its strip of funky High St bars and shops, and a cluster of gay venues in the inner-city suburbs of Abbotsford, Collingwood and Fitzroy. Northside residents are reputedly more down to earth than their cousins across the river; as well as a little more bohemian, a little less pretentious and (again, depending who you speak to) slightly more feral.

Still in its infancy, another gay village is developing in the inner west, around the narrow streets of Yarraville.

SHOPPING

DUNGEON WAREHOUSE

Map pp74–5 Fashion, Accessories

☎ 9416 4800; www.dungeonwarehouse.com.au;
130 Hoddle St, Abbotsford; ☎ Collingwood

A retail outlet specialising in leather and fetish clothing for men.

HARES & HYENAS BOOKSHOP

Map pp74–5 Books

☎ 9495 6589; www.hares-hyenas.com.au;
63 Johnston St, Fitzroy; ☎ 96, 86

A well-resourced and welcoming gay and lesbian bookshop, which regularly features readings by visiting authors.

OUTVIDEO

Map pp88–9 DVD/Video

☎ 9525 3669; www.out.com.au; 108 St Kilda Rd,
St Kilda; ☎ 11am–10pm; ☎ 67

This video/DVD store specialises in GLBT films to rent or buy.

DRINKING & NIGHTLIFE

MARKET

Map pp84–5 Club

☎ 9826 0933; www.markethotel.com.au;
143 Commercial Rd South Yarra; ☎ 10pm–8am
Fri–Sat; ☎ Prahran, ☎ 72

The queen of clubs is undoubtedly Melbourne's largest gay venue and popular with experienced clubbers who love house music and late-night drag shows. International djs and guests appear regularly.

XCHANGE HOTEL

Map pp84–5 Pub

☎ 9867 5144; www.xchange.com.au; 119 Commercial Rd,
South Yarra; ☎ 4pm–1am Mon–Thu, 2pm–3am
Fri–Sun; ☎ Prahran, ☎ 72

Features drag shows most nights of the week as well as djs playing Top 40 and commercial dance tunes. Attracts a young, stylish clientele.

PRINCE OF WALES HOTEL

Map pp88–9 Pub

☎ 9536 1111; www.princebars.com.au; 29 Fitzroy St,
St Kilda; ☎ noon–2am Mon–Thu, noon–3am
Fri–Sat; ☎ 16, 96, 122

This landmark in bayside St Kilda is home to the iconic monthly night *Girlbar* (www.girlbar.com.au). Downstairs, on street level, the back bar attracts a predominantly gay and lesbian crowd seven days a week.

LAIRD HOTEL

Map pp74–5 Pub/Club

☎ 9417 2832; www.lairdhotel.com; 149 Gipps St
Collingwood; ☎ 5pm–late; ☎ Collingwood

A men-only venue that attracts an older, denim and leather crowd.

OPIUM DEN

Map pp74–5 Bar

☎ 9417 2696; www.opiumden.com.au; 176 Hoddle St,
Abbotsford; ☎ 7pm–1am Wed–Thu, 7pm–3am
Fri–Sat, 5pm–1am Sun; ☎ Collingwood

Home of Melbourne's gay and lesbian Asian community, the Laird features drag shows and live entertainment.

GLASSHOUSE HOTEL

Map pp74–5 Pub

☎ 9419 4748; www.glass-house.com.au; 51–55
Gipps St, Collingwood; ☎ 11am–1am Wed–Thu,
11am–5am Fri, noon–5am Sat, noon–midnight Sun;
☎ 16, 96, 12

Caters for a mostly lesbian crowd with entertainment including live bands, drag kings and djs.

PEEL HOTEL

Map pp74–5 Club

☎ 94194762; www.thepeel.com.au; cnr Peel &
Wellington Sts, Collingwood; ☎ 9pm–dawn
Thu–Sun; ☎ 86

Features a mostly male crowd dancing to house music, retro and commercial dance.

COMMERCIAL HOTEL

Map pp48–9 Pub

☎ 9687 9578, 238 Whitehall St, Yarraville;
☎ Yarraville

A friendly, low-key pub in Melbourne's inner west that presents drag shows every Thursday and Saturday night.

SLEEPING

OPIUM DEN

Map pp74–5 Hotel \$

☎ 9417 2696; www.opiumden.com.au; 176 Hoddle
St, Abbotsford; ☎ 7pm–1am Wed–Thu, 7pm–3am
Fri–Sat, 5pm–1am Sun; d \$77; ☎ Collingwood

As well as being a popular gay bar, Opium Den is also a residential hotel, and popular with gay and lesbian visitors from regional Victoria.

169 DRUMMOND

Map pp78–9 Guesthouse \$\$

☎ 9663 3081; www.169drummond.com.au;
169 Drummond St, Carlton; d \$135–145; ☎ 1, 8

A privately owned guesthouse in a renovated, 19th-century terrace in the inner north, one block from vibrant Lygon St.

FESTIVALS

Held each year over late January–early February is the *Midsumma Festival* (www.midsumma.org

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.au), with a diverse program of cultural, community and sporting events, including the popular Midsumma Carnival, Pride March and much more.

Australia's largest GLBT film festival, the *Melbourne Queer Film Festival* (www.melbournequeerfilm.com.au) screens 140 films from around the world each March. Opening night at the Art Deco *Astor Theatre* (Map pp88–9; ☎ 9510-1414, cnr Dandenong Rd & Chapel St, St Kilda) is one of the social events of the year, with the majority of sessions held at the *Australian Centre for the Moving Image* (Map pp52–3; ☎ 8663 2200; Federation Square).

Less than two hours' drive from Melbourne is the *ChillOut Festival* (www.chilloutfestival.com.au), held each Labour Day long weekend in March in the gay-friendly country town of Daylesford (p259).

RESOURCES

Two free weekly newspapers, each published on Thursdays, service Melbourne's gay and lesbian community and are excellent sources of up-to-the-minute information and resources for visitors: *MCV* (www.mcv.net.au) and *Bnews* (www.bnews.net.au).

The gay and lesbian community radio station *JOY 94.9 FM* (www.joy.org.au) is another important resource for visitors and locals alike, and provides regular updates about key community events.

The *Gay and Lesbian Switchboard* (☎ 9510 5488; ☎ 6–10pm Mon, Tue & Thur, 2–10pm Wed, 6–9pm Fri–Sun) operates a telephone counselling service.

The *Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre* (☎ 9865 6700; www.vic aids.asn.au; 6 Claremont St, South Yarra; ☎ 9am–9pm Mon–Thu, 9am–5pm Fri) is a community health centre providing medical and counselling services for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Richard Watts is the editor of Melbourne's weekly gay and lesbian newspaper MCV and presents a weekly arts program on radio station 3RRR

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