

The Departures Ten

Suddenly Sydney

In the first of a series, DEPARTURES travels to Australia, where Luxe Guides editor **GRANT THATCHER** spotlights the city's best and latest.

Situated on Australia's eastern coast, Sydney is blessed with one of the world's finest natural harbors and a slew of stunning beaches (Bondi, Tamarama, Bronte), all within 15 minutes of the city's central business district. And if the expanses of blond sand, blue skies and crystal waters somehow aren't enough to satisfy even the most discriminating traveler, then the increasingly smart culture and fashion scenes certainly will. Not to mention the gastronomy: With such a wealth of fine local produce and ultra-fresh seafood, Sydneysiders take their food and drink extremely seriously. Beyond the center, Sydney spins off into a variety of neighborhoods: hipster Surry Hills and upwardly mobile Paddington to the east; alternative Newtown and stroller-pushing Balmain to the west; Manly across the harbor and to the north;



Even with a slew of recent arrivals, Quay (at right) remains one of the city's best restaurants with a view.

COURTESY QUAY



The mod courtyard of Costa Plenti, a private apartment for those seeking villa comforts, Sydney-style

and residential suburbs all around. It's all accessible, low-rise, wonderfully green (despite a recent drought) and about to hit its summertime peak. What follows are ten very good reasons to go down under right now.

1 | *Perfect Pied-à-Terre*
The Park Hyatt remains the city's best five-star hotel, but if that's not the experience you're looking for in easygoing Sydney, the two-year-old full-service apartment **Costa Plenti** might be just the thing. Located in the swanky retail enclave of Double Bay, just ten minutes from the city center, and owned by travel consultant Fay Cohen, this contemporary one-bedroom pad has polished wood floors and a white and ecru palette. There's Moët on arrival, a full kitchen, a Bang & Olufsen entertainment system, two flatscreen TVs (one of them 52 inches), plus WiFi, iPod dock, laptop, parking and courtyard garden. The windows and doors let in ample bay breezes (though there's

air-conditioning, too), and with Cohen's office downstairs, access to her little black book is easy. *From \$800 a night. At 6 Transvaal Ave., Double Bay; 61-2/9326-1166; costaplenti.com.*

2 | *Alfresco*
Because the greatest part of Sydney's great outdoors is its harbor, with its smattering of small islands and secluded beaches, one of the best ways to explore the city is by boat.

Sydney Harbour Escapes (61-2/9328-4748; sydneyharboureescapes.com.au) rents a variety of crewed or uncrewed motor and sailing vessels by the day or the hour, and **Aquabay Charters** (61-434/392-225; aquabaycharters.com.au) has one of the most impressive boats on the harbor: the *I Do*, a 33-foot Pegiva Eclipse. With Brazilian mahogany decks, teak detailing and leather seats, the ten-seat speedboat would look equally at home on the French Riviera and can hit up to 45 knots, making quick work of Sydney's waterways. For the perfect picnic, there's the idyllic Bantry Bay in Middle Harbour's Garigal National Park—once home to World War II munitions and now surrounded by

eucalyptus trees and glittering water—and for the perfect lunch there's **Sydney Picnic Company** (see "Pick a Picnic").

3 | *Strictly Italian*
Sydney's fondness for Italian cooking is everywhere these days, from the formal Manly Pavilion (see "Tables with a View") to the excellent, relaxing trattoria in the **Beresford Hotel** (dinner, \$45; 354 Bourke St., Surry Hills NSW; 61-2/9357-1111; theberesford.com.au), which opened at the end of 2008 and earned rave reviews. Gabriele Taddeucci took over the kitchen in August, introducing flavors from his native Tuscany. Two new spots are tops. At the earthy, rustic Milanese **La Pesa** (dinner, \$55; 172-4 Liverpool St., Darlinghurst NSW; 61-2/9331-4358; lapesa.com.au), seasonal accents punctuate handmade pasta and risotto, and tile floors and chunky wood tables create a cozy vibe. And **Berta** (dinner, \$50; 17-19 Alberta St.; 61-2/9264-6133; berta.com.au), meanwhile, is a boisterous, no-frills, no-reservations concrete bunker on a nondescript lane downtown. An offshoot of the pioneering wine bar Vini, this five-month-old place specializes in food made to share, with an affordable wine list. The deep-fried cauliflower and chickpeas with caraway are addictive, as is the crisp snap and crackle of the skin on the roast suckling pig. To score a coveted seat, one should get on the waiting list at 6 P.M. and wait for the call. **CONTINUED»**

TASTING NOTES

PICK A PICNIC

Founded by two British expats two years ago, **Sydney Picnic Company** assembles stylish hamper lunches from four menus—Australian, British, Italian or Spanish—all starting at \$110 and serving two. 61-4/2094-3670; sydneypicnic.com.au.



4 *Tables with a View*

The golden rule of destination dining—that the splendor of the view tends to be inversely proportional to the quality of the food—is frequently broken in Sydney. Take, for instance, the grand dame **Quay** (dinner, \$145; Overseas Passenger Terminal, W. Circular Quay, The Rocks; 61-2/9251-5600; quay.com.au), overlooking the Opera House, where executive chef Peter Gilmore collaborates with and uses produce from a nearby organic farm; or the over-the-water **Pier** (dinner, \$65; 594 New S. Head Rd., Rose Bay; 61-2/9327-6561; pierrestaurant.com.au), still the city's best seafood 20 years on. The latest arrival is eight-month-old **Manly Pavilion** (dinner, \$80; W. Esplanade, Manly Cove; 61-2/9949-9011; manlypier.com), in a thirties bathing pavilion that's been given a contemporary spin with timber, polished concrete, wall-to-wall glass, a magnificent wraparound deck and commanding views of the North Heads entrance to the harbor. While seafood is the star (grilled scampi with celery ragù and

bagna cauda, say, or panfried whiting fillets wrapped in *lardo*), Jonathan Barthelme's deft touch with Italian-Mediterranean cooking extends to comforting dishes like black-pepper risotto and beef short ribs, too.



A confit of South Australian squid with red core radishes and garlic custard from Quay

UP IN THE AIR

GREAT PLANES

With Sydney Seaplanes, the Palm Beach peninsula and the Berowra Waters Inn (see no. 10) are each only a 20-minute flight from the city, making them easy day trips or even dinner destinations: The company has fly-and-dine packages. At Lyne Park, Rose Bay; 61-2/9388-1978; seaplanes.com.au.

5 *Fashion Avenue*

The eastern suburb of Paddington has long been the place for the best Aussie fashion. The choicest picks, especially for women, are concentrated on and around Glenmore Road, where beloved brands like Sass & Bide, Scanlan & Theodore and Willow are clustered. Two recent additions are attracting particular attention: **Bassike** (26 Glenmore

Rd.; 61-2/9999-5586) does top-quality dresses, trousers and stylish t-shirts in organic cotton jersey as well as uncomplicated knits, denim and linen staples for men and women. And the new outpost of **Ginger & Smart** (16 Glenmore Rd.; 61-2/9380-9966) focuses on chic dresses and jackets, plus edgy resortwear and a range of spa products. After shopping, Glenmore regulars like a glass of wine and a bite to eat at **Jackies Café & Sushi Bar** (lunch,

from \$20; 237 Glenmore Rd.; 61-2/9380-9818). And for the inside track on Oz's top labels, there's **Fiona Milne** (fifi.com.au), a former fashion editor and stylist and now the city's best-kept personal-shopping secret.

6 *Dessert Only*

Sydney's European immigrants have helped shape a highly opinionated café culture. But in the past three years, new artisanal bakeries and specialist pâtisseries have started to complement the hallowed coffee-and-cake ritual. If one in particular should be singled out, it's **Adriano Zumbo's** eponymous shop. At once works of art and flights of fancy, his wittily named confections taste as good as they look. The Honey Comover, a play on the jelly roll, is filled with buttercream and shards of honeycomb, and the Cloudy Thyme combines

licorice-flavored pastry, olive oil crème citron, butterscotch caramel, oven-roasted apples, mint and Italian thyme meringue. At 296 Darling St., Balmain; adrianozumbo.com.

7 *For the Home*

One look at the goods at **Bemboka** is enough to make anyone start cooing about yarn ply, nap and thread count. Stacked floor to ceiling in designer Petr Houf's hidden, appointment-only Paddington showroom, which opened in the spring, are waves of gorgeous pure Italian cashmere throws, Angora rabbit and fine Australian merino wool blankets, linen sheets and Turkish cotton towels. The ultra-fine wares are knit, wet-finished and tumble-dried in New Zealand, where they're also dyed in neutral shades. The wide-rib blankets and cable-knit throws in merino wool

shouldn't be missed, and many items can be made to order in any size. *At 90 Sutherland St., Paddington; bemboka.com.*

8 *Bar Culture*

Thanks to antiquated licensing laws and fees, Sydney's bar scene has historically been lacking—something that left Melbournians laughing into their old-fashioned. But recent changes have led to the arrival of small and sophisticated bars. The grunge-cool **Pocket Bar** (13 Burton St., Darlinghurst; 61-2/9380-7002; pocketsydney.com.au) does perfect mojitos, and the slightly kitsch, Wild West-inspired **Shady Pines Saloon** (256 Crown St.; feedback@swillhouse.com), in Surry Hills, specializes in beer and whiskey. For the city's best classic cocktails, there's the ten-month-old **Eau De Vie** (229 Darlinghurst Rd.; 61-4/2226-3226; eaudevie.com.au), tucked in the back of the boutique Kirketon Hotel in Darlinghurst, where a crack team of gin slingers works in a moody, low-lit speakeasy-style salon where ice is hand-cut, and the Dark & Stormy is mixed with house-made ginger beer. It's best to arrive early or call ahead to reserve a table.

9 *Gallery Scene*

Melbourne claims the prize as Australia's art capital, but many of its large galleries have satellites in Sydney, too. The latest homegrown space to arrive, however, is the **Dominik Mersch Gallery** (11/2 Danks St., Waterloo; dominikmerschgallery.com), with an impressive list of European artists including Giacomo Costa, who represented Italy at the 2009 Venice Biennale. **Tim Olsen** (63 Jersey Rd.; timolsen-gallery.com) opened his eponymous gallery in Paddington three years ago and features important Oz artists, not least of all his internationally renowned father, the painter John Olsen. The long-established **Hogarth Galleries** (7 Walker Ln.; aboriginalartcentres.com), also in Paddington, remains the go-to for all things Aboriginal. And over in Rushcutters Bay, Ali and Di Yeldham's **Arthouse Gallery** (66 McLachlan Ave.; arthouse-gallery.com.au) shows new and mid-career Aussies like abstract landscape and figurative artist Joshua Yeldham in a recently renovated space. For those seeking more guidance, Isobel Johnston of **Sydney Art Tours** (61-4/0037-8842) can arrange personalized tours with 48 hours' notice, and for connoisseurs thinking about investing,



Chef Dietmar Sawyere (top left) oversees the contemporary Australian cuisine at the Berowra Waters Inn just outside Sydney (above); a painting by Swiss artist Beat Zoderer from the Dominik Mersch Gallery.

Alison Renwick Art Consultancy (61-4/1236-3431; alisonrenwick@ozemail.com.au) guides clients through galleries and offers smart advice.

10 *Beyond Sydney*

A 50-minute drive up the coast is the Palm Beach peninsula, or "Palmie" as it's called by the stylish locals who've made it Sydney's answer to the Hamptons. Most stay for the weekend at **Barrenjoey House** (rooms, from \$170; 1108 Barrenjoey Rd.; 61-2/9974-4001; barrenjoeyhouse.com.au) or rent through **LJHooker Palm Beach** (61-2/9974-5999; palmbeachholidayrentals.com.au). For a casual beachside brunch, there's the recently renovated **Boathouse** (brunch, \$20; 1108 Barrenjoey Boathouse, Governor Philip Park.; 61-2/9974-3868; theboathousepb.com), atop a wooden wharf,

with a new bar, an expanded kitchen and excellent fish-and-chips. Just around the headland, at Whale Beach, the mod Oz cuisine of cliffside classic **Jonah's** (dinner, \$60; 69 Bynya Rd., Whale Beach; 61-2/9974-5599; jonahs.com.au) puts the emphasis on seafood and relaxed romance. The **Berowra Waters Inn** (dinner, \$140; 61-2/9456-1027; berowrawatersinn.com), west of Palmie, provides something even more special. Only reachable by seaplane or boat, the luxed-up, tin-roof cottage in the middle of national parkland and surrounded by water and bush does multicourse tasting menus in a setting that is quintessentially Australian. The service is impeccable, and Dietmar Sawyere's contemporary cooking—crown roast of wild hare with Belgian endive, say—is as sensational as it is seasonal.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ANSON SMART; COURTESY BEAT ZODERER/DOMINIK MERSCH GALLERY; ANSON SMART