

## TRAVEL

# Adelaide: On the fringe of a mad month

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6 minutes to read



Adelaide Fringe festival. Photo / Mike Seyfang, Creative Commons

AAP

By: Caroline Berdon

## South Australia's dynamic festival is worth a visit, writes Caroline Berdon

I was last in Adelaide 16 years ago. The city was in the midst of a heatwave, Glenelg beach was heaving and Womadelaide festival was in full swing, with sprinkler jets cooling down revellers.

It was my first experience of the South Australian capital and I liked its calm, its solidarity. The city's relatively small size meant festival season consumed it. Mad March, with the Adelaide Festival, the Adelaide Fringe and Womad happening at once, seemed to rouse its population like a Mexican wave.

Fast-forward to late summer 2017 and the desert sun is still pounding Adelaide's quiet, wide streets. Many have flocked to the beaches, and everyone's talking about last weekend's Womad — the event's 25th anniversary and apparently its best ever.

To me, it feels the same, same but different here. This place doesn't feel quite so composed. The outside world has penetrated Adelaide and shaken it up.

Over a late-night pizza in Glenelg with friends, I cast my eyes excitedly over a *What's On* guide with Adelaide's logo on the cover — a map of Australia with an open door in the bottom middle. I'm so impressed with the quantity and variety of event but it seems not everyone is.

"That's Adelaide," my friend Matt, a local, chants in. "In the middle of the bottom."

You're so lucky, I want to tell him. You have so much happening here — without crowds, traffic, humidity and lock-out laws.

Its vibrancy is everywhere. I see it in the small bars and "saloons" that have sprouted up along what were the bin alleys of Leigh St and Peel St; Rundle Mall at midnight is packed with pop-up cafes, street barbecues and performers for festival-goers; and I don't think I'm the only one to notice the city's fashion has ramped up a gear.

The change is even obvious to me on a quiet Saturday morning stroll along Pulteney St, when 16 jovial people pedal past on mobile cafe HandleBar Adelaide (at night it becomes Australia's first pedal pub). People wave and smile at the breakfast bar as it whizzes past.

The Adelaide Central Market, an institution, now seems as eclectic and ethnically diverse as Womad. There's local charcuterie, continental cheeses, Spanish paella at Comida, Algerian breakfast at Le Souk, and Baltic trends on sale at The Latvian Lunchroom.



Adelaide Central Market.

After a Scandi-style breakfast of fish, capers, potatoes and dill at Jamface, I wander up to the Art Gallery of South Australia for a festival event, expecting the museum to be a poor cousin to its NSW counterpart.

The trans-historic Melrose Wing, in particular, is a happy revelation.

Marc Quinn's 2009 bronze statue of Buck Angel is flirting with William Bouguereau's *Virgin and Child*, a work made in 1888. Nearby, male and female Shinto deities from the 16th century stand alluringly.

The gallery is a celebration not of one style, but the beautiful clash of different styles when they're brought together. It's a trend I feel is happening outside the gallery, too. Perhaps it's the flow-on effects of all these festivals.

At the back of the building, I spend a calm and mesmerising hour in the dark watching Berlin photographer Volker Gerling flick through his black and white flipbooks. Each is 36 images in sequence, which would normally run by in about one and half seconds of film. But the gentle flicking of Gerling's delicate hands slows down time and allows us to fill in the gaps.

Each flipbook in *Portraits in Motion* creates a short film of longing, sadness, love or laughter. There's the mother and daughter smiling freely together; the grieving woman nuzzling the hair she cut off in anguish; the old man reminiscing about his past.

Gerling later tells me how happy he is to have found a medium through which he can slow down time.

"The gaps are important," he says. "You are the person who brings it to life. This is why you feel so connected to the people, I think."

The Adelaide Festival, the Adelaide Fringe and Womadelaide take place every year during "Mad March".

Our evening event, one of last year's most talked about fringe shows, is frenzied by comparison. The *Barbu Electro Trad Cabaret*, performed by Canada's *Cirque Alfonse*, is a bold, ridiculous, cheeky take on circus magic, trapeze and acrobatics. There's a booming, folkish soundtrack and plenty of nudity amid thick beards and corsets.

It's all good fun and the crowd laps it up. Nobody seems shocked by the show's risqué elements; Adelaide is no longer a small town.

The immensely popular fringe seems reflective of Adelaide itself — once the child, it has grown to be bigger and louder than the festival, its parent. Adelaide may still be dwarfed in size by Sydney and Melbourne, but it's now a world-class arts hub boasting the second-largest annual arts festival in the world after Edinburgh.

The fringe, which alone encompasses more than 400 venues, completely possesses Adelaide. But it feels visceral and unpatronising — unlike festivals of some of Australia's larger cities, which struggle to fight for prominence.

Residents in other capitals are certainly paying attention. This year's fringe recorded a 9 per cent increase on last year's sales, boosted by plenty of interstate visitors.

We leave Barbu and exit the Peacock tent to an art-deco vintage playground of circus tents, antique wardrobes and a fortune-telling skeleton.

I hand the cloaked figure \$2 and its bony finger tells me I have the chance to invest in my future — not through money but in love.

It strikes me that these temporary events have invested similarly in Adelaide, and that the city has evolved so colourfully over the years that Mad March has become almost a fringe to the festival that is Adelaide itself.

I look around at the people enjoying food and drinks with friends under glowing lanterns dangling from the trees of Rymill Park, and I think how very lucky they are to live down here, at the bottom in the middle.



Cirque Alfonse.

## CHECKLIST

### Getting there:

Air New Zealand  
flies seasonal services from Auckland to Adelaide.

### Accommodation:

Crowne Plaza  
at Hindmarsh Square is a more-than-comfortable hotel close to all the action.

### Further information:

Adelaide Central Market  
is open Tuesday-Saturday.

The Handlebar Adelaide  
markets itself as Australia's first and only pedal pub and is a fun way to tour the city.

The Art Gallery of South Australia holds one of Australia's finest art collections, including  
noted indigenous art.

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"Mad March".

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