

Sydney's surprises

Sydney offers students a generous mix of everything, from great shopping and nightlife to adrenaline-rush sports, breathtaking beaches and countryside. GILLIAN EVANS takes it all in.

Sydne y has an enviable reputation as a lively city with a fun-loving population, beautiful harbour, stunning beaches and plenty of restaurants, nightclubs and bars - and its appeal stretches right across the board. 'Sydney is a city with many attractions for people of all ages,' confirms Susan Davis of Sydney Institute of Tafe English Centre (Sitec). 'It has a relaxed, informal atmosphere with weather that is the envy of most other major cities.'

As well as the favourable climate, Mick Edwards, Principal of Sydney English Academy (SEA), also mentions the famous beaches such as Manly and Bondi as being 'a big part of the attraction', while Sawzan Salah, General Manager of Access Language Centre, says 'Nothing tops a trip to the Circular Quay with the Opera House, the Rocks area and the Harbour Bridge.'

Sydney's most famous sight is undoubtedly its impressive harbour and opera house. 'Tourists and commuters enjoy ferry trips on stunning Sydney Harbour,' says Davis, but she adds, 'If more physical action is wanted, then there is swimming, surfing, sailing, rafting, windsurfing, scuba diving, water skiing, jet skiing and kite surfing.'

Sydney generally appeals to outdoor and active people, says Edwards, so most schools arrange a whole raft of interesting and unusual activities for students. Access Language Centre offers four activities per week, which includes a full-day tour each weekend, a tourist activity

in Sydney and an after-class activity - which can be anything from a pool championship to a sandcastle building competition on the beach.

At SEA, getting students together is important. 'SEA is a small and friendly school so students get to mix with students and teachers from other classes apart from their own,' says Edwards. 'We have a large comfortable social/lounge area and so students like to stay and chat after their classes have finished. This means they have the opportunity to learn about what other students have done or discovered in Sydney.'

Sydney's historic quarter, the Rocks, with its beautiful sandstone buildings and lots of pubs and restaurants, is popular with students. Edwards highlights Home Nightclub at Darling Harbour, the Three Wise Monkeys and Cheers, both in George Street, and the Steyne Hotel and the Aqua Lounge in Manly as popular nightspots, while Salah adds, 'Newtown is an area that never sleeps and offers a lot of activities for [young people].'

Davis reports that many pubs serve cheap meals and visitors can even sometimes cook their own steak on the pub barbecue. 'This is a great way to practise



Art Gallery of New South Wales

One of Australia's foremost art museums, the Art Gallery of NSW is host to the largest permanent exhibition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art

English with the locals and to learn 'Australian', she adds. However, she is

equally as keen to stress that 'Australia is not all barbecue and beer!'. It also has a wide range of restaurants serving food from all over the world. 'The accent is on local produce and healthy eating,' she asserts.

Although Sydney doesn't need an excuse to party, there are plenty of annual festivals to enjoy. In January, the city lights up with its Festival of Sydney. According to Edwards, it is the country's largest celebration of culture, and includes outdoor cinemas and theatre productions, as well as international and national performances in the city's theatres and galleries. And most of them are free of charge. 'Students love the variety of programmes [the festival] offers,' says Salah.

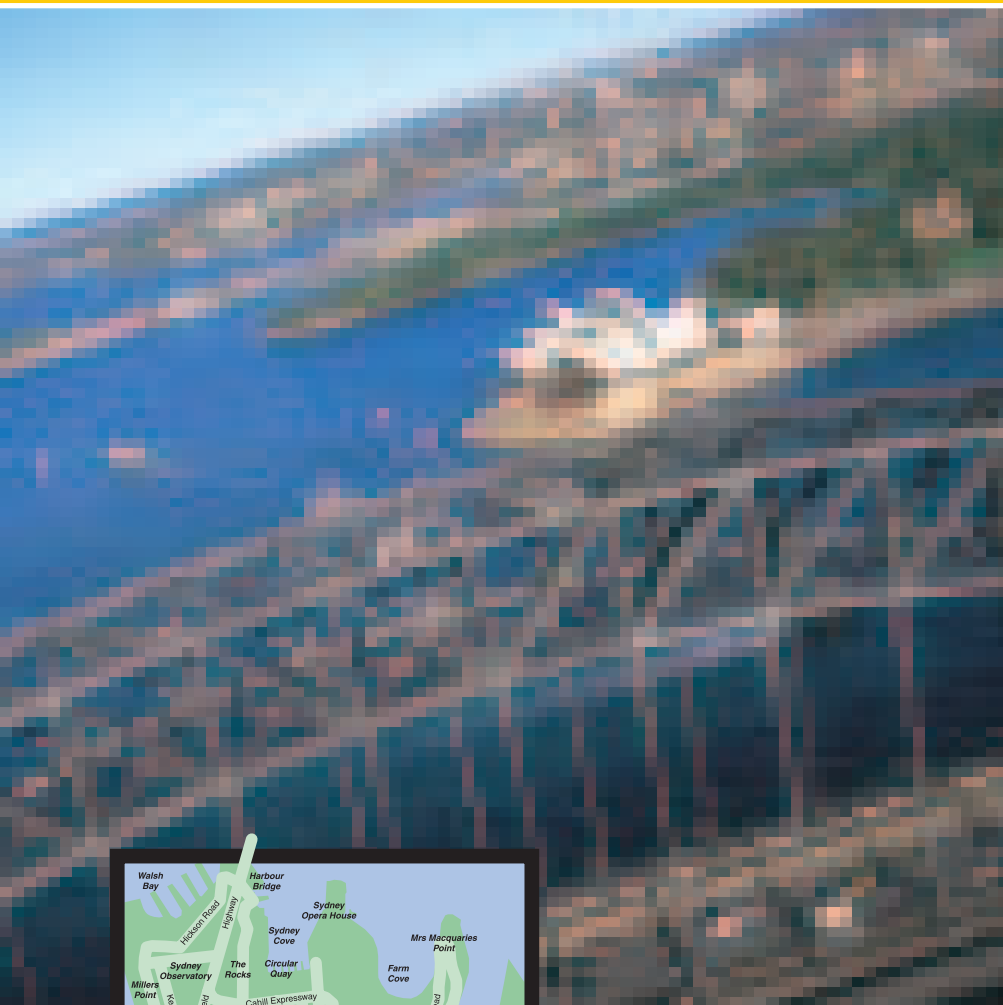
Carsten Matthai, Marketing Manager at Uniworld Colleges, says that tuition fees in Sydney are very affordable compared with major cities in the UK and USA, while another very important advantage of Sydney is that it is quite easy to find part-time work.

'Part-time jobs are advertised in newspapers, backpacker magazines, at hostels and



International Aquatic Centre, Homebush

This centre, which houses three different swimming pools, hosted the swimming events at the 2000 Olympic Games and has room for 17,500 spectators



Agent viewpoint

'We send students to Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Cairns, Gold Coast, Perth, Adelaide and Hobart. You can see in the variety of destinations how popular Australia is for Germans. Of course, Sydney is the most popular destination, as one of the most exciting cities in the world and a melting pot for many different nationalities. Many of our students combine a language course and internship in order to learn more about Australian culture and business. Our students find it easy to acclimatise to life in Sydney. German students love the sun and all the breathtaking beaches, especially Manly Beach. They enjoy beautiful Sydney Harbour, the amazing Sydney skyline at night and Taronga Zoo, where you can see koalas, kangaroos and other native fauna.'

Milena Langer, GLS Sprachenzentrum, Germany

'Australia is a popular destination with our clients, and many of them want to go to Sydney. The main attraction is the sunny, warm climate. After their lessons in the morning, they do aquatic sports, such as surfing - an opportunity they definitely don't have in Belgium! One negative point is the high cost of living in Sydney, but that doesn't stop our clients coming back delighted.'

Magali de Koninck, Languages & Travel, Belgium

'Our students study in Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart, Gold Coast, Cairns, Brisbane and Byron Bay. Sydney is the most popular place, but we try to send students to other cities and towns as well. The most students from the Czech Republic are in Sydney and they recommend Sydney to other people. They also believe there are more work opportunities there than in other cities. The advantages of studying in Sydney are the huge range of colleges, work opportunities, beautiful city and sea. The disadvantages are that there are a lot of Czech students at cheaper colleges, and the high cost of living in Sydney [compared with other cities in Australia].'

Tatana Kvapilova, ACIC Prague, Czech Republic



The Harbour Bridge and Opera House dominate Sydney's harbour and boat trips provide the best views (main picture)

for students,' explains Davis. 'Lots of students still choose to live in homestay with Australian families for the first month or so, but as self-catering accommodation is readily available, they soon opt for independent living.'

Despite Sydney being a major world city, nature is never far away. The World Heritage-listed Blue Mountains National Park is only an hour-and-a-half's drive away from the city. Closer to home is the Manly to Spit Bridge Walk, which follows the foreshores for several kilometres. '[There] you can find secluded beaches, many different species of birds and aboriginal rock engravings,' says Edwards. Salah recounts that the abundance of nature so close to the city centre often surprises many students.

Wildlife, too, might not be very far away. Every year, whales travel

by word-of-mouth,' says Davis. 'Students generally help each other to find part-time work in restaurants, supermarkets, as cleaners, data entry jobs and sometimes as tour guides.' Some schools also design their programmes around the fact that many students work. 'We are located in the heart of Sydney and our timetable is designed to cater for those who would like to work and study at the same time,' says Salah.

In addition, unlike many other major cities around the world, private rented accommodation is not hard to find in Sydney. 'Many of Sydney's old warehouses, factories and bond stores have been converted cleverly into convenient and well-priced housing

north past Sydney to the warmer waters of Queensland for breeding and then travel south again a few months later. '[A group of our students] went to the top of the headland and were greeted with the sight of two humpback whales about 200 metres from the shore moving south to Antarctica. [They] were amazed that they could see whales so close to a major city,' says Edwards.

Whatever students are expecting, Syd-

ney is certainly full of surprises in terms of sights and experiences - and you never know what opportunities can be waiting around the corner. Salah recalls that one of their Brazilian students was chosen as an extra in the *Mission Impossible 2* movie, which was filmed in Sydney. □



Manly Beach

One of Sydney's most famous beaches, Manly is a popular spot for surfing or simply relaxing in the sun. The beach can be reached by a ferry ride which crosses Sydney's harbour