

FIRSTLIGHTTRAVEL



*Your South Pacific Travel Specialists*

# AUSTRALIA

2023-2024 GUIDED HOLIDAYS



**FIRST CHOICE** 5-21 day Fully Curated Experiences **From page 24**

**BEST BUYS** 3-15 day Flexible Guided Holidays **From page 58**

# Southern Capitals: City Meets Bush



## Highlights

### 📍 Local Connection

Crisp air, blue skies, the melody of sheep... there's nothing like being on a 400-hectare working farm. Meet Craig Starr and his family for a BBQ and a yarn or two.

### 🗝️ Insider Knowledge

The Australian capital holds some of the country's greatest stories, whether of politics at Parliament House (your guide knows the secrets) or history at the humbling War Memorial.

### 🏡 Cultural Immersion

Gold rush towns always come with stories about infamous bush rangers and love scandals. Hear them when you arrive in historic Beechworth.

### 🦘 Wildlife & Nature

More than 32,000 little penguins live around Phillip Island, and some 4,000 of them pitter patter from the sea to their sandy burrows every evening. Say goodnight.

As this holiday departs at 7.30am from the Vibe Hotel Sydney, accommodation will need to be pre-booked for the previous night.

#### 1 Sydney – Canberra

It's hard to believe that just 1.5 hours from Sydney lies a patch of countryside that could have been transplanted straight from the English Cotswolds. Think atmospheric villages amid rolling hills of grape vines – the Southern Highlands is the closest wine region to Australia's largest city, after all. And then there are the grand gardens and emerald farms, one of which you'll visit to meet Craig Starr and his family. Gold Creek Station farm is your backdrop for a Be My Guest BBQ lunch and tales about life on the land. This is your entrée to the country's cool little capital of Canberra, home to Parliament House, where you'll go behind the political scenes, as well as the Australian War Memorial. Hearing the Last Post is a moving experience. **Hotel: Crowne Plaza. BG DW**

#### 2 Canberra – Wangaratta

Thanks to architect Walter Burley Griffin, Canberra is an urban planner's delight – the city is that well laid out, as you'll discover when you head to the summit of Mt. Ainslie for panoramic views. You won't yet be able to see the Murray River, but you'll soon cross it en route to Beechworth. From Australia's longest river to Victoria's best-preserved gold rush town, Beechworth saw an influx of fortune-seekers during the 1850s. Your Travel Director will give you the Beechworth lowdown, then set you on your way to explore character-filled antiques stores, galleries, leafy parks and gardens, and museums at your leisure. There are plenty of charming cafés and restaurants to refuel in as well, before Wangaratta's cathedrals beckon. **Hotel: Quality. B**

#### 3 Wangaratta – Melbourne

Meandering south toward historic Glenrowan, you're well and truly in Ned Kelly country – this is where the infamous bushranger and his gang were finally captured in 1880. The story is remembered on pretty much every city corner, whether in enormous statues or at the museum. We'll tell you all the tales – some of them true, many of them heresay. All of them entertaining. Then we'll tell you a bit more about Melbourne, like how it's the home of Aussie rules football, covets some of the country's

best arts institutions, and has a swag of stellar restaurants, cafés and bars. Small wonder it's known as Australia's cultural, culinary and sporting capital. Once you have your bearings after a city tour, head off to explore. Forget your map – one of the joys of being in Melbourne is getting lost. Discovering a hidden jazz bar. Stumbling upon a hole-in-the-wall restaurant. Finding a gallery that catches your eye. Enjoy. **Hotel: Crowne Plaza, 2 nights. B**

#### 4 Melbourne Free Time

You could spend weeks exploring Melbourne and its surrounds and not tire of the attractions. But you just have today, so make the most of it. We wouldn't hold it against you if all you want to do is jump on a tram and ride the rails to the city's character-filled neighbourhoods. But if you want to explore further afield, we've got you covered on an optional experience. For a bird's-eye view of the bay, sign up to scale the Eureka Skydeck, offering dizzying vistas in every direction. Animal lover? Venture to Phillip Island to see hundreds of little penguins pad along the sand en route to their burrows. Want to get back to nature? Chug through the lush Dandenong Ranges on the Puffing Billy Steam Train, followed by a sip or two of wine in the Yarra Valley. The choice is yours. **B**

#### 5 Farewell from Melbourne

Wait, how did you just pack so much action into a working week? Cities, countryside, farms, wineries, islands... what an adventure. **B**

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