

THE IRISH TIMES

SE Saturday Magazine
HD **Weekend in Sydney; Go off-track from the famous harbour and discover a city bursting with art spaces, cool bars and stunning beaches, writes Ingrid K Williams**
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In ever-sunny, easygoing Sydney, don't let the famous attractions circling the handsome harbour consume all your attention. Focus instead on the evolving neighbourhoods where art spaces are cropping up beside train tracks, and innovative, chef-driven restaurants are opening at a rapid clip. If you're searching for flash, look to Darling Harbour, where celebrity chefs like David Chang and Luke Nguyen have opened outposts in the Star, a ritzy casino and entertainment complex that reopened in 2011 after a renovation costing about \$800 **million**.

For more discreet indulgences, seek out the diminutive drinking dens that now pepper the city, the result of a change in local liquor licensing laws that finally made **business** viable for small bars. Then when it's time to dry out, the natural beauty of Australia's most populous city will be waiting along the sandy beaches that lie just minutes from downtown. And don't worry, you're bound to pass a certain opera house along the way.

TD

Friday

3pm

1 Modern Masters

Sydney is the pre-eminent place for art on the continent, in part because of the city's soaring multi-storey art spaces. First hop over to the White Rabbit Gallery (free), which focuses exclusively on contemporary **Chinese** art.

Rotating exhibitions draw from the gallery's vast collection, which includes stunning pieces like a life-size wire motorbike by Shi Jindian, a pile of Ai Weiwei's sunflower seeds, and Tu Wei-Cheng's reproduction of a chocolate shop stocked with tank- and bomb-shaped confections. Then head uptown to the Rocks precinct where the renovated Museum of Contemporary Art reopened in 2012 with a new five-storey wing.

Most interesting are the temporary exhibitions, like last year's captivating Anish Kapoor retrospective and, now, a thought-provoking collection from Yoko Ono.

6pm

2 Duck, Duck, Dumplings

In a city flush with excellent Asian restaurants, one of the most exciting is Mr Wong, a two-level, **Chinese**-inflected establishment hidden down a narrow lane. The restaurant's elegant interior features wood-beam ceilings, bamboo-framed chairs and rows of plump ducks hanging in the kitchen window. After seeing the fowl, it will be difficult to pass up the **Chinese** roasted duck (half order, AUD\$34, €21) or the Peking duck pancakes (half order, \$45, €28), but save room for a platter of delicious steamed dim sum (\$32, €20).

8pm

1 Culture Carriage

Near the ascendant Redfern area, a 19th-century industrial complex where railroad cars were once constructed, is now a cavernous cultural hub called Carriageworks. Located at the old Eveleigh Railway Yards, the venue hosts myriad contemporary arts events - everything from offbeat plays to large-scale art exhibitions - in its multiple performance and exhibition spaces. Look out for an ambitious installation by Christian Boltanski this month, and performances from the Samoan choreographer Lemi Ponifasio's **company** of Maori dancers, MAU, in May.

11pm

3 Basement Bars

Finding Sydney's most atmospheric bars is no easy task. For example, to reach the Baxter Inn, you walk down an unmarked alley, through an unkempt courtyard and down a flight of industrial-looking steps to a nondescript basement door. When you're mumbling "this can't possibly be right", heave the heavy portal open to enter an attractive, dimly lit saloon with vintage boxing posters on the walls and hundreds of fine whiskeys lined up behind the bar. Another hip hangout squirrelled away from view is Frankie's Pizza. The front half of the bar is a kitschy homage to a pizzeria, with plastic checked tablecloths and Chianti-bottle candleholders, while the rear half houses a rollicking American dive bar circa 1987, with pinball machines flashing and deep cuts from Guns N' Roses blasting. There are also tasty sausage pizzas and craft beers from around the world, so plan for a very late - and fun - night.

Saturday

9am

4 Seaside Salutations

Greet the morning with a series of sun salutations in stupendously scenic environs. About a mile south of the more famous Bondi Beach, along a breathtakingly beautiful waterfront walkway, is Bronte Beach, a boomerang of golden sand nestled between **wind**-worn cliffs, a verdant public park and the Tasman Sea. Here, in full view of the aquamarine water, Yoga by the Sea holds restorative hatha classes in a beachfront studio (\$23, €14). Sessions are also held at Bondi and Tamarama beaches, but finding your centre amid the sea breezes and rhythmic crashing of waves in Bronte is hard to top. After class, cool off with a dip in the sea or **stake** out a spot on the beach for a blissful, extended savasana.

12.30pm

5 Bronte Bites

From the beach, it's a short (albeit steep) uphill walk to Three Blue Ducks, a casual restaurant run by three surfer friends. The vibe is laid-back - colourful murals painted across the walls, fresh air wafting through open doors and windows - but the organic-focused menu reflects a fine-dining sensibility. During the antipodean summer, try a bright salad from the ever-changing menu; a recent standout included spicy duck, green mango and bean sprouts. Then scope out the backyard garden that most likely supplied some of the produce that graced your plate. Lunch for two, about \$50 (€31).

3pm

6 Neighbourhood Shops

Spend the afternoon strolling through Surry Hills, a tranquil neighbourhood where the tree-lined streets are home to organic markets, sidewalk cafes and stylish shops. Give your wandering purpose with a shopping tour beginning at Mushu, an eclectic boutique brimming with vintage-inspired clothing, delicate jewellery and bright leather bags.

Then cross the road to the Standard Store, an airy shop stocked with printed sundresses, striped sailor shirts and polished brogues for dapper ladies and gents. Afterward, head to Workshopped, a cool housewares store packed with Australian-designed products, from **copper** pendant lamps to amber glass jam jars.

7pm

7 Grill Guys

Stick around Surry Hills for supper at Porteño, a lively Argentine restaurant owned by chefs Ben Milgate and Elvis Abrahamowicz. Dine on whole suckling pig and **milk**-fed lamb, roasted over an open flame for eight hours, or try a steak cooked on the smoking parrilla.

Should you find yourself waiting for a table, head upstairs to Gardel's Bar, where you can whet your appetite with a Fernet Branca and cola - a popular tippie in Argentina. Dinner for two, about \$100 (€63).

10pm

8 Little Darlings

After dinner, head north to Darlinghurst, a slightly scruffier area dotted with great watering holes. Start at Red Lily, a tiny Indochina-inspired cocktail bar that serves creative concoctions like the Pham Fatale (kaffir lime leaf vodka, lychee and ginger liqueurs, lemon, and coconut water, \$18, (€11). Continue the bar crawl at Shady Pines Saloon, a basement bar that could double as a taxidermist's lair.

It's easy to settle in here, shelling peanuts, listening to honky-tonk, petting the stuffed bull head and drinking beer all night. But if you tire of the tongue-in-cheek Americana, head out for a nightcap at Hinky Dinks.

At this '50s-themed bar, claim a seat on the banquettes and order one of the irresistibly cutesy cocktails, like the Hinky Fizz: strawberry-and-prosecco sorbet, gin, St-Germain, peach bitters and grapefruit juice served in a sorbet cup (\$18, €11).

Sunday

10am

9 Bread and Brett

Start the morning mingling with the many neighbourhood pooches that accompany their owners outside Bourke Street Bakery, a local institution that recently opened a fifth location. At one of the original cafe's sidewalk tables, linger over a short black and a pear-and-berry muffin or sweet pistachio crème brûlée tart. Then grab a loaf of sourdough and walk up the block to the Brett Whiteley Studio (free), the former home and workplace of the prominent Australian artist. Now an exhibition space under the auspices of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the studio contains some of Whiteley's abstract and surrealist pieces, as well as his well-preserved loft workshop, complete with unfinished works, reference books and inspiration wall.

12.30pm

10 Harbourside Hideaway

Seaside beaches like Bondi can get crowded, so instead soak up the sun harbourside. One secluded swathe of soft golden sand on the harbour's eastern edge is Camp Cove Beach, where clear turquoise water laps the shore.

It's the sort of secret spot where Sydneysiders come for a picnic, a swim and a reminder of the fantastic nature that lies so close to their concrete metropolis. To reach this hidden beach, take the ferry from Circular Quay to Watsons Bay, a relaxing ride that also affords a fine view of - what else? - the white wedges of the iconic Sydney Opera House backed by the steel arch of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Where to stay

The QT Sydney (49 Market Street; qtsydney.com.au) opened in September 2012 with 200 rooms spread within two historic buildings: Gowings department store and heritage-listed State Theatre. Rooms feature a chic, theatrical style, with bowler-hat lamps and oxblood skins draped on beds. The quirky décor extends to the hotel's restaurant, cocktail bar, spa and barbershop. Doubles from \$295 (€187).

The 2012 opening of the redesigned Park Hyatt Sydney (7 Hickson Road; sydney.park.hyatt.com) ushered in a new era of luxury lodgings in the city. In the hotel's 155 rooms and suites, clean lines and neutral tones prime the star attraction: balcony views of the city skyline, the Sydney Opera House, and the sparkling harbour. Doubles from €1,060 (€674).

- New York TimesService

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