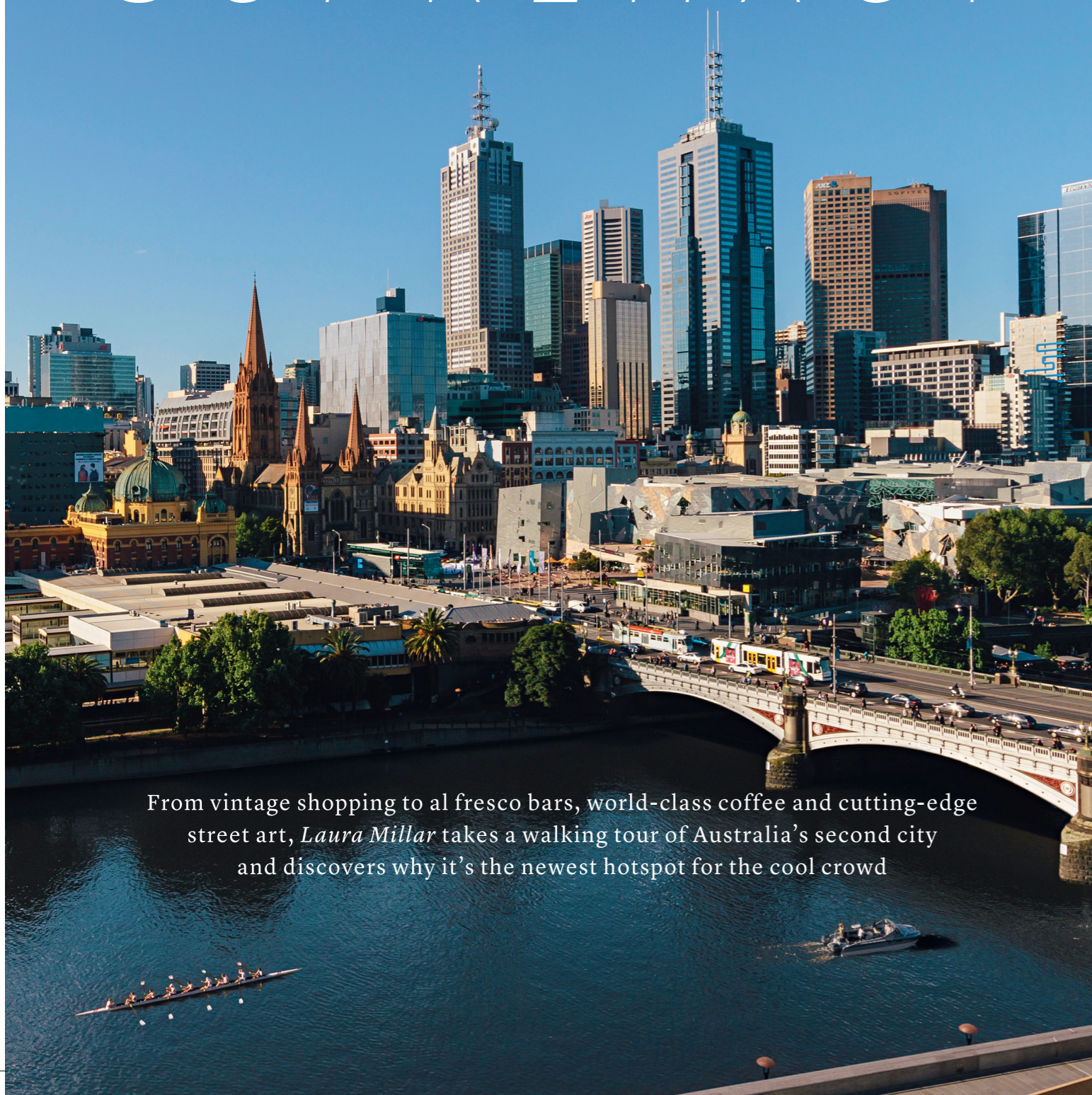


# THE MELBOURNE SUPREMACY



From vintage shopping to al fresco bars, world-class coffee and cutting-edge street art, *Laura Millar* takes a walking tour of Australia's second city and discovers why it's the newest hotspot for the cool crowd



**Subways and taxis may be the quickest way to navigate the world's busiest cities** – I'm looking at you, London and New York – but I've always felt that being underground or sightseeing from a cab is somewhat limiting, which might explain the current boom for 'urban walking'. To remedy my FOMO, I'm taking a walking tour of Melbourne to find out why the city has been voted the 'world's most liveable city\*' for the seventh year in a row.

When it comes to Australia, Sydney gets all the headlines but over the past few years, I've heard from people in the know that Melbourne is a bit of a player its own right. Despite it being a somewhat exhausting 22-hour flight away, it is well worth the journey in order to discover its European-sounding appeal. Bursting with art galleries and museums? Check. Home to a vibrant food scene? Check. Street art on almost every corner? Check. And no need to worry about the jet lag – this city runs on caffeine, boasting hundreds of coffee shops and roasters.

For the first leg of the tour, it's just me and my guide, Daniel Platt, a passionate native of the city and founder of Localing Tours. I've come on my own because a buzzing metropolis like Melbourne is the perfect place for the solo traveller. For a start, there's no language barrier and, I later discover, as I stop at Market Lane Coffee, people are only too keen to strike up a conversation if you're in a bar or restaurant on your own.

We start with a stroll of the hip Fitzroy neighbourhood. As we pass vintage clothing shops, bars and cute terraced houses decorated with intricate ironwork, it feels like Brooklyn Down Under. I earmark the brilliantly named Naked for Satan tapas and cocktail bar for a pit stop later. There's also, inexplicably, a bar entirely dedicated to George Costanza from *Seinfeld* – called



George's Bar – complete with a mural of him on the wall outside. 'Yeah, that's Melbourne for you,' smiles Daniel. 'There's a lot of quirk.'

There's a reassuring resistance here to big chains – I don't see a single Starbucks. I spot countless Italian-run cafes (the city lays claim to having invented the flat white), and baristas serve every variety of coffee from French press to cold drip, even if all you want is a latte.

A few blocks along Fitzroy's Brunswick Street, one of the area's four main thoroughfares (alongside Gertrude, Smith and Johnston), we pass a Russian-Jewish bakery; a Vietnamese restaurant; an award-winning cocktail bar called Black Pearl; HoMie, a clothing shop/social enterprise; vegan delicatessen Smith & Deli; the Rose Street Market, which showcases work by local, emerging artists; and a raft of live-music venues. Daniel points out branches of

successful Melbourne-grown brands, like Aesop (I can't leave without buying a bottle of its divinely scented Resurrection Aromatique Hand Wash) and T2, which makes beautifully packaged teas. There's also Mud Australia, makers of Nigella Lawson's favourite candy-coloured crockery. The city's nickname of 'Marvellous Melbourne' suddenly feels apt.

After covering a couple of miles of grid-like streets on foot, my boutique hotel, the Ovolo Laneways, is very welcoming, even more so when I discover the minibar is free – yay! (I do love Aussie hospitality, they've got their priorities spot on.) With only 43 rooms, it sacrifices facilities like a bar and restaurant in order to offer more living space, but there are so many dining and drinking options in its location of the vibrant and less-boring-than-it-sounds Central Business District, or CBD, it's no real hardship. The rooms are simple in a chic way – ▶



Clockwise from top left: St Kilda's famous Luna Park; Federation Square, a popular meeting place; one of the city's renowned coffee houses; illuminated buildings during the annual White Night Melbourne festival