

AUSTRALIA

Take a free ride in Melbourne

It's easy to be a cheapskate in Melbourne. By **Bruce Clarke.**

Australian Centre for the Moving Images

ACMI showcases the moving image in all its forms — film, television, games, video and digital media. At Federation Square, ACMI has exhibitions, screenings and educational programmes, many of which don't cost a bean. Current free programmes include Memory Grid, an on-demand short film experience presented in your own viewing pod, and the Independent Games Festival, a selection of winners and nominees from the Sundance Festival for Games. Many exhibitions are interactive. Good luck getting the controls from your kids.

■ Federation Square, Flinders St, Melbourne, www.acmi.net.au

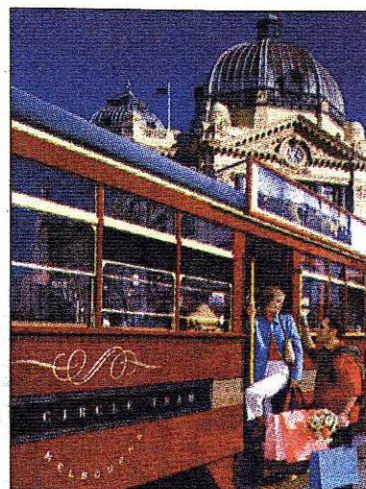
Wunderkammer

"Wunderkammer" is a German word meaning wonder-chamber. It is a museum and a shop, specialising in science and natural history. The collection includes antique botanical prints, anatomical models, specimens preserved in vintage glass canisters, fossils, medical instruments, beetles and butterflies in hand-blown specimen domes. The front window display is constantly updated.

■ 439 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, www.wunderkammer.com.au

Bernard's Magic Shop

A Melbourne institution since 1937, Bernard's is Australia's oldest



Circuit breaker: City Circle trams are generally historic W classes.

magic shop. Kids will love browsing through the magical merchandise, from rubber dog poo and fake vomit to more elaborate card and rope tricks.

My favourite is the packet of fake rattlesnake eggs. My wife denounced this gag as "lame" seconds before launching the eggs into the air in fright.

■ 211 Elizabeth St, Melbourne, www.bernardsmagic.com.au

Royal Arcade

Melbourne's oldest shopping arcade dates back to 1870 and is guarded by two fearsome giants, Gog and Magog, which have been striking the hour since 1892. The arcade has historically hosted shops of an idiosyncratic nature,

The fireballs are programmed by computer, and dance to intricate patterns.

and currently has tarot readers, a games shop, a magic shop and the wonderful Babushka, home of authentic Russian dolls.

If you have a sweet tooth, you'll love the Sugar Melbourne Candy Kitchen, where boiled sweets are handmade in front of you.

■ 325 Bourke St Mall, Melbourne, www.royalarcade.com.au

Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden

In the Royal Botanic Gardens, this

garden has tunnels, climbing rocks, forests and watercourses for children to explore. Arbours, sculptures, topiary, cubby houses and mazes can all be built.

The kitchen garden has interesting, unusual and common fruits, vegetables and herbs. Children can propagate plants in the potting shed and plant in the kitchen garden with help from horticultural staff. Take along cloths to wipe off the dirt.

■ Royal Botanic Gardens Observatory Precinct, Birdwood Ave, South Yarra

Fireballs at Crown Casino

My favourite free Melbourne activity is the Gas Brigade display, which takes place nightly on the promenade in front of Crown Casino. Times are seasonal, but gener-



What's in store: Royal Arcade has an idiosyncratic collection of shops.



Friendly fire: The Gas Brigade display takes place every night on the promenade in front of Crown Casino.

commuters as they rush past to catch a train.

■ Campbell Arcade, Flinders Street Station subway, Degraives St entrance

State Library of Victoria

The library is in Swanston St, and is a fabulous place to visit on a rainy day. The La Trobe Reading Room (Dome) is the library's most spectacular feature. Opened in 1913, the room was refurbished in 2003, and its highlight is a magnificent eight-sided dome that floods the room with light. The room houses the library's Australiana collection, which includes Australian literature, geography, biographies and history. One current exhibition showcases rare, beautiful and historically significant books from the library's collections, including a Shakespeare Second Folio, classic children's books and 1950s pulp crime fiction.

■ 328 Swanston St, Melbourne, www.slv.vic.gov.au

City Circle Tram

Take a free ride on one of Melbourne's famous trams to get your bearings and soak up the atmosphere. Get on at any of the marked stops on Flinders, Spencer, La Trobe or Spring streets and Harbour Esplanade.

Trams have been a feature of Melbourne for more than 100 years — the one you catch will probably be a historic W Class tram, built between 1936 and 1956.

ally run on the hour from dark till about midnight. Massive fireballs are released from the top of eight towers, each 10 metres high and spaced 50m apart. The fireballs, the largest created in the world, are programmed by computer, and dance to intricate patterns. The flames are up to 7m in diameter, and the warmth can be felt on the ground. Watch out for the brave birds, which congregate on the top of each tower and leave their escape to the last possible moment.

■ Whiteman St, Southbank, www.crowncasino.com.au

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

ACCA is in a distinctive metallic

brown building that bears an uncanny resemblance to a sandcrawler from *Star Wars*. The centre presents changing seasons of Australian and international exhibitions, events and public programmes.

The centre is closed between exhibitions, so check the website before visiting. Keep an eye out for the infamous sculpture *Vault*.

■ 111 Sturt St, Southbank, www.accaonline.org.au

Platform 2

This exhibition space in the bowels of Melbourne's main suburban railway station is home to the work of emerging artists and designers, and is designed to inspire and challenge