

July 11, 2004 Sunday

**SECTION:** ESCAPE; Pg. 604

**LENGTH:** 898 words

**HEADLINE:** Rug up and do winter in style

**BYLINE:** Alison Cotes

**BODY:**

Victoria

GET out the long undies, the long overcoat and the woolly gloves, because one of the best times to visit Melbourne is in winter. I'm intimate with this city and the vagaries of its weather -- it is my home town, after all -- and although it's beautiful beyond belief in spring, the weather is completely unreliable. If you go then you'll find yourself shivering in your lightweight Queensland shoes.

At least if you go in winter you know it's going to be freezing, and can pack accordingly.

And it doesn't have to be walks in the Fitzroy Gardens to see Captain Cook's Cottage and the Fairy Tree, either, because there are ways of having a great time without exposing yourself to too many of the elements, and without spending a fortune.

So here are the Insider's Tips to enjoying a middle-market holiday in the greyest, dampest, most beautiful city in Australia.

First, forget the big hotels -- they're far too expensive for the ordinary budget, and you have to spend a fortune on eating out.

Tempting as that is, with Melbourne's world-class eateries (and we will visit some of them), it's cheaper and almost as much fun to self-cater, and you can do this in comfort in the Medina Executive Apartments in Flinders St, where I always stay now.

It's right opposite the MCG and the tennis centre, and the free City Circle tram stops right outside the door, which means you can travel almost anywhere in the inner city for nothing.

It's just a block and a half from Flinders St Station ("I'll meet you under the clocks"), where you'll also find the controversial Federation Square on one corner, St Paul's Cathedral on another, and Young and Jackson's pub, with Chloe still hanging naked in the bar, making up the fourth.

These apartments come fully equipped with kitchen and laundry, and a big living-dining area where even little children won't feel cramped, and if you take a guided

tour of the Victoria Markets, you'll come home with enough exotic ingredients to cook up a gourmet storm.

That's if you don't have breakfast (most accommodation packages at Medina come with a voucher) in the little cafe hidden just behind the apartments, or walk a block towards Swanston St to eat at Melbourne's trendiest new tapas bar, Movida, where deep-fried ham croquettes cost just \$2.80 each, a ballantine of Victorian rabbit with a Catalan quince aioli will set you back \$8.50, and Poor Man's Potatoes with olive oil, peppers and garlic are a mere \$7.

The endless jugs of sangria might bump the bill up a little but, hey, we're on holidays.

The other cheap and cheerful place to eat is Pellegrini's Bar in Bourke St, where I tasted my first espresso many years ago.

Thus fed and watered, what next? Well, there's always the National Gallery of Victoria, newly refurbished but retaining its emblematic water wall.

Inside, much more of the seminal collection is now on display, and it's all free, except for the heart-stopping exhibition of Impressionist painting from the Musee D'Orsay in Paris.

Many people go to Melbourne simply to shop, but there's no need to stick to the Bourke St mall and find in Myers and David Jones exactly what's in Brisbane.

It's the off-beat shops that make shopping in Melbourne special, and this can be hard to do unless you know the city well. This is where Hidden Secrets can come to the rescue, for their three-hour guided shopping tours will take you to places in the arcades and little streets in down-town Flinders and Collins streets that you'd never find on your own.

No buses, no stuffed koalas or souvenir shops -- for \$70 Fiona Sweetman will give you a smart black shopping bag, a bottle of water, pen and paper, a wine-tasting in Federation Square, a special morning tea offer at Koko Black, and best of all, a pack of cards called **Shopping Secrets** Melbourne, which details, with maps, the places she takes you.

You'll visit places like Suga, where you can have rock lollies made with any message you like in the centre, Retrostar Vintage Clothing for clothes to kill if not die for, Smitten Kitten for the sexiest lingerie, the Paperback Bookshop which puts the ABC's Black Books to shame for chaos, Il Papiro for hand-made paper and Koko Black for chocolate.

Patchwork quilts? High-concept homewares? Specialist music shop? Fiona will lead you to all these, and you keep the cards so you can go back at your leisure.

All this is within four city blocks, and you won't get wet or cold once.

Marvellous Melbourne doesn't have to be bank-breaking Melbourne, and with the cheap air fares now available, it's worth experiencing some real winter.

And finally, a note for fashionistas from the sunny north: In Melbourne, the new black is still black.

#### IF YOU GO

Medina Executive Flinders St, 88 Flinders St, Melbourne. Phone (03) 8663 0000 or 1300 300 323.

National Gallery of Victoria, 180 St Kilda Rd or Federation Square. The Impressionists exhibition closes on September 26.

Hidden Secrets Walking Tours, PO Box 12830, Melbourne 8006. Contact Fiona Sweetman, (03) 9329 9665.

Queen Victoria Markets, Elizabeth and Victoria streets. Open Tuesday and Thursday 9am-2pm, Friday 6am-6pm, Saturday 6am-3pm, Sunday 9am-4pm. Closed Monday and Wednesday. Guided tours lasting two hours start at 10am every Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Phone (03) 9320 5835, website [www.qvm.com.au](http://www.qvm.com.au)

**LOAD-DATE:** July 10, 2004