

Melbourne

UNESCO city of Literature



As a city of extraordinary diversity in literary activity, Melbourne is a vibrant arena for the creation of literary works. The capital of the south-eastern state of Victoria and major business centre within the Asia – Pacific region is widely acknowledged as Australia’s cultural capital.

The city is a focal point for cultural and literary activity in the region, and writers are supported by a robust publishing environment, including a large number of independent and small publishers and by the public’s broad participation in literature – as readers, writers and audiences at events and festivals.

Melbourne City of Literature is built upon land traditionally belonging to the people of the Kulin Nation. Indigenous people have been writing their stories for over 40,000 years, carving rocks, painting on bark, or drawing on possum skins cloaks long before books arrived on the first boats. Today local indigenous literature is vital expression of an enduring indigenous culture in Melbourne.

Fast facts

- In the 2003-2004 financial year, book publishers based in Victoria generated \$580.4 million, 43% of total book sales in Australia (ABS survey. 2003-04, Book Publishers. 1363.0).
- The retail bookselling industry generates \$453.1 million in Victoria annually and provides employment for 2600 people (ABS survey. 2003-04, Book Publishers. 1371.0).
- The first major cultural institution to be established in Melbourne, the State Library, is one of 287 local libraries in the state of Victoria, with 2.5 million members who borrow around 50 million items each year.

Omnipresent literature

- Nearly a third of all writers in Australia live in Melbourne (around 1,300) with many other people enjoying writing as a hobby (97,600).
- As well as large multinational publishers, with Lonely Planet the city's largest and greatest success, Melbourne hosts a number of unique and independent publishing houses, such as Text Publishing, Black Inc. and Scribe Publications, each contributing in creating a rich literary identity.
- Two of Australia's foremost 19th-century novelists were Rolf Boldrewood (Thomas Browne) and Marcus Clarke, both lived and at times wrote in Melbourne. The most famous of Melbourne's early poets is C.J. Dennis but perhaps the most renowned writer, and twice Booker prize-winner, is Peter Carey who was born and also lived and worked in Melbourne, his books reflecting many locales around the state.



Events

- **Melbourne Writers' Festival**
The city's premier literary event attracts more than 40,000 people each year. For 10 days in August, writers and readers from around the world descend on the city to attend forums, launches and debates.
- **Emerging Writers' Festival**
Each May, this festival brings writers, editors, publishers and literary performers together with the reading public to promote the work of the best up-and-coming writers. The festival is fast becoming an essential part of Australia's literary agenda.
- **Overload Poetry Festival/Australian Poetry Centre**
Australia's premier poetry festival brings together poets from across the globe with local talent to celebrate Melbourne's vibrant poetry scene and in 2007, the Australian Poetry Centre was established in Melbourne.

Economic impact

- A third of all Australian bookstores are in Victoria and 41% of Australian booksellers are based in Melbourne.

Literature on the move

Australia's first Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas will open at the State Library of Victoria in Melbourne. The Centre will provide a hub for writers and a home for small literary organisations, independent publishers and research journalists. The Centre is planned to launch in September 2009 and will deliver a diverse public program of literary events each year to audiences of around 100,000. These will include workshops, various festival events and regular keynote lectures by international speakers.

