



Parliament House, Canberra

CANBERRA

Even Melbourne and Adelaide, with their neat inner-city grids, can't match Canberra's carefully planned, circular grandeur, designed around the original topography of the land of the Ngunnawal people. The diverse population of public servants, students, diplomats, creatives and entrepreneurs prides itself on living in a city with few traffic jams and short commutes, leaving room for leisure time and an all-round slower pace of life.

The phrase "city living with country benefits" rings true in the bush capital, surrounded as it is by readily accessible national parkland, much of it hilly and mountainous. The tip of the Australian Alps, Brindabella Range, rises immediately west of the city, showing pretty snow-capped peaks during winter. The pristine skyline of forested slopes is interrupted only occasionally by high-rises, the iconic Telstra Tower and Parliament House's flagpole.

The artificial Lake Burley Griffin sits at the centre of town, with several major cultural institutions, such as the

National Gallery of Australia, dotted around its shores. Canberra is also host to the National Museum, libraries, theatres and festivals that encapsulate the nation's history and culture in a way not found elsewhere. Canberra Balloon Spectacular in March is a remarkable experience, whether you're on firm ground among the 50-odd inflating hot air balloons or floating above the city with a bird's-eye view of swirling autumnal colours.

Local knowledge is key here, as Canberra lacks the dense clusters of easily discoverable highlights of other cities. Drive to a quiet neighbourhood suburb and find one of Australia's best restaurants, or drive 20 minutes west of the city to discover idyllic swimming holes and picnic spots. With fewer than half a million residents, Canberra may not have the hubbub of other capital cities, but that's what makes it feel special and worthwhile.

—Ashley St George