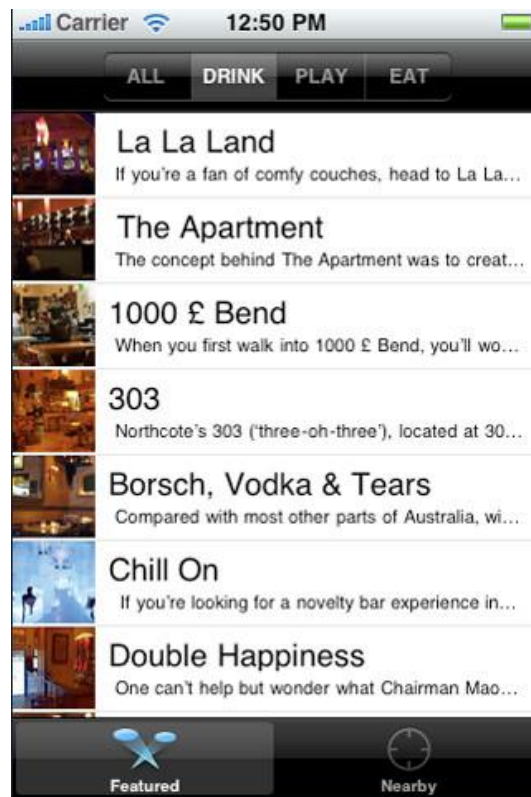


EAT.DRINK.PLAY Melbourne



Sample reviews:

Madam Brussels (bar)

Named after an infamous 19th century Melbourne brothel owner, Madame Brussels is a very different – and surprising – Melbourne bar experience. Far from being a house of ill repute, this funky little venue could be described as ‘*Alice in Wonderland* meets country tennis club’ with its faux grass, tiled garden path, pink walls and cute white outdoor furniture – and that’s all inside. The friendly bar staff are even cuter in their 1930s-style tennis outfits. Outside, you can stretch your legs on the sizable Rather Fancy Terrace; blankets are available out here when it’s cold. Cocktails are served by the jug and the menu includes cupcakes and finger foods. If you’re getting tired of a same-same bar scene, visit Madam Brussels, order a Pimm’s and let yourself tumble down the rabbit hole. This one’s worth the fall.

Saigon Pho (restaurant)

It seems there are two types of people in this world: those who love phở, and those who don't. If you're one of the latter, stop reading now. But if you're pro-phở, you'll understand the lengths to which many will go to find that perfect steaming bowl of Vietnamese goodness. Melbourne is blessed with many fine phở establishments, but Saigon Pho in Footscray has got to be one of the best. Serving phở almost exclusively, this unpretentious little eat-house will offer up a small (read large) bowl of soup for \$7, a medium for \$8 or a large (read bucket-sized) for \$9. After phở – which is akin to an internal sauna – try a three-colour drink, a delicious concoction of coconut, ice, kidney beans and funny green wormy things. You'll leave feeling as though you've had a five-course meal all in one.

Readings (shop)

Literature lovers listen up. If you're looking for a great bookshop where the staff actually know about books, head to Readings in Lygon St, Carlton. This store was established in 1969 and has since given birth to five more Readings stores around Melbourne. The Carlton store is a hub of literary activity; on any given week there's sure to be book launches, author discussions and other exciting events taking place (check the website for details). For those who aren't big readers, Readings also has a great range of music and, increasingly, DVDs. As the winner of the 2009 Independent Bookseller of the Year award, it's easy to see why this place is a favourite among Melbourne's literary community, including many local authors, so if you'd like to sample the local literary scene, visit Readings for a taste.

Seven Seeds (cafe)

As soon as you walk into Seven Seeds, it's pretty clear that this is probably one of the most artfully trendy cafes in Melbourne. Like most fashionable Melbourne venues, Seven Seeds is in an obscure location and the exterior could easily be mistaken for a factory. The interior of the café has the required warehouse/industrial feel, with exposed beams on the high ceilings and rubbed-back brick walls. There's even an indoor potted coffee-plant garden and a bicycle rack on the wall – surely the epitome of Melbourne trend. This place may teeter dangerously towards pretentiousness, but coffee lovers clearly don't care. Here, coffee isn't a drink, it's a lifestyle. Seven Seeds is known for its specialty coffee, and also does a small range of breakfast/lunch gourmet sandwiches. If you're in the area, make sure you check it out

Prudence (bar)

If you're looking for a home-away-from-home, try Prudence. Located near the Queen Victoria Market just outside Melbourne's busy CBD, this little gem of a bar somehow manages to be comfy, quirky and oh-so-cool all at the same time. Upstairs there's a distinctly lounge-room-esque vibe, with leather couches and a plethora of Persian-style carpets hanging on the walls, while downstairs there's a beer garden so cosy that even the long wooden seating benches are heated in cold weather. Open from 4pm to 1am daily, the bar stays relatively quiet during the week but is always jam-packed on Friday and Saturday evenings. With its mood lighting, homely furnishings and great selection of new and old-school music, Prudence is the ultimate hang-out on a chilly Melbourne night.

Pellegrini's (restaurant)

Mention Pellegrini's Espresso Bar to a Melbournian and you're sure to hear the words 'icon' and 'Melbourne institution' bandied about without hesitation. Renowned for its coffee and its basic home-cooked Italian fare, Pellegrini's is the real deal – a little slice of Rome on Bourke St. This is a family-run establishment and you certainly won't find any false sincerity here: the staff are brusque, brisk and casual. The décor is simple, with all meals served at counters. Displayed behind the bar is a collection of old photographs and other bits and pieces that have built up over the years, including a small note sternly informing uncultured customers that the commonly used abbreviation 'latte' translates simply as 'milk', and that patrons should modify their orders accordingly. Pastas are \$12–\$15 for ample serving sizes, and meals arrive promptly. No muss, no fuss.

Sister Bella (bar)

Down a street, down a laneway, down a smaller laneway and through an unmarked open doorway is Sister Bella. Maybe it's the fact that this bar is so hard to find (even for locals) or maybe it's Sister Bella's low-key-but-chic vibe that makes this place 'very Melbourne'. With a menu that includes cheap pides and pastas, coffees and drinks, it's no wonder that Sister Bella has become the favourite haunt of many a Melbournian. A word of caution: this place can get pretty packed of an evening, so either arrive early or make sure you keep a plan B venue in mind.