

BLACKBOOK

WHERE TO GO NEXT TRAVEL WHAT TO KNOW NOW

WEEKEND AWAY

CAPITAL IDEAS

As Canberra celebrates its centenary, its rapidly expanding offerings prove that there is much to be proud of.
By Carrie Hutchinson



Italian & Sons, a contemporary take on the old-school trattoria



The entrance hall of Canberra's 6,600 sq m National Museum of Australia was designed to look like a huge rope knot - seen from the inside

It's no secret that Canberra has harboured a reputation as something of a sleepy hollow populated by politicians and public servants. Visitors, however, write it off as a destination to their own peril, especially in 2013. Not only does the city possess lively arts and food scenes, stunning architecture and wide green spaces, and a slew of must-visit attractions, but this year also marks its 100th birthday, and the city and its denizens have planned a year long party to celebrate.

WHERE TO EAT

The deep leather banquettes at the sophisticated yet casual **Ox Eatery** (easthotel.com.au) encourage languid dining, as does the reasonable pricing of the simple, full-flavoured dishes. The culinary centrepiece is a French rotisserie, and you can't go wrong ordering whatever is doing the lap of honour, especially the lemon-rosemary chicken. **Italian & Sons** (italianandsons.com.au) takes the traditional trattoria

and gives it a funky modern makeover. With a focus on seasonal produce, the menu changes regularly but could include chestnut pappardelle with rabbit ragu or veal shin with soft polenta, asparagus and gremolata. Styled to resemble a Malay kampung - dark timbers, overhead fans, wooden shutters - **The Lanterne Rooms** (lanternerooms.chairmangroup.com.au) sports a menu that traverses the cuisines of Southeast Asia, from Malaysian to Thai, accompanied by excellent service and a solid wine list. With full-length windows overlooking suburban Griffith, you could be forgiven for thinking **Aubergine** (aubergine.com.au) might be your average neighbourhood dining room. Think again. Since 2008, chef and owner Ben Willis has been perfecting his skillful, innovative, Euro-inspired menu that is paired with relaxed, spot-on service. Dishes change regularly but expect offerings like crispy pork belly and spanner crab salad with watermelon and rouille and John Dory with speck, mussels,



Parliament House, and its 81m flagpole, from the outside

baby leeks, white asparagus and lemon thyme.

WHERE TO DRINK

At the colourful and brick-walled **Playground** (playgroundbar.com.au), martins, cider and craft beers complement a sprawling tapas menu which features petite versions of favourites like paella. An amazing wall mural by Erin Forsyth will immediately attract your attention at **La De Da** (102 Emu Bank, Belconnen), Canberra's hippest cocktail bar. Slip into the banquette to sip from the list inspired by the seasons. Local beats DJs



Expressive atmosphere at East Hotel's Ox Eatery, inspired by design elements from the 1950s



From left: opened last August, the stylish East Hotel's lounge-lobby; the takeaway delicatessen at East Hotel imparts a casual elegance

and hip-hop crews provide the tunes. Serious oenophiles will want to spend some time at **Benchmark Wine Bar** (benchmarkwinebar.com.au), whose extensive list spans the globe, with interesting and lesser-known varieties its speciality. Among the hundred by-the-glass offerings, alongside a 400-strong list by the bottle, you'll find some local Canberra numbers. The city's most sophisticated cocktail bar is also a haven for music lovers. **Hippo** (hippobar.com.au) prides itself on its list – one of the bar's specialities is the Jet Li martini, combining citrus vodka, watermelon liqueur and fresh-pressed watermelon and apple juice – but there's also a side of jazz, blues or Latin served during the week. DJs take over the decks on the weekend.

THE CITY'S MOST SOPHISTICATED COCKTAIL BAR IS ALSO A HAVEN FOR MUSIC LOVERS



Colourful appetizer at Aubergine

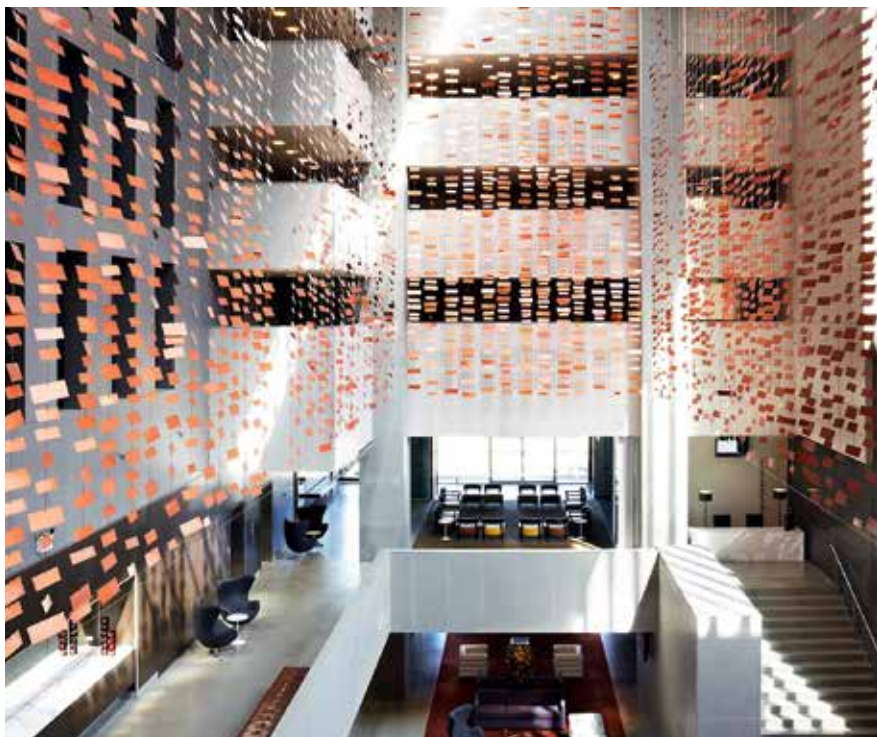


From left: fun vibe at the aptly named Playground bar; head chef Jeffrey Shims at his restaurant The Lanterne Rooms

WHERE TO STAY

Be inspired by the photography projected onto an entire wall in the foyer of **East Hotel** (easthotel.com.au), the city's newest groovy digs. The rooms are modern with colourful photos on the walls and finishing touches by local designers Fink. Plump for a Luxe Studio, and enjoy the balcony before booking one of the retro bikes to tour the area. Right on the doorstep of the Parliamentary Zone (see "Can't-miss Canberra" on page 30"), **Hotel Realm** (hotelrealm.com.au) has contemporary luxe down to a fine art. Each of

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: © EAST HOTEL (2), JASON LOUCAS, © THE LANTERNE ROOMS, LAUREN HEWITT



From left: dropping in for lunch at Lonsdale Street Roasters; abutting the Parliamentary Triangle, Hotel Realm shines with chic modern design and decor

THE DETAILS

CAN'T-MISS CANBERRA

A century of reasons to take in the city sights



OUT & ABOUT

To celebrate Canberra's centenary, creative director Robyn Archer and her team have pulled together a mind-boggling number of events taking place over the course of 12 months. Encompassing almost every space in the city and every aspect of our culture, the **Canberra 100 program** (canberra100.com.au) includes the **Canberra Craft Beer Festival** (13 April), the **National Folk Festival** (28 March–1 April) and the **AIS Open Day** (28 April), as well as exhibitions like "The Dream of a Century: the Griffins in Australia's Capital", which tells the story of the city's designers Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin.

MUST-VISIT

It may sound a tad mundane, but the city's Parliamentary Zone is a gem. All within walking distance are the **Parliament Houses**, both new and old, the **National Gallery**, the **National Portrait Gallery** and the **National Library**. Take in the whole city from the roof of **Parliament House**, picnic by the lake and marvel at the brutalist beauty of the **High Court of Australia**, designed by Edwards Madigan Torzillo and Briggs in 1972.

the 158 rooms, from studio to two-storey penthouse, has understated opulence, along with Mac Mini in-room systems, Nespresso machines and L'Occitane amenities. The hotel itself provides 24-hour room service and has an on-site spa, hair salon, health club and five restaurants. Part of the same precinct is the **Burbury Hotel** (burburyhotel.com.au), which shares many of the facilities of its five-star sister property Hotel Realm, but offers a cosier retreat and has options for longer stays.

WHAT TO BUY

Once a slightly grungy thoroughfare lined with light industry and car sales yards, Braddon is now one of Canberra's hippest strips. Not surprising, really, since it's a five-minute walk from the city centre. Duck into **Hipsley Lane** (27 Lonsdale Street) to check out the vintage fashion and **The Hive Gallery** (25 Lonsdale Street) for local art, craft and design. For independent streetwear labels

like Vanishing Elephant, try **itrip iskip** (itripiskip.blogspot.com.au), while more upmarket Australian women's designers, including Megan Park, Akira and Easton Pearson, are available at **Pink Inc** (pinkincboutique.com). Recharge at **Lonsdale Street Roasters** (lonsdalestreetroasters.com), where the black industrial fit-out with bright yellow accents is the perfect backdrop for a great cup of coffee and a quick snack like the slow-roasted pork panini with coriander and chipotle. ■



Vintage frocks at Hipsley Lane

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TRISH SMITH, © HOTEL REALM, TRACY LEE, © CANBERRA 100