



**MAIN IMAGE** Façade of The Famous Spiegelent. **BELOW (left to right)** Opening night celebrations on Federation Square; indigenous performers the Black Arm Band; Lucy Guerin Dance Company in performance



# MELBOURNE ARTS FESTIVAL VS THE EDINBURGH FRINGE FESTIVAL

*The Melbourne International Arts Festival can rival the artistic quality and cultural variety of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival – but without the crowds or the struggle for top tickets.*

## NEED TO KNOW

**LOCATION** Melbourne is on Australia's east coast, 1040 km (647 miles) southwest of the national capital, Canberra

**WHEN** 17 days every October

**VISITORS PER FESTIVAL** 476,000

**AVERAGE TEMPERATURE** 19°C (67°F) in October



The Melbourne International Arts Festival is Australia's foremost celebration of global performing arts and visual arts. Established in 1986 as a sister festival to the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto, Italy, and the Spoleto Festival USA, in Charleston, South Carolina (whose "two worlds" are those of European and American culture), the festival was first known as the Spoleto Festival Melbourne but took on its current name in 2003. Today, it is renowned for premiering and promoting some of the best national and international artists and

companies. Unlike the sprawling, all-embracing Edinburgh Fringe, with its hit-and-miss aesthetic, everything here – no matter how avant-garde or experimental – is staged on the merit of its quality.

The Melbourne Festival offers its visitors a multicultural smorgasboard of dance, theatre, opera, music, visual arts, multimedia and outdoor events. Each year boasts around 60 to 80 events held in a host of inner-city venues, such as the flagship Arts Centre, home to the Playhouse and State Theatres, nestled next to the Yarra River and topped by Melbourne's now iconic spire; The Famous Spiegelent, a European Mirror Tent billed as "the ultimate cabaret and music salon", which is pitched in the Arts Centre forecourt for the duration; and the National Gallery of Victoria, with its striking "water wall" and stained-glass ceiling.

Federation Square acts as the central point of the festivities, and the opening and closing parties are held in this colourful open-plan space. Both events celebrate the artists, the audiences and the multicultural city of Melbourne itself. Melbournians have long prided themselves on being Australia's

cultural ambassadors: accents are considered more refined; the main thoroughfare, Collins Street, has a leafy "Paris End"; and a plethora of theatres and galleries ensure a healthy arts diet all year round. The Melbourne Festival boasts this much-vaunted reputation with 17 days of ticketed and free events, most of them programmed by a high-profile artistic director on a three- or four-year contract.

Previous programs have included recitals from the classical Schönberg Ensemble; performances by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; a photography exhibition and concert by the "Godmother of Punk", artist and musician Patti Smith, as well as a collaborative event with the composer Phillip Glass; and a performance by the all-star indigenous Australian collective The Black Arm Band. As a background to the live shows, an In Conversation discussion series offers insights into the thoughts of many extraordinary artists. There are also dance, theatre and music workshops, as well as lectures and school and family events. With entertainment for night owls at the Becks Bar, Artist Bar and The Famous Spiegelent, the Melbourne Festival is as inclusive as it is inspiring.

## FORGET "THE FRINGE"?

**THE BUILD-UP** The Edinburgh Fringe Festival is officially the largest arts festival in the world. For three hectic weeks each August, "The Fringe", as it is known, encompasses over 30,000 performances by hundreds of groups, spanning theatre, stand-up, music, dance and children's entertainment in around 250 venues.

**THE LETDOWN** Huge crowds mill along Edinburgh's Royal Mile to watch street performers, buy tickets from the Fringe Shop and amass flyers for shows. Well-reviewed shows sell out very early, leaving a choice of less-than-satisfactory alternatives: with no selection and approval process, quality varies widely.

**GOING ANYWAY?:** Take time out to relax on a café terrace, stroll along the beach at Leith Walk or visit the city's spectacular castle. On the second Sunday in August, head to the large green expanse of the Meadows for the carnivalesque Fringe Sunday, a free showcase of events.



**ABOVE** Crowds thronging in Edinburgh city centre during "The Fringe", Scotland

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Getting There and Around

Most major international airlines fly to Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport, 22 km (14 miles) from the city centre. Take a taxi or the 24-hour Skybus into Melbourne. The city centre is a neat grid on the Yarra River, compact enough to be covered on foot, but with good public transport too.

### Where to Eat

For exceptional tapas visit MoVida ([www.movida.com.au](http://www.movida.com.au)); revisit the French classics at Bistro Guillaume ([www.bistroguillaume.com.au](http://www.bistroguillaume.com.au)); or indulge in some spectacular haute cuisine at Vue de Monde ([www.vuedemonde.com.au](http://www.vuedemonde.com.au)). For

modern Australian food, Rockpool Bar & Grill is hard to beat ([www.rockpool.com.au](http://www.rockpool.com.au)).

### Where to Stay

The Grand Hyatt is on stylish Collins St ([www.melbourne.grand.hyatt.com](http://www.melbourne.grand.hyatt.com)); the central, boutique-style Hotel Lindrum has a club-like ambience ([www.hotellindrum.com.au](http://www.hotellindrum.com.au)); Crown Promenade on lively Southbank is smart and affordable ([www.crownpromenade.com.au](http://www.crownpromenade.com.au))

### Budget per Day for Two

£180, including accommodation, meals and public transport.

### Website

[www.melbournefestival.com.au](http://www.melbournefestival.com.au)