

BUCKET LIST EXPERIENCE

ICONIC SYDNEY



By Deborah R. Huso

Just the mention of Australia will likely conjure an image of the Sydney Opera House. Along with the Sydney Harbor Bridge, the distinctively styled performance venue is easily recognizable from the air by travelers descending into Sydney Airport. Both landmarks provide Instagrammable photo opportunities, but don't settle for only pictures. The opera house and the bridge also offer a variety of in-depth experiences, from witnessing world-class live performances to climbing the tallest steel arch bridge on earth (soaring 440 feet from water level to the top).

Sydney Opera House during Vivid Sydney, a festival of light, music and ideas

COURTESY OF VIVID SYDNEY/
TOURISM AUSTRALIA



Boat tours and commuter ferries both offer Instagrammable opportunities in Sydney Harbor.

The House That Sydney Built

When the UNESCO World Heritage Committee added the Sydney Opera House (sydneyoperahouse.com) to its list of critical historical and cultural sites in 2007, committee members noted, "It stands by itself as one of the indisputable masterpieces of human creativity, not only in the 20th century but in the history of humankind."

In 1956, New South Wales Premier Joseph Cahill opened a competition for the design of an arts center that would define his growing nation. Winner Danish architect Jørn Utzon offered an unconventional, expressionistic design of sail-like roofs and walls of glass that overlooked both Sydney Harbor and the Royal Botanic Garden. Construction began in 1959, but due to a variety of complications, it was not completed until 1973.

Today, visitors can compose postcard-perfect photos of the famous structure from a boat tour of Sydney Harbor or from a vantage point on the Harbor Bridge, which has a pedestrian walkway that can be crossed in 15 minutes (sydneyharbourboattours.com).

Center Stage

The opera house offers a range of tours covering everything from the building's drama-laden construction history (The Sydney Opera House Tour) to the inner workings of running a performance (Backstage Tour). Be sure to follow up your guided tour with a concert or show.

Opera is only one of the offerings here. The annual Utzon Music Series, for example, showcases a variety of classical musicians and chamber orchestras from around the globe, while the First Nations program presents music, dance and theater performances from aboriginal cultures worldwide.

And check out the Badu Gili (water light) show (sydneyoperahouse.com/visit-us/BaduGili.html), which runs nightly on the hour from sunset to 9 p.m. The show features the work of new aboriginal artists illuminated across the opera house's sail-like half-domes.

Bridge Connections

The world's largest (but not longest) steel arch bridge carries eight vehicle lanes, two train lines, a bike path and a pedestrian walkway.

While the same Sydney Harbor Boat Tours that offer photogenic views of the opera house will also bring you up to and under the bridge affectionately named "The Coathanger" (because of its arch-based design), Sydney's commuter ferries offer similar—and often less-expensive—experiences. For the best viewing opportunities of the bridge, take the Mosman Bay Ferry from Circular Quay (transportnsw.info/travel-info/ways-to-get-around/ferry#).

If you're feeling a bit more adventurous, a bridge climb is in order. BridgeClimb Sydney (bridgeclimb.com) offers an array of "climbs" that take you well beyond the pedestrian path.



COURTESY OF BRIDGECLIMB SYDNEY

There are a variety of bridge climbs available on Sydney's 'Coathanger.'

The popular Summit tour first takes climbers below the road deck to the bridge's South-East Pylon (on the Sydney Opera House side of the harbor). From there, they climb up four ladders to the start of the upper arch and then continue along the upper arch to the bridge's center for 360-degree views of Sydney Harbor and its surroundings before descending on the Darling Harbor side of the bridge. The climb takes three-and-a-half hours and costs anywhere from \$268 to \$403 in Australian dollars.

If your time and budget are limited, take the Sampler climb up to the catwalks to the quarter-point of the bridge's lower arch on the opera house side. This hour-and-a-half trek costs about \$174 in Australian dollars (for adults).