SYDNEY: BEYOND ICONICITY

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INTRODUCTION

Sydney is a quintessential post-modern city - modernist architecture and landscapes wrapped around the post-modern sensibilities of its people and economy. It is the financial capital of Australia. It is Australia's only 'world city'. At its core is Sydney Harbour and its associated icons, the Harbour Bridge and Opera House. Together, these form the city's international persona and are amongst the most recognisable of all urban sights. The relatively mundane central business district (CBD), dominated by international-style, high-rise office towers, is lifted aesthetically by its juxtaposition to the harbour, which surrounds it on three sides. With the harbour as its centre point, it is little wonder that Sydney has become a major international tourism destination.

However, Sydney's emergence as a tourism destination is relatively recent when compared to other world cities discussed in this volume, such as London, Paris and New York. It has only been since the mid-1980s that tourism has become significant for the city and a major influence on its social and physical fabric. In contemporary times it is hard to imagine Sydney without tourists and the overt signs of commercial tourism enterprises, particularly around the harbour and central city areas. Sightseeing cruises, pleasure craft of all shapes and sizes, and the ubiquitous jet boats for the more thrill-seeking tourists, dominate the harbour. Tourism and leisure activities now occupy an almost unbroken stretch of foreshore land extending nearly ten kilometres from Woolloomooloo to Pyrmont. Within this stretch of foreshore are many of Sydney's

principal tourist attractions, including the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney Opera House, Circular Quay, The Rocks, the Harbour Bridge, Walsh Bay arts precinct, King Street Wharf, Darling Harbour and the 'Star City' Casino.

Significantly, much of this waterfront land and its immediate environs are under the ownership or management of a state government instrumentality, the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (SHFA), reflecting the importance that the New South Wales (NSW) government places on this area and its tourism-related functions. Indeed, the way in which SHFA has evolved over time from its antecedent authorities is symbolic of the growing importance of tourism to the Sydney and NSW economies over the past few decades.

TOURISM IN SYDNEY: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In spite of tourism's increasing prominence and profile, its development in Sydney has rarely been guided by conscious and deliberate policy. Major public policy initiatives have certainly influenced tourism, but often tourism has been a by-product rather than a strategic objective central to these initiatives, particularly prior to the mid-1980s. This section of the chapter reviews the development of tourism in Sydney, decade by decade since the 1960s. Major factors and events influencing the development of tourism within the city are highlighted, including the role of government policy.

1960s and 1970s: The 'Accidental' Tourist Destination

In the 1960s, Australia was fairly inward-looking and, as a city, Sydney reflected this orientation. To the extent that the nation gazed outward at all, it did so primarily in two

directions: 'Mother England', the progenitor of the national culture and home of Australia's head of state; and the USA, the country's most important military ally. To Britain, Australia owed the debt of its identity and the economic benefits that membership of the British Commonwealth afforded it. We remained stoically British and loyal. To the USA, Australia owed its survival as a sovereign nation during World War II and its ongoing security, given its isolated position at the base of Asia. South-east Asia in particular had experienced a turbulent period with the end of European colonialism and the emergent threat of communism. In Vietnam, America had responded militarily to these events, with Australia's enthusiastic and grateful support. While Britain represented the past, the USA represented the future, politically and economically, particularly with Britain showing signs of interest in joining the European Economic Community and in the process abandoning the favourable trade terms it hitherto offered Commonwealth nations.

Sydney in the early 1960s strongly reflected its British heritage in both form and feel, although the American influence was showing signs of taking root. Tourism was primarily domestic and barely noticeable. Sydney's beaches, particularly Manly and Bondi, attracted summer holidaymakers and were popular day-trip destinations for Sydneysiders. Much of the central city consisted of sturdy Victorian sandstone buildings and was fundamentally concerned with the serious business of property, finance and high order retailing. Entertainment was confined to the corner pubs, which still closed their doors at 6pm, and a concentration of cinemas and theatres at the southern end of the CBD. The occasional steakhouse or smoke-filled jazz club could be

found nestled in one of the city's more intimate laneways, but most such activities were located a couple of kilometres away in the Kings Cross area.

Kings Cross, at this stage, had developed as something of an alternative, bohemian quarter. The home of many artists and students, it had a cosmopolitan café culture and nightlife which stood in strong contrast to the rest of the city. Kings Cross was effectively the city's first truly urban tourism precinct, based largely on its concentration of nightlife and entertainment activities and its somewhat 'racy' reputation. The business of prostitution and strip clubs received a particular boost during the Vietnam War years, when thousands of American servicemen would regularly visit the city on leave. Sydney's first major hotels catering to leisure travellers were also constructed in this area. Famously, the Beatles had waved from the balcony of the *Kings Cross Sheraton* on the first morning of their 1964 visit to Australia, while the nearby *Chevron Hilton's Silver Spade Room* played host to most of the major international performing artists for more mature audiences. The CBD, on the other hand, contained only the austere *Menzies Hotel* and a handful of other establishments for the business traveller.

Around the harbour, some significant changes were afoot. On Bennelong Point, the old tram sheds had been demolished, no longer needed because of the decision to dismantle the tramways in 1961 in order to free up the city's streets for the motor car (see Nixon 2008). For more than a decade Sydneysiders watched, sometimes eagerly and sometimes sceptically, as the distinctive form of the Opera House gradually took shape on this site. The brainchild of J.J. Cahill, a socialist NSW Premier who wanted to make

high culture accessible to the masses, the Opera House was reflective of a more progressive Australia which was breaking away from its conservative roots.

Starting in the late 1950s around Circular Quay, the area juxtaposing the Opera House site, Sydney's first 'skyscrapers' were being built. This trend gathered pace throughout the 1960s and early 1970s as sleek office towers began to replace much of the Victorian fabric of the city, spurred on by a burgeoning finance and property sector and significant levels of foreign investment. Such development was seen as indicative of Sydney's transformation into a modern, progressive, international city, with pretensions to be the financial capital of the South Pacific. It was in this climate that the future of an area that was to become one of Sydney's most important tourism precincts took a dramatic change of direction.

Located on the harbour, at the northern end of the CBD and in the shadow of the Harbour Bridge, was an area known as The Rocks. In the 1960s The Rocks was widely regarded as a crime-ridden slum of decrepit and derelict buildings. It was perceived as ripe for redevelopment, in spite of it being the site of the original European settlement in Sydney and containing the oldest extant buildings of colonial origin in Australia. Fortuitously for the development-minded NSW government of the late 1960s, most of the area was under public ownership, having been resumed by the government in the early 1900s in order to stem an outbreak of bubonic plague! A new statutory authority, the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA) was created by an Act of the NSW Parliament in 1970 and given control over The Rocks. SCRA's charter was to plan for and carry out the wholesale redevelopment of the area and maximize the financial return

to the government from doing so. Ownership of the land was to remain in public hands, with all development proceeding under leasehold arrangements. As landlord, SCRA possessed virtually absolute power over the site and was accountable only to its Minister. The creation of such a powerful statutory authority was intended to expedite the process of redevelopment, to ensure that it proceeded quickly and smoothly. SCRA's plan was basically to raze the existing built fabric and extend the CBD northwards through the construction of high-rise office towers. That The Rocks of today does not reflect this plan is largely an accident of circumstances converging to frustrate the government's original intent.

In the early 1970s, the demolition crews moved into The Rocks only to be confronted by an alliance of residential tenants, some of whose families had lived in the area for generations, and a militant trade union, the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF). The BLF had, on a number of previous occasions in Sydney, shown its willingness to support residents against development interests and had placed a 'green ban' on The Rocks, which effectively barred any union member from working on the demolition or construction (Roddewig 1978). Green bans had evolved partly because the state planning legislation of the day afforded local communities virtually no rights to object to or otherwise influence planning and development decisions. The green ban succeeded in delaying the redevelopment until a collapse in the commercial property market in 1973/74 raised questions about the viability of the original plan. At a time of massive oversupply in city office space it would not have served the government's financial objectives for The Rocks to release further space onto the market. By the time the office market had recovered a new state government, more sympathetic to conservation of

heritage[1], was in office. The Rocks was now recognized for its important heritage values, but SCRA still needed to generate a financial return from the government's substantial investment. The plan then became one based on restoration of as much of the built fabric as possible. Demolition would only occur where buildings could not be safely restored, and new constructions had to fit into the scale and character of the historic built fabric. This in turn limited the land use options which were available to occupants of buildings in the area. Almost by default, tourism was now seen as the principal commercial activity of the area, and restaurants, cafés, and specialty retailing became the major tenants of the renovated buildings. On the southern fringe of the precinct, adjacent to the CBD, a number of sites were earmarked for future major hotel developments. SCRA began to promote the area as an historic tourism precinct, the 'Birthplace of Australia', and its commercial success was now contingent on attracting tourists who would spend money in the tenant businesses. Sydney now had its first mainstream urban tourism precinct.

1980s: The World Discovers Sydney, and Sydney Discovers Tourism

In spite of the emergence of The Rocks as a tourism precinct, by the early 1980s Sydney was still an international tourism backwater. In 1985 the city boasted only eight 4 and 5-star hotels, and even that limited supply had been boosted by the opening of the *Regent* and *Inter-Continental* hotels in 1983 and 1985 respectively (Griffin 1989). All that, however, was about to change. In 1985, Australia received some one million international visitors. By 1988 that number had more than doubled, as international

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[1] One of the early acts of this new state government, elected in May 1976, was to introduce the Heritage Act, 1977, the first legislation in NSW aimed at protecting the state's built heritage. Later, this government enacted new planning legislation, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979, which substantially increased legitimate avenues for public participation in planning. However, throughout its life SCRA remained exempt from the requirements of this legislation.

arrivals grew at annual rates in excess of 25 per cent throughout the middle part of the decade. As the major international gateway, Sydney was receiving a substantial proportion of that growth and featured in the standard itinerary for many package tourists – the classic 'Sydney, the Reef and the Rock'[2]. On the back of that growth and its anticipated continuation, the supply of up-market hotel rooms in the CBD alone was set to more than triple from 1988 to 1993, with 19 new hotels containing nearly 8,000 rooms either under construction or in the planning pipeline at that time (Griffin 1989). More budget accommodation was planned around the fringes of the city centre.

The 1980s also saw the development of Sydney's most substantial commitment to tourism – Darling Harbour. Located to the immediate west of the CBD, Darling Harbour had been a blighted area of redundant dockland, railway goods yards and warehouses since the 1970s. In the early 1980s, however, plans were announced to redevelop the area into the centrepiece of Sydney's celebrations of the bicentennial of European settlement. Thus in 1984 the NSW government created the Darling Harbour Authority (DHA) to implement this plan. Like SCRA in The Rocks, DHA was given extraordinary powers as a combined landlord, developer and planning authority for the site. To circumvent the possibility that its redevelopment could be delayed by public objections, Darling Harbour was exempted from the normal provisions of the state's environmental planning legislation. Statutory planning obligations such as placing plans on exhibition, allowing for public submissions, objections and rights of appeal, and environmental and social impact assessment did not have to be included in Darling Harbour's planning and development processes as a matter of deliberate policy.

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[2] Many package tours to Australia at this time featured Sydney, the Great Barrier Reef in North Queensland and Ayers Rock – now Uluru – in the Northern Territory, arguably Australia's most iconic tourist sights. These tours were generally of one to two weeks duration.

Moreover, the Sydney City Council, the local government authority for the area, was effectively excluded from any part of the planning process. All this was intended to ensure that the new Darling Harbour was ready in time for the major bicentennial celebrations in January 1988 and it was a feature of its development that drew much criticism (Hall 1998).

Darling Harbour was certainly intentionally created as a tourism precinct, although it also represented a significant exercise in the urban renewal of a blighted area. Its size and strategic location on the harbour and adjacent to the CBD provided an opportunity to develop a range of major facilities that the city was perceived to lack. Hence the government invested heavily in facilities such as the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre and National Maritime Museum, to enhance the city's capacity to attract visitors. The private sector also contributed to the development, and at the time of its opening, Darling Harbour contained a number of other major attractions and facilities, such as the Sydney Aquarium and Harbourside shopping centre which incorporated numerous cafes, bars and restaurants. The area also featured significant pockets of open space, including spaces for outdoor performances and events. Many of the aforementioned new hotels were constructed in and around this new tourism precinct.

Darling Harbour, however, was not an immediate success. In its initial year of operation it drew some 13 million visitors, less than had been anticipated, and by 1995 this had risen to only 13.7million (Darling Harbour Authority 1996, cited in Hall 1998), with the majority being Sydneysiders. Some of its key elements, notably the Harbourside shopping centre, have proved to be persistently problematic from a commercial point of

view, with numerous changes in the management, configuration and tenant mix over the years. A few of the originally planned developments did not eventuate, in one case due to the financial collapse of the private developer. Rather than being a *fait accompli,* by the end of the 1980s the precinct was effectively developed in a number of stages over the next two decades and it was well into the 1990s before there was a sense of completion about it.

1990s: And the Winner is…Sydney!

For tourism in Sydney, the 1990s was a decade of extremes. International tourism had temporarily plateaued after the euphoria of the 1988 Bicentennial year. While growth resumed in the early 1990s it was much more modest than the heady days of the mid-1980s. Many of the new hotels whose development had been stimulated by this growth opened in conditions where supply had far outstripped demand. As a consequence, some were in receivership even before they had welcomed their first guest. Financiers became hotel owners and numerous new properties were put on the market for substantially less than their development costs as the bankers sought to recoup their losses from tourism investors and developers unable to service their loans (Griffin & Darcy 1997). After the boom of the 1980s, Sydney was experiencing its first tourism development bust. The hard times for Sydney tourism were, however, short-lived.

Early on the morning of 24 September, 1993, tens of thousands of Sydneysiders had gathered around Circular Quay and the Opera House. The crowd fell silent for a moment as the President of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch, appeared on the massive TV screens dotted around the area, only to erupt

when he announced that Sydney had won the right to host the 2000 Olympic Games. Aside from the local populace's outpouring of delight at this news, the outlook for tourism in Sydney once again looked very positive.

Securing the right to host the Olympics represented a major opportunity for Sydney, from both tourism and urban development perspectives. However, the decision to bid for the Games was not strongly motivated by either of these considerations. Certainly the value of the Olympics as a means of boosting international exposure and inbound tourism was recognized, but this was perceived more in a national context rather than relating specifically to Sydney. In the previous two rounds of bidding for the right to host the Games, Melbourne had been Australia's officially endorsed, but unsuccessful candidate. Looking ahead to the 2000 Games, Sydney was quite simply and pragmatically seen as having a much better prospect of winning the bid for Australia. This success inevitably led to a number of significant planning and development responses within Sydney as both state and local government sought to deal with the challenges of both staging the Games and its longer term legacies.

The Olympics certainly provided an opportunity to resolve a longstanding urban development problem. Homebush Bay, the nominated site for the major venues, was a blighted, contaminated and largely redundant industrial wasteland located at the geographic centre of the city. Amongst its former uses were an abattoir, a brick pit, a munitions factory and storage site, and a number of chemical dumpsites. The Games provided the impetus for the area's rehabilitation and redevelopment. Prior to the successful bid, the state government had prepared a masterplan for the area and created

the Homebush Bay Development Corporation (HBDC) in 1991 to oversee its implementation. The need to accommodate the Games was incorporated into the masterplan and HBDC's responsibilities were subsumed by the Olympic Coordination Authority (OCA) in 1995 (Sydney Olympic Park Authority 2008).

The early 1990s was also a time when major new markets were emerging from the so-called 'tiger economies' of Asia, with inbound arrivals from Korea and Taiwan growing particularly strongly (Griffin & Darcy 1997). By the middle of the decade the oversupply in Sydney hotel rooms had been absorbed and a concern was arising over whether the city would be able to accommodate the expected influx of visitors during and after the Olympics. The Tourism Olympic Forum, a body created by the state government to advise on tourism related matters in the lead-up to the Games, highlighted this prospective shortage in a report it commissioned soon after its establishment (Hotel & Tourism Asset Advisory Services and JLW Transact 1994). The Sydney City Council moved swiftly to stimulate more hotel development by amending its local planning controls. Floor space ratio bonuses, allowing up to an additional 40 per cent above the normal maximum permissible floor space, were introduced for hotel developments in the CBD, provided the development application was submitted by 1 January 1998. This was specifically designed to stimulate development that would be ready in time for the Olympics.

The City Council and the NSW government recognized that there was a great need for public as well as private development activity if Sydney was to successfully host the Olympics. Aside from the facilities directly associated with operating the Games,

Sydney's public domain, especially in its central areas, was perceived to require a substantial facelift. A major program of civic improvements was initiated, particularly focusing on the CBD and key harbourside precincts such as Circular Quay. As a culmination and an ongoing legacy of this process, the state government created the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (SHFA) in 1998. Immediately, SHFA assumed control of The Rocks from the Sydney Cove Authority[3]. The Darling Harbour Authority was also to be abolished and its responsibilities absorbed by SHFA following the Olympics. Hence by 2001 one single government authority was landlord, planner, manager and promoter for Sydney's two most significant tourism precincts. SHFA was also given management powers over other important waterfront precincts such as Circular Quay and Woolloomooloo. As with all of its antecedent bodies, the main motivation behind creating such a powerful authority as SHFA was to ensure the dominance of state over local government in relation to the planning and development of these areas.

The decade had not been one of continual smooth growth, however. Some markets had waxed and waned. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 sent previously booming inbound markets like Korea into sudden decline. One market that grew steadily and significantly over the decade, however, was the backpacker market. Moreover, backpackers were having a profound effect on the geography of tourism in Sydney. Rather than the CBD and immediate surrounds, backpackers were being accommodated in areas that offered nightlife and entertainment, such as Kings Cross and other inner suburbs like Glebe and Newtown. The beachside suburbs of Bondi, Manly and Coogee were also particularly

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[3] During the 1980s, the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority dropped the word 'Redevelopment' from its title in order to improve its somewhat tarnished image and convey the message that it was no longer concerned with the wholesale redevelopment of one of Australia's most important historic areas.

targeted. From a developer's perspective these areas had the added advantage of an ample supply of low-rent housing, especially boarding houses, that could be easily converted into cheap accommodation for backpackers. A problem with this trend, however, was that the backpacker lifestyle was not always compatible with that of the residential neighbourhoods they now occupied. Local councils in the affected areas formulated development control plans to deal with many of these conflicts.

Backpackers aside, the bulk of Sydney's tourism remained concentrated around the CBD and adjacent harbourside areas. In the run-up to the Olympic Games, Darling Harbour, which was to be one of the main venues, strengthened its position due to the completion of Cockle Bay Wharf on its eastern side, adjacent to the CBD. This area had been a void within the precinct for the previous decade. From a policy perspective, though, there was a growing belief that Sydney needed to diversify its attraction base if it was going to maintain its competitiveness into the future. Hence Tourism New South Wales (TNSW), the state government authority responsible for tourism, launched first an attractions development strategy for Sydney (TNSW 1996) followed by the Sydney Tourism Experience Development (STED) Program (TNSW 1998). The STED program in particular was focused on assisting the development and promotion of tourism in parts of Sydney outside the centre. One of the long term legacies of the STED program was that TNSW established a number of committees comprising precinct managers and/or business interests, which were intended to maintain the impetus towards diversifying tourism experiences in Sydney. However, the potential of these committees to have a substantial impact on the quality or type of experiences available to tourists has never been fully realized.

Beyond 2000: Recovering Lost Ground

The new millennium could not have begun on a higher note for Sydney. The Olympics were acknowledged as a resounding success - the 'best ever' according to the IOC President - and now the city's tourism industry could sit back and reap the rewards from the enhanced international profile. The Sydney Olympic Park Authority (SOPA) had been established in July 2001 to take over the ongoing management of the Homebush Bay Olympic site and to assist the state planning authority with the area's conversion from a one-off venue into an integrated part of the urban fabric (SOPA 2008). This was not without its challenges, and the government recognized that to maximize the tourist potential of the site it had to generate a sense of vitality around the somewhat monumental venues and not just rely on the staging of events. The area needed to be a living place with a substantial, permanent residential community.

All the post-Olympic optimism, however, came to a shuddering halt early in the morning of 11 September 2001, New York time. The impact of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on international tourism was felt worldwide, and Sydney experienced a decline in visitation like many other destinations. Two years later, the SARS virus emerged to further impact on a number of major Asian inbound markets. Talk of the positive Olympic legacy was now replaced by discussions of crisis management and recovery programs. The expected post-Olympic boom never happened and the Sydney tourism industry became more concerned with consolidating and holding onto the gains that had been made in the previous decade. At least backpackers were still arriving in increasing numbers, and there was rapid growth from new Asian markets such as China and India. There was uncertainty, however, about how to best

cater for these markets and, more importantly, how to avoid the problem of 'profitless volume' that was evident in the burgeoning Korean and Taiwanese markets of the 1990s. Of most concern was the decline in the Japanese market, one of the mainstays of Sydney tourism for the previous two decades. Furthermore, this trend could not be attributed to any crisis. Could it be that Sydney's appeal to tourists was on the wane, and it was no longer generating positive word-of-mouth and strong repeat visitation from its traditionally strong markets?

At the same time, tourism in Australia's second city, Melbourne, was thriving on the back of some extremely successful promotional campaigns. Melbourne was being portrayed as a sophisticated, cultured city which offered a diverse array of interesting and intimate experiences rather than iconic sights and attractions. Melbourne offered the prospect of discovery, whereas Sydney had perhaps become a little too well known and familiar. In the face of this success by its southern neighbour, in the latter part of the decade Sydney was seen by many as losing its competitive edge. Arguably it needed to learn some lessons from Melbourne's success and to focus more strongly on extending the range and quality of experiences the city offered. Sydney could still offer peak experiences, such as the Harbour Bridge climb, and its major and famous precincts like Darling Harbour were thriving, but would this be enough to ensure its sustained success?

An examination of recent trends in Sydney's tourism produces some conflicting messages. Domestically the number of overnight visitors to Sydney has decreased from 8.3 million in the year ended June 2003 to 7.6 million in the year ended June 2007, a

decline of more than nine percent over that five year period. Domestic visitor nights have declined by more than 5 percent over that same period, while day trips have declined by 7.5 percent. Running counter to these trends, international visits and visitor nights grew by 16.5 and 37 percent respectively from 2003 to 2007. While the international visitation figures seem positive, it should be stressed that using 2003 as a base year may produce a somewhat misleading picture, given that events such as the SARS outbreak contributed to a significant decline in international tourism to Australia in that particular year[4] (Tourism NSW 2007b).

Despite some concerns about the current trajectory of tourism in Sydney, the city maintains its position as Australia's pre-eminent destination, and tourism has become a significant part of the local economy. For the year ended June 2007, domestic overnight visitors spent in excess of A\$3.5 billion within the city (i.e. excluding cost of transport to Sydney) (Tourism Research Australia 2007b). By virtue of their longer average length of stay, international visitors spent more than A\$5 billion in the same year, which represented one third of the total international tourism expenditure in Australia (Tourism Research Australia 2007a). Domestic day visitors contributed a further A\$1.6 billion to the city's economy (Tourism Research Australia 2007b). It may or may not be significant that on average both domestic and international visitors now spend more per night during a stay in Melbourne than they do in Sydney. The average length of stay for international visitors in Melbourne also exceeds that for Sydney (Tourism Research Australia 2007a).

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[4] Examining visitation trends over a longer period than this is made difficult by a change in visit estimation methods in 2003. Figures before and after that year are not directly comparable.

THE SYDNEY TOURISM EXPERIENCE

One of the explanations for the decline in domestic visitors and slower than anticipated growth in international tourism, has been a concern that Sydney has linked the development of tourism generally, and the city's image in particular, too closely to its harbourside attractions. According to TTF Australia (2007a), the city needs to innovate and create new experiences and attractions to encourage visitors. They note that while marketing campaigns create a certain 'buzz' about a city visit, they have to be supported by a distinctive and compelling tourism offering (TTF Australia 2007b). By implication, the Sydney tourism experience may be failing to match its marketing message.

The experience of the city has certainly been subject to recent criticism (Munro 2007; Nixon 2008). While Sydney presents a visual panoply to visitors, Munro (2007:1) argues that:

> Sydney is a trophy wife. Like her smug husband, we bask in the glory of association and smooth over the rough spots. Sydneysiders struggle with their glamorous, sparkling city. Catch the bus across town, but not if you are in a hurry. A brisk walk would probably be faster.
>
> Walk a few bus or train stops to lose weight. But rug up against the wind tunnels and the deep shade thrown by our skyscrapers. Meet a friend for a drink in town. But do not expect to hear each other talking.

A walk northward to the harbour along Sydney's main thoroughfare, George Street, lays bare the clatter and bustle of the city noted by Munro (2007).Concrete and glass towers dominate the skyline. At ground level, pedestrians compete with buses and cars on narrow and congested streets. What does this cacophony of architecture, people and commercial enterprise tell us about Sydney? The answer is brief - very little really. It seems that many post-modern cities of the 'New World' are largely distinguished by

their lack of distinctiveness. Indeed as Bridge and Watson (2000) observed, these cities typically have more in common with each other than with their surrounding hinterland!

As George Street approaches the harbour and the tourist hub of Circular Quay, visitors share the public space with city workers who scurry from the commuter ferries toward their offices. At this point a large steel railway bridge dissects the public space and fractures the flow of the skyline. Painted along the horizontal beam of the bridge is a sign 'Welcome to The Rocks'. Passing under the bridge, the physical and social characteristics of the cityscape are transformed. Twentieth century concrete and glass give way to nineteenth century sandstone and slate. The goal-directed pace of the city gives way to more relaxed, seemingly aimless activity. Predominantly, commercial activity is geared to meeting leisure and pleasure needs. The collective effect of the change in architecture, scale, tempo and visitor activity, creates a markedly different city experience - this is clearly a different site. It is part of the city, yet a place set apart.

The Tourist Precinct

Precincts such as The Rocks play an important role in the life and the experience of the city for both visitors and residents. As noted elsewhere (Hayllar, Griffin & Edwards 2008), tourism services and attractions, from both supply and demand perspectives, are not dispersed evenly and seamlessly throughout a city but tend to be concentrated into relatively small, contained geographic locales - precincts. For visitors in particular, precincts are focal points and sites of intense consumption.

In an 'intensely urban' city like Sydney, the interaction of tourists with precincts takes on a particular resonance. Arguably, precincts are counterpoints to the dissonance of the city – they bring legibility to the discord that surrounds them. This position raises two interrelated questions about precincts that have in part been broached by both Maitland and Newman (2004) and Montgomery (2004). The first concerns how well do we understand the experience of tourists in precincts? What is their experience, how do they explain it, what sense of meaning do they attach to the experience? The second, and interconnected question, concerns the functional aspects of precincts. What functions do precincts perform in shaping or facilitating the experience of tourists? Can seemingly dissimilar precincts perform similar functions? Do inner-city precincts perform different functions to city fringe, or suburban precincts? The focus is thus on the roles a precinct performs and not simply what its physical form or 'type' might imply.

The chapter now turns to addressing these and related questions in respect of Sydney. The first part examines the experience of tourists in the two city-based precincts previously discussed, The Rocks and Darling Harbour, and theorizes the role these precincts play in providing experiences beyond the well trodden path. The second section broadens the scope of the discussion and considers the functions these two precincts perform for tourists and contrasts them with two suburban or 'fringe' precincts – Norton Street (Leichhardt) and Parramatta. The overall purpose in this latter discussion is to examine the functional roles of precincts and their implications for the tourist experience of Sydney. Finally, and against this background, the future of Sydney as a tourism destination is considered.

PRECINCTS AS PART OF THE SYDNEY EXPERIENCE

The experiences of people in precincts are at least partly shaped by the historo-physical context of the precinct itself. A visitor's prior knowledge, impressions passed to them by others, and the physical fabric and location of a precinct are among a number of factors that impact on the expectations of visitors and, as a logical corollary, the experience itself.

The Rocks precinct takes its name from the rocky outcrops, long since flattened by development, which once marked its shoreline and immediate environs. In earlier times, The Rocks had a reputation for its hard working class edge and nefarious activities such as those perpetrated by the *Rocks Push*, a street gang which terrorized the area in the late nineteenth century.

In perhaps a portent of its future as a tourist precinct, an Englishmen visiting Sydney in c1890 was taken by a friend into a Rocks pub frequented by *Push* members and described them as:

> Wiry, hard-faced little fellows, for the most part, with scarcely a sizeable man amongst them. They were all clothed in "push" evening dress—black bell-bottomed pants, no waistcoat, very short black paget coat, white shirt with no collar, and a gaudy neckerchief round the bare throat. Their boots were marvels, very high in the heel and picked out with all sorts of colours down the sides.
> (A.B. Paterson - *In Push Society* 1906)

Although the *Push* has faded into history, many tourists still venture into The Rocks in an attempt to capture a sense of the 'real' Sydney. While substantially altered and 'sanitized', The Rocks offers tourists the prospect of insights into the city's past and present day contemporaneously and has become a significant focus of city-based tourist activity. Between July 2006 and June 2007 the precinct recorded over 13.5 million visits. Sydney residents are the dominant user group (54 per cent) followed by international tourists (24 per cent) and those from regional areas of NSW and interstate visitors (22 per cent). (www.shfa.nsw.gov.au).

Approximately three kilometres along the harbour foreshore from The Rocks is the contrasting precinct of Darling Harbour. Conceived and developed in the genre of the 'festival marketplace' (Rowe & Stevenson 1994), Darling Harbour is an eclectic mix of modern architectural forms reflecting its 20 year development 'heritage'. Despite some ongoing criticism (see Huxley 1991; Hall 1998; Searle 2008) it has become a weekend hub of activity for Sydney residents and visitors alike. The regular events, array of attractions and opportunities to stroll around the waterfront, all with the backdrop of the city and harbour, make Darling Harbour an attractive leisure time option. Between July 2006 and June 2007, the precinct received over 27.5 million visits making it Sydney's most visited tourist place. Of these, 62 per cent were Sydneysiders, with the remaining 38 per cent divided evenly between domestic and international visitors (www.shfa.nsw.gov.au).

As Sydney's most significant tourism precincts, The Rocks (Hayllar & Griffin 2005) and Darling Harbour (Hayllar & Griffin 2007) provided the foundation for the first two

in a series of studies undertaken by the authors The overall purpose of these studies was to progressively develop an understanding of tourists' experience of a city generally, and in particular their experience of city precincts. In each of these studies a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the examination of experience was used. Data were collected via in-depth interviews using the respective visitors centre in both precincts to recruit participants and conduct the interviews. Interviews were conducted with 90 visitors; 60 international and 30 non-Sydney residents. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were prepared and the narrative 'data' were analysed using the thematic approach recommended by Van Manen (1990) and Denzin (1989). Following several 'works' of the participants' narratives by the research team, three experiential themes emerged from the data:

- physical form and setting;

- atmosphere; and

- personal meaning.

The *physical setting* and what it means to the visitor is an important experiential characteristic. The Rocks and Darling Harbour have strikingly different architectural forms. The historic yet evolved streetscape of The Rocks with its low rise, more human scale 18th and 19th century buildings links Sydney to its colonial past. In contrast the 'style' of Darling Harbour is somewhat of a discordant mix of late 20th century concrete, glass and metal. In both cases the precincts are located close to the city yet they eschew quite a different experience. The Rocks is adjacent to the main tourist core of the city. It is encircled by vibrant inner city life and tourist activity. Its relative quietness and change of pace are in sharp contrast to its immediate surrounds. It is a place to meet, eat,

drink and shop – it is a more urbanized, perhaps local, experience. By way of contrast, *Play it your way* is the marketing theme for Darling Harbour. It is a site of colour, movement and activity. As one respondent in the Darling Harbour study commented: *It's like a big entertainment centre.*

The second theme, *atmosphere,* refers to the overall 'feel' of the precinct created by the dialectical interaction of the social and personal experiences of the visitor with the precinct. A visit to a precinct is an inherently social experience. Both Darling Harbour and The Rocks are urban melting pots of international and domestic tourists, local residents and office workers. On weekends, the office workers make way for pleasure-seeking locals and visitors from outside Sydney. The atmosphere in The Rocks is more subdued, 'old world' in style, while Darling Harbour is more open, expressive and fast-paced. The Rocks' narrow streets, living precinct character and human interactions convey a particular type of experience; in part a sense of timelessness. Darling Harbour 'feels' younger, more active and a place of its time. These different characteristics help shape the personal experiences of the visitors.

The final theme identified is concerned with how an individual's cumulative experiences and level of engagement provide some sense of *personal meaning* to their visit. In the sense described here, meaning is understood at two levels – external and internal. External is concerned with the meaning the precinct gives to the 'host' city itself - as a marker for Sydney as a destination. Conversely, internal meaning is more inwardly focused – what the experience means for the individual.

In both precincts there is an unambiguous sense that visitors are experiencing 'Sydney' but in manifestly different ways. Both are measures of distinctiveness. At The Rocks, visitors recognize they are moving in the environs of old Sydney and do not appear to be concerned with what might be considered the imposition of the modern or 'inauthentic'. Indeed Wang's (1999) notion of 'existential authenticity' (in Ashworth & Tunbridge 2000:17), where authenticity lies in the experience and not the object, is relevant to this group of visitors. Conversely, Darling Harbour provides a different marker. Here the experience is one of modern, emblematic Sydney.

Respondents at both sites expressed positive 'feelings' toward their experience. They felt 'safe', 'comfortable', 'less stressed', and 'not hassled'. However, these expressions were more marked in reference to The Rocks. It could be that the greater 'depth' and complexity of the environment in The Rocks provided a richer experiential foundation for meaningful reflection. Indeed support for this observation is provided in companion studies of precincts undertaken in Melbourne (Griffin, Hayllar & King 2006).

Theorising the Precinct Experience

In thinking through the narratives and thematic analyses for both these precincts as described above, we have argued from the phenomenological perspective that the contested notion of *place* (see Relph 1976; Lefebvre 1991; Suvantola 2002; Creswell 2004) is the essential characteristic or *essence* of the visitor experience to these spaces (Hayllar & Griffin 2005). While the companion concepts of *space* and *place* are problematized in the literature, the work of Suvantola (2002) and Tuan (1977) is instructive. According to Suvantola (2002), there are five different types of spaces:

mathematical, physical, socio-economic, behavioural and experiential. It is his notion of experiential space which is of particular interest. Suvantola (2002) argues that experiential space is dynamic and, invoking phenomenological reasoning, describes the use of space as both lived <u>and</u> experienced. Of the five different types of spaces discussed, it is perhaps the least quantifiable yet arguably the most important in respect of the tourist experience. It is within the experiential realm that meaning is applied to space through our encounters with it. Theoretically, a space imbued with meaning becomes a place (Tuan 1977).

Although Darling Harbour and The Rocks are sites of substantial contrast, they each have an intrinsic resonance that visitors connect to Sydney. The unique architectural heritage of The Rocks, and its location as a physical and social counterpoint to the city which adjoins it, makes this a distinctive urban landscape in Sydney. It is this distinctiveness, and the visitors' experience of it, that give rise to phenomenological experience of place.

The phenomenon of place emerged somewhat unexpectedly from the analysis of Darling Harbour given the pejorative statements that generally accompany discussions of such planned precincts. For example, Rowe and Stevenson (1994:181) argued that 'festival marketplaces involve the calculated packaging of time and space, seeking to satisfy tourists' expectations of an authentic experience of place by constructing often decontextualized and sanitized simulations of urban landscapes', and further that these types of precincts resonate with the 'urbanism of universal equivalence so that anywhere can now be everywhere'. (see also Clark 1991, in Craig-Smith & Fagence

1995) However, our findings suggest that visitor experiences of Darling Harbour run counter to this conventional wisdom. Darling Harbour is not 'anywhere' nor simply the 'carnivalesque' with its implied superficiality and depthlessness, but rather something more engaging and meaningful for the visitor (Hayllar & Griffin 2007). It is a distinctly Sydney place.

In considering the overall thematic analysis, and the implicit psychological shift from space to place, it could be argued that there is a type of experiential or thematic 'hierarchy' in the nature of the visitor's interaction with the precinct. This hierarchy is ordered by increasing levels of engagement or depth in the way a precinct is experienced. At the broad level, the *Physical Form* is immediate and unavoidable. At one level it may invoke the spirit of curiosity and invite further exploration - to investigate what is beyond the immediate or to discover 'what's this all about?'. At another level, the physical form may act as a barrier to further engagement. Where there is no experiential (emotional) union between the physical form and the visitor, arguably the precinct remains a space rather than a place.

The next level, *Atmosphere,* relates to the social psychological experience of engagement with the precinct beyond the more immediate reaction to its physicality. It is an emotional sense of experience which we argue is critical for the precinct to be experienced as a *place.* Thus emotional commitment in its psychological sense leads to an experience of greater depth and subsequently meaning.

Finally, and consistent with Tuan's argument, the third level, *Meaning*, represents the deepest level of experience, beyond that of immediate enjoyment. At this less superficial level of experience, the visitor acquires a much stronger sense of place attachment. Indeed it might be that a 'meaningful' precinct experience may have a substantial impact on the overall destination's sense of place much like landmark sights have in other destinations, for example the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Statue of Liberty in New York.

A second set of theoretical considerations concerns the experiences provided by the study precincts for different types of visitors. In a previous paper (Hayllar & Griffin 2005) we discussed a typology of visitors identified as *Explorers*, *Browsers* and *Samplers*. This typology reflects the idea that different people can simultaneously experience a precinct in quite different ways, provided the precinct offers opportunities for different layers of experience.

The *Explorers* were identified as those visitors who want to move beyond the façade of a precinct, to find their own way and discover its innermost complexities and qualities. An explorer in The Rocks who wanted to look beyond the immediacy of the precinct commented that:

> *The narrow cobbled street is something you don't find in very many places and I think that's really part of its charm. You're walking along one street and then all of a sudden without realising it there's a kind of this little alleyway off to the left that might take you to something a bit more interesting around the corner.*

Another noted that *you can just kind of explore behind the buildings and through the alleyways. It's fun. It's got wonderful energy.* Earlier she commented that if you wander *you never know, well you know you've got to come out somewhere, but I like the little streets.*

The second group, the *Browsers,* are more content to stay within the confines of the main precinct area and to follow the tourist routes. As one browser commented: *you just want to sit, listen to the music* or call into the local pub *to mix with people a little bit and that's quite nice.* Another browser considered The Rocks as a collection of *kind of quaint little restaurants, little delis, little cafes – very relaxed, very casual and something you'd want to go and see if you just came off the boat or something [if] you were a little bit tired but didn't want to go home yet. It's a nice place to stroll around to relax and take a break.* The browsers are engaged by the experience at hand but do not seek to further enrich that experience through extensive investigations of the precinct.

The experience for the final group, *the Samplers* is more superficial, with a visit to a precinct representing just another stop on their schedule of moving through the attractions of a city. For them the precinct is yet another sight to be viewed but not experienced, or a place of brief respite. The sampler will typically not move beyond the fringe or specific 'refuge point', such as a café.

Taken together, this theorising around the precinct experience raises three key points: firstly, the psychological shift from the experience of space to place as described by Tuan (1977) is arguably a consequence of the dialectical interaction between the physical and social experience of the precinct itself; secondly, that the depth of engagement with a precinct may be hierarchically arranged; and finally, that the type of

experiences sought from and the level of interaction with the precinct may be dependent upon the learned predispositions of visitors for experience seeking behaviour.

In the context of the broader discussion, arguably it is the explorers who actively seek experiences away from the mainstream tourist environs of a city. It is their desire for exploration that motivates them to take the path less trodden. When a city precinct has been fully explored, it is the explorer, who may also be a second or third time visitor to the city, who seeks more meaningful and place engaged experiences.

SYDNEY PRECINCTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

Taken together, the thematic constructs and theorising point to the multi-faceted nature of a city experience where physical structures, activity, human interactions and personal experience engage in a vital interplay which produces an 'experience' for the visitor. Interestingly the visitor interviews in The Rocks and Darling Harbour also highlight how two physically disparate and contrasting precincts can fulfil similar roles or functions for the visitor. For example, both: provide points of contrast or act in the role of a 'refuge' or place of respite from the city; provide opportunities for interaction with locals – they are part of the social fabric; and contribute powerfully to a sense of identity for Sydney.

The development of this 'functional' reasoning led to a second set of studies, the principal purpose of which was to better understand the functions that precincts perform for the visitor to an urban destination. Hence the focal question of the study moved from 'What is my experience in this precinct?' to 'What functions do precincts perform, for

me as a tourist?'. A related supplementary question was to examine, in part, the relative importance of these various functions. These follow-up studies were conducted in both Darling Harbour and The Rocks. However, in an attempt to move beyond the city-based sites, studies were also conducted at two precincts outside of the immediate central city boundaries: Norton Street in Leichhardt, and Parramatta.

Norton Street would be typically be classified as an 'ethnic' precinct. Leichhardt is an inner western suburb situated eight kilometres from the Sydney CBD and is readily accessible to the city via light rail and bus. In the 1920s Italian migrants began to settle in the area, and this increased dramatically in the years following World War II. Hence Leichhardt became substantially influenced by Italian culture, particularly with the appearance of Italian businesses and community clubs along Norton Street. The Italian/Australian newspaper, *La Fiamma*, was also established during this period. Today, the *Italian Forum* shopping and residential complex, the *Casa D'Italia* - headquarters for an Italian cultural and social support agency - cafes, restaurants, cinema and shopping experiences in suburban Norton Street retain a distinctly Italian feeling and flavour.

The second precinct, *Parramatta,* was founded in 1788, the same year as the original British settlement of Sydney. Located 23 kilometres from the CBD, Parramatta is now at the geographic centre of metropolitan Sydney. Although accessible by both train and bus, the most popular entry point for tourists is by the *RiverCat,* a 50 minute ferry ride from Circular Quay along the historic Parramatta River. Famous for its sandstone Georgian architecture, Parramatta features some of the most important historical sites

and buildings in Australia, including Old Government House (Australia's oldest surviving public building), Experiment Farm (the site of Australia's first wheat crop), Elizabeth Farm (the home of John and Elizabeth Macarthur – founders of the Australian wool industry), and the Female Orphan School. While Parramatta presents itself as a unified precinct, in reality these important buildings and sites are widely dispersed throughout the area in 'micro' precincts and are typically difficult for all but the most intrepid tourist to access. Otherwise Parramatta represents a major commercial and retail centre, regarded as Sydney's second CBD serving its extensive western suburbs.

Data were collected through a questionnaire survey administered within the four precincts indicated above. The questionnaire design was based primarily on ideas which unfolded from interviews with precinct managers and previous qualitative work (Hayllar & Griffin 2005, 2007). The same questionnaires were administered in each of the four study precincts, allowing for the direct comparison of the results.

In the course of the study, 690 domestic and international tourists were interviewed at the four sites. Essentially the questionnaire was based on presenting the tourists with a wide range of statements that each reflected a particular function that the precinct could be performing for them. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement, based on a five-point Likert scale. For the purposes of analysis presented here, only 11 (of 30) of the most highly ranked functions are reported. While the overall analysis is still at its preliminary stage, the data show that the highest ranked functions (based on mean scores) group themselves around three functional themes: social functions; atmospheric functions; and facilitating functions.

In the context of this study, *social functions* are concerned with the extent of the visitors' engagement with the precinct. The sense of personal freedom and comfort to move around with minimal social constraint appears important to visitors. This was particularly the case in those precincts where tourists typically gather in larger numbers and where tourist related services appear as part of the natural landscape – The Rocks and Darling Harbour. Visitors to three of the four precincts (Parramatta being the exception) considered the opportunity to sit back and observe the experiences of others – 'people watching'- as important to their experience. However, there appear to be some mixed messages, perhaps sensitivity expressed through the data, as visitors did not want to intrude in the lives of Sydney residents. This was noticeable in the suburban precincts of Parramatta and Leichhardt where their presence as 'outsiders' is more readily identified. This finding presents a paradoxical dilemma for the explorer who wishes to investigate sights off the beaten track but does not wish to stand apart from the everyday experience of the locals.

In the social context, precincts function to provide a 'space' for social engagement somewhat at arm's length from the resident. Seemingly visitors want to experience the sociality and freedom that these spaces provide – to sit back and observe others - while enjoying the autonomy of the visitors' space.

The *atmospheric functions* that emerge from these data reinforce the importance of a precinct's atmosphere as part of the overall visitor experience. All precincts provided a 'relaxing atmosphere' for their visitors. Some earlier theorising around the notion of precincts performing the function of a refuge (Hayllar & Griffin 2005) from the city is

well supported by these data. This was particularly the case in The Rocks, and Darling Harbour but less so in Norton Street and Parramatta. The result is perhaps not too surprising given the more suburban nature of the latter two precincts in contrast to the holiday atmosphere engendered by the more iconic precincts.

Visitors' responses to a related question on the 'vibrancy' of the atmosphere in particular precincts appear to be consistent with our observations and indeed the marketing of the precincts. Darling Harbour ranked the highest on this atmospheric function. The more laid back atmosphere eschewed by both the historic precincts - The Rocks and Parramatta - and the suburban Norton Street are borne out by the data.

Visit *facilitating functions* refer to the specific interventions or planning decisions taken by managers, such as wayfinding or lighting for evening use, which in some way facilitate or shape the experience of visitors. As expected, the more developed precincts - Darling Harbour and The Rocks - were ranked highest in this functional area. A related visit facilitating function that scored consistently across each of the four precincts was their importance as a point of reference to navigate to and from other parts of the city.

While not specifically commented upon in the data, meaningful information on the suburban precincts and their links to adequate public transport is problematic. At the Parramatta ferry wharf, there are no tourist services to facilitate movement between the micro-precincts, nor is adequate wayfinding provided. Thus even though tourists visit Parramatta with intent, the infrastructure needed to facilitate the experience, even for the

most dedicated and adventurous, is conspicuously absent. The data suggest that Parramatta acts more as the end of a ferry excursion up the Parramatta River rather than living up to its potential as an opportunity for exploration into Sydney's history.

Norton Street is less impacted by transport problems. However this small living precinct may be constrained by the depth of experience it can offer to visitors. It takes time to access the site for what might seem quite a limited experiential return. To this end the Norton Street precinct managers likely need to consider how they can project its image through interpretation and maximize its potential.

Experience and Functions – The Sydney Visitor Experience

The majority of tourists to Sydney visit its two principal precincts – The Rocks and Darling Harbour. Here, they have the opportunity to seek 'refuge' from the city, yet at the same time engage with it through its architectural forms and social interactions with locals. In these geographically small areas, tourists form impressions of Sydney as a place. Indeed for many short term visitors, this is Sydney. They give Sydney meaning – one historical, one contemporary. They are places where Sydneysiders predominate and where visitors can observe and engage with anonymity because everyone within these areas is a visitor (save for a small resident population in The Rocks). The transient nature of visitors to these precincts creates an atmosphere which 'feels' comfortable. Visitors can be with others in the overtly social context of these precincts, while at the same time having personal space and opportunities to gather their thoughts through reflection on their own experiences - time *away* from, and time *with* others.

In experiencing these precincts, it is clear that they perform a number of functions for tourists – many of which have been facilitated by design and management considerations or have simply evolved from the existing fabric. The important social functions, identified across all precincts, suggest the need for spaces for both open engagement with others, and spaces for respite. This may be catered for in the public domain, such as the open waterside promenades in Darling Harbour or through the specific commercial uses of space, such as the back street cafés and pubs in The Rocks. The design and use of these spaces, the people flows, and the interactions with the physical structures, help create a distinctive atmosphere in each of the precincts. The facilitating functions, such as places of orientation (obvious landmarks or cultural meeting points) or designated wayfinding mechanisms like maps or directional signage, serve to move or guide visitors through their experience.

On the fringe of the city, Norton Street and Parramatta are geographic 'outliers'. While clearly they perform many of the functions identified across the precincts, they do not perform as strongly relative to the other precincts - Parramatta in particular. Parramatta performs above the mean on only two of the 11 most highly ranked functions identified while Norton Street is more successful, exceeding the mean scores on six of the functions.

Overall, the well known precincts are performing their expected functional roles and generally providing the types of experience valued by tourists. However, it would appear that the suburban venues are not attracting the number of visitors, meeting their

functional needs nor realising their potential to provide opportunities for a deeper engagement with Sydney by particular groups of experience seekers.

In the context of earlier discussions, arguably it is the explorers who might venture to the suburban precincts given their need to seek experience beyond that which is presented to them within the typical tourist frame. However, if the suburban precincts are not meeting the functional requirements and, *ipso facto*, the explorer's need for a particular type of experience, these precincts are not contributing in a meaningful way to the depth of tourist experiences offered by the city – they are off the beaten track and will continue to be so!

SYDNEY TOURISM: THE FUTURE

In this chapter we have argued that the tourists' experience of Sydney is substantially influenced by their interaction with its iconic harbourside attractions. However, in moving beyond the immediacy of this initial experience, the two most visited precincts in Sydney, Darling Harbour and Rocks, provide visitors with the opportunity to better understand the city, albeit in somewhat contrived environments created or managed largely for tourists. Here visitors interact with locals and other tourists, and here they form early and sometimes lasting impressions of Sydney through their physical and social interaction with people and space.

While for many tourists these sites provide the opportunity to explore 'Sydney', for others, their explorations are limited by both time and accessibility. The CBD itself is congested and unexceptional. A ferry trip to Manly or a bus ride to Bondi complements

the city experience of many visitors. (Indeed, both these beachside suburbs have been substantially influenced by backpackers, who have been attracted by the seaside locations and quintessentially Australian experience that these locations are seen to offer.) However, Sydney has the potential to offer far richer and more complex experiences for the visitor, in keeping with its status as a 'world city'. In extrapolating from the findings relating to the fringe precincts, it could be argued that Sydney is currently falling short of realising that potential; the number of visitors to these precincts is relatively small, and the experiences they offer to those who venture beyond the central city are not remarkably rewarding.

The question arises as to whether any of this matters. Regardless of the extent to which tourist currently explore the city, Sydney is still a successful tourist destination in aggregate terms. It is still the most visited destination in Australia, receiving some 7.4 million domestic visitors (Tourism Research Australia 2008b) and 2.7 million international visitors (Tourism Research Australia 2008a) in 2007. It retains its pre-eminence over Melbourne, with 13 per cent more domestic visitors (Tourism Research Australia 2008b) and nearly twice as many international visitors (Tourism Research Australia 2008b). Of some concern for tourism interests in Sydney, however, the gap is narrowing, particularly in relation to domestic tourism. Indeed in 2007 the total expenditure by domestic visitors to Melbourne (A$3.39 billion) was only marginally behind that of Sydney (A$3.45 billion) by virtue of Melbourne visitors' higher average expenditure per night (A$179 compared to Sydney's A$158) (Tourism Research Australia 2008b).

The policy development and marketing of Melbourne as a destination may well be instructive. With no 'world city' pretensions and limited landmark attractions, Melbourne projects itself as a type of metaphorical theatre - the events 'capital' of Australia – and a sophisticated city to be enjoyed and explored. Melbourne embraces the explorer. Its promotional campaigns celebrate difference and complexity and invite the visitor to experience this difference; typically through engagement with thematically organized precincts spread throughout the city. Moreover these campaigns suggest that Melbourne is a place which evokes emotions, particularly romance, and engenders a sense of attachment, with one series of recent advertisements suggesting 'You'll never want to leave'.

In Melbourne, the notions of experience and opportunities for exploration are central to its positioning. By way of contrast, the promotional tagline that 'There's no place in the world like Sydney' (Tourism NSW 2007a) continues to draw on its established attractions as its key marketing message. The predominant message of Sydney's promotion seems to be 'We're Special' (it's about us), whereas Melbourne's suggests 'We'll Make *You* Feel Special' (it's about you). In our view, Sydney's sustained success and maintenance of market share in the face of growing competition may rely on conveying the idea that it offers distinctive and personally enriching experiences beyond the well known sights. Indeed Tourism NSW policy documentation (2006) focusing on 'Sydney Surrounds', supports such a proposition. However, it is unclear whether or not this having an impact on visitation patterns to the areas beyond the central city and harbour.

Within the CBD and its immediate environs, Sydney needs to better facilitate and articulate its rich heritage. One way to deliver on this offer is to adopt a Melbourne type approach, which itself has been modelled on successful international examples, and develop an array of accessible and logically connected precincts throughout the city that, by virtue of their form, activities and atmosphere, possess the qualities that facilitate the experiences that tourists seek. These precincts need to provide depth to accommodate the different visitor types (different experience seekers) and to encourage repeat visitation. They need to enrich the Sydney experience both within and beyond the immediate city - beyond iconicity.

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