



13 JUL, 2024

Winter wonderland

Adelaide Advertiser, Adelaide



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From the treasures of long-dead ancient rulers in blockbuster exhibition Pharaoh to modern-day coffee kings and restaurant royalty – you'll find it all in Melbourne, where winter is a season to bewitch

Story JACKIE TRACY

Who knew the royals of Ancient Egypt loved cat charm necklaces and funky personalised labels for their designer footwear?

It's these tiny trinkets that fascinate as much as showstoppers like a 2.5 tonne red granite lion, 10 stern statues of Sekhmet, the goddess of destruction, and a hieroglyph-covered wall from an underground tomb excavated in the Valley of the Kings that has not been seen in a generation.

They are just a few of the 500 priceless treasures that have travelled 17,000km to the National Gallery of Victoria, on loan from London's British Museum. Telling the story of Egypt's God Kings, Pharaoh is the largest touring exhibition in the venerable institution's 270-year history.

Eight years in the making, it took 11

months just to pack the pieces for their journey, and thousands of hours of painstaking conservation work to spruce them up.

"So please enjoy it," urges chief curator

Dr Marie Vandenbeusch, who has accompanied them from the UK.

Pharaoh is the jewel in the crown of Melbourne's 2024 winter cultural calendar – a blockbuster exhibition spanning 3000 years of ancient Egyptian history.

It's a world-exclusive and that is just how our Victorian friends like it. For the past 20 years, their capital city has shrugged off the cold with Melbourne Winter Masterpieces, luring millions of visitors. Pharaoh lives up to the billing – it is nothing short of a triumph.

Spoiler alert – there are no mummies, but you won't miss them among the incredible array of other artefacts,

memorialising obscure rulers like King Den through to household names Tutankhamun, Ramses II and Khufu.

The staging by designer Peter King is unexpectedly contemporary – modern, masterfully lit spaces that take visitors from dawn to nightfall, with a specially commissioned soundscape by Peter Corrigan.



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There's plenty to engross all ages, but families can also access the free Ancient Egypt for Kids, where littlies can build a pyramid, turn their name into hieroglyphs and take a multimedia quiz with an animated talking papyrus scroll.

A short stroll away up the road at ACMI, enjoy the contrast of the very 21st century interactive exhibition Beings, full of curious creatures created in code and generative works from UK-based Universal Everything.

When the mercury plummets, the Victorian capital really is just the place to chill out, with festivals, theatrical blockbusters – Wicked and Beauty & the Beast to name but two – and dazzling installations, not to mention fine dining,

Vivid Sydney and Hobart's Dark Mofo. Eclectic music, art and performances, plus a late-night party vibe at Night Trade make it a big drawcard. From the Blak Infinite's UFO installations in Federation Square to frenetic Belgian fusion of sport and rock One Song, which earned a standing ovation at Melbourne Town Hall, it's fast and furious fun. Foodies can book Rising-themed eats between shows, like Aru's magnificent Moon Bites menu. You'll be warmed by the flames of its signature open kitchen. Make a diary note, the festival rises again in June 2025.

Catch Lightscape at the Royal Botanic Gardens until August 4, a magical immersive after-dark experience with a twinkling trail, the popular Winter Cathedral and the Laser Forest, and be sure to grab a hot chocolate or mulled wine by the Yarra River.

Of course, culture is just one ingredient

of Melbourne's warming winter menu, with cuisine and coffee the other stars.

For a truly memorable night, treat yourself to a progressive degustation walk with Hidden Secret Tours and try three exceptional restaurants.

Founder Fiona Sweetman hosts our elevated food and wine crawl, starting at Federation Square and wending past exuberant street art and elegant arcades en route to renowned chef-restaurateur Andrew McConnell's Supernormal. It's like heading out with a cool friend who knows names of the maitre d and sommelier, the must-try dishes, plus all the local gossip.

Against a backdrop of its signature

snug pubs and cosy cocktail bars in its labyrinth of laneways.

The seasonal curtain raiser is Rising, Victoria's answer to our own Illuminate,

neon cherries and Tokyo-vibe vending machine, we devour duck baos and seared tuna on nori crackers, washed down with exceptional Victorian wines. Next stop is the convivial Torino Aperitivo, where

sommelier Silas expertly talks us through his selections, before we finish in a former blacksmith's workshop, now the Myrtle Wine Bar. It's peak cosy, as front of house Kirsty McAteer delivers a gorgeous wine flight and exceptional bites from her chef partner Chris Smith's nostalgic menu, think toasted soldiers topped with whipped Murray cod bottarga and Port Lincoln sardines and old-school potato cakes.

Melbourne is one of the great pedestrian cities, with handy trams if you get footsore. I'm staying at The Howey, a chic urban haven right at the epicentre of Rising, in a laneway with a storied history and a new illuminated rainbow sign that reads "Palace of Intellect".

This was the colloquial name of the Coles Book Arcade, which graced Howey Place in Gold Rush times. Visited by literary legend Mark Twain, it once

boasted more than one million books, marking itself as a cultural landmark that shaped the city's identity.

My room is comfortable, with eco-friendly products, plush chaise longue and elegant minimalist decor. The location is unbeatable, just a stone's throw from the Block and Royal Arcades and loads of hipster brunch options and cool boutiques.

Adelaide lays claim to the nation's coffee crown but there's no doubt our Victorian arch rivals put up a good fight. You are never too far from a perfect pour over or fine flat white. But true brew devotees can elevate their experience with a masterclass at The Rosso Roastery Co's cool new concept cafe in North Melbourne.



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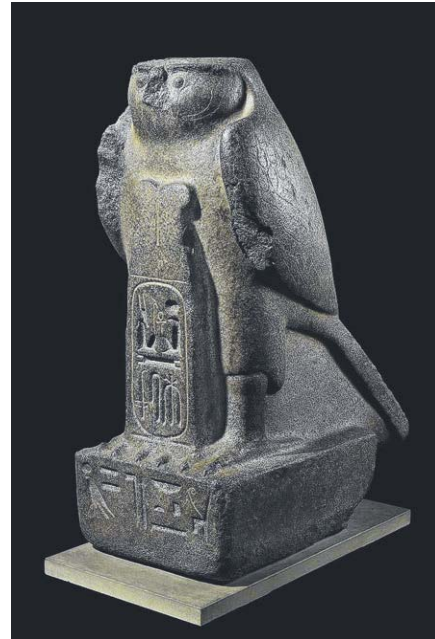
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Make your own with expert tuition and storytelling from chief roaster Jut, using equipment that looks ready to launch a moon mission. And then stay for a superb brunch. Chef Michael Bernerger Kevin's all-day eats range from a hot buttered lobster roll to perfect huevos Benny and anchovies on toast, washed down by extraordinary coffee.

Take-home packs of the signature roasts, like the Secret Agent, the Bohemian and the Commuter, make affordable, fun gifts for family and friends to join the Pharaoh goodies from the amazing NGV Design Store.

Jackie Tracy travelled as a guest of Visit Victoria



WHAT'S ON

Pharaoh

NGV International
 2024 Melbourne
 Winter
 Masterpieces
 exhibition
 June 14-October 6.



Ticketed Pharaoh has a free exhibition for children and families, plus special events for NGV Friday Nights.

ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/pharaoh



Clockwise from main: Part of the ACMI exhibition by Universal Everything; British chief curator Dr Marie Vandenbusch with statues of gods as part the NGV Pharaoh exhibition; a statue of the god Ra-Horakhty Tell el-Maskhuta; Supernormal in Flinders Lane; and, a high-end coffee machine and the concept cafe at The Rosso Roastery Co in North Melbourne.



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