

Weekend ... in Sydney

Prime Minister John Howard bucked convention and insisted on living in Sydney when he took office. It's easy to see why he wouldn't move to the Lodge in Canberra — there's always so much happening in the NSW capital, especially in summer, writes **GREG HACKETT**

FRIDAY:

CATCH an after-work flight to Sydney Airport (Virgin blue fares from \$120 one way from Melbourne, www.virginblue.com.au), catch a train for 10-minute ride to Central Station (the \$12.30 fare seems a lot), cross one street and you are at the Mercure Sydney hotel. On the edge of Chinatown, this is a handy base for exploring the Harbour City.

Busy George and Pitt streets converge at the foot of the Mercure and the wide window in the 14th-floor room looks down into the vibrant heart of the city. The hotel's Sydney Weekend Getaway package includes a double room, sparkling wine and strawberries dipped in chocolate on arrival, room service breakfast in bed and a \$10 voucher per person towards dinner in the hotel's Caboose restaurant, from \$189 for the first night, \$169 for the second. (818-820 George St, call (02) 9217 6666, www.mercuresydney.com.au)

Catch a bus (\$2.90) from the terminal next to Mercure and head for Circular Quay. At Pier 6, board Jetcruiser (adults \$44, children \$33, www.jetcruiser.com.au) for an exhilarating "cruise" around Sydney Harbour. For 45 minutes, two 600-horsepower jet engines haul 64 passengers at up to 65km/h up and over waves like a roller-coaster on water ... it's a big step up from the Manly ferry.

As the "land legs" return, hail a taxi (\$20) to Woolloomooloo Wharf — similar to Melbourne's NewQuay, with a series of trendy, open-fronted restaurants facing the water — and have dinner at Nove Cucina gourmet pizza and pasta restaurant (entree, main and glass of wine about \$45). Enjoy a summer evening stroll along the wharf before heading back to hotel.

SATURDAY:

AN invigorating 20-minute walk to a Darling Harbour cafe for breakfast of rye toast and



Sydney on show: The view from Mercure hotel (top), St Mary's Cathedral (top right), thrills on Jetcruiser (right), and dining with a view (below) at Summit restaurant.



As the sun sets, it's a pleasant 25-minute walk back to the hotel, stopping to admire the historic sandstone architecture of St Mary's Cathedral and Sydney Grammar School.

It was a big lunch, so dial room service for a light dinner of toasted Turkish bread with chilli hommus, guacamole and tomato salsa dips (\$14). And a Cooper's Pale Ale.

SUNDAY:

CHECK out of the hotel but leave your luggage with the concierge and catch a taxi (\$39) to Bronte Beach. The half-hour trip becomes 45 minutes in Sydney's congested traffic, but the taxi driver provides a free social history lesson — "see that little mansion on the left, Richard Pratt bought that for his girlfriend for \$3 million; she got tired of the media attention and soon sold it — for a few million dollars more".

Brunch at a Bronte Beach street cafe of ciabatta with chorizo sausage and tomatoes (\$14) washed down with cinnamon-laced chai tea with skim milk in a huge cup — or is it a small bowl? Whatever, there's a lot of it. This is a good spot for people-watching ... adolescent, sun-bleached surfer grommets fighting off seagulls with a huge pile of fish 'n' chips as the prize; young mums soothing their babies in strollers while sipping lattes; any minute now model Sarah Murdoch may come strolling down from her home on the hill, or actor Heath Ledger could emerge from his house near the beach.

Catch a bus (\$2.90) for the one-hour ride through Darlinghurst and Paddington back to the Mercure.

Collect your luggage, catch the airport shuttle bus (\$12) to the airport and board your flight home to Melbourne ... where it's 22 degrees with thunderstorms.



coffee (\$12), then check out the Sydney Aquarium and

A 20-minute walk into the CBD and it's lunchtime at the Summit revolving restaurant (www.summitrestaurant.com.au), on the 47th floor of Australia Square at 264 George St. Enjoy half a dozen grilled oysters (\$26) then seared king prawns (\$39) and a glass of chilled rose from the Rhone Valley (\$9). There's no hurry — gaze out of the windows at all Sydney has to offer while the restaurant rotates 360 degrees in 105 minutes.

Walk it off through picturesque Hyde Park to the Australian Museum, corner College and William streets (www.austmus.com.au, adult \$10, child \$5). The exhibition is *Eaten Alive — The World of Predators*.

Wildlife World (open 9am-10pm, adult \$24.75, child \$12.60, www.sydneyaquarium.com.au). The nearby Australian National Maritime Museum has heaps of galleries and exhibits. Find out what navy life was like by boarding the barque *Endeavour* and a retired destroyer, patrol boat and Oberon-class submarine (various admission prices, www.anmn.gov.au).

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