

# A tale of green cities

The twinning of towns and cities creates a support network across geographical borders. It has led to numerous enterprises and mutually-beneficial agreements which, in recent times, have also included the sharing of eco-friendly ideas. We look at two sets of twin cities and their respective green initiatives.

TEXT LUCIANO DI GREGORIO

## Melbourne, Australia and Osaka, Japan

- Distance: 8,126km
- Twinned in April 1978; Osaka was Melbourne's first sister city
- Purpose: To foster 'a people-to-people relationship with the aim of developing mutual friendships and a lasting and understanding relationship'
- Both are important port cities with strong political and socio-cultural links to the other
- Both are considered the food capital of their respective countries, as well as hubs of culture and design

## OSAKA

### Eco-entertainment

Osaka is a thriving urban city and its growth has meant its residents have limited access to green spaces. Congestion, traffic jams and space restrictions have forced architects to rely on creative genius when designing new buildings and public spaces. One such project is **Namba Parks**, a retail and office compound of some 130,000sqm, conceived by designers to inject much-needed oxygen into the city. The compound was built on the site of a former baseball stadium and

comprises eight floors of lush terraced gardens, a sloping park, cliffs, ponds and waterfalls. In this oasis amidst the concrete jungle, you will find cinemas, the best retail outlets and a variety of world-class restaurants.

### Osaka green

Given the concrete nature of the city, officials have placed greater importance on developing green lungs in and around it. Parks have been spruced up and more trees have been planted, and the benefits have been enjoyed by both locals and tourists. Parks and gardens





(Facing page) Lush greens surround the Osaka Castle; (this page clockwise from left) the Council of the City of Melbourne building was conceived for a holistic green environment; Port Phillip Bay; *okonomiyaki* is one of Osaka's many specialties – like its twin, Japan's third largest city is known as a culinary capital

include Nagai Park, Osaka Castle Park, Sankaku Park and Tennoji Park. And there's one more in the making – **Osaka Station City**, a large retail and office complex connected to one of the city's main stations, is set to receive a green roof that will be home to a farm with vegetable patches and rice paddies. It is due to be completed in spring.

### A port to behold

With a serious decline in water quality in and around the city of Osaka, officials have adopted a variety of initiatives to allow for sustainable growth and development at the **Port of Osaka**. Recognising the need for citizens to

have access to and enjoy the waterside meant rethinking its aesthetic value. The construction of a swimming resort, fishing park, natural bird sanctuary and a yacht harbour have made the area more visitor-friendly. These improvements do not interfere with the practical functions of an international trade port that rivals Port Melbourne, and were undertaken alongside policy changes relating to waste disposal and pollution.

### MELBOURNE

#### Carbon-reduced council

Melbourne has garnered a reputation on the world stage for its style and design influences. Indeed, the city is home to architecturally and environmentally ground-breaking buildings, and the **Council of the City of Melbourne** has led much of the change. The governing body was amongst the first of 16 corporate bodies to sign up for a programme which commits participants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by just under 40%.

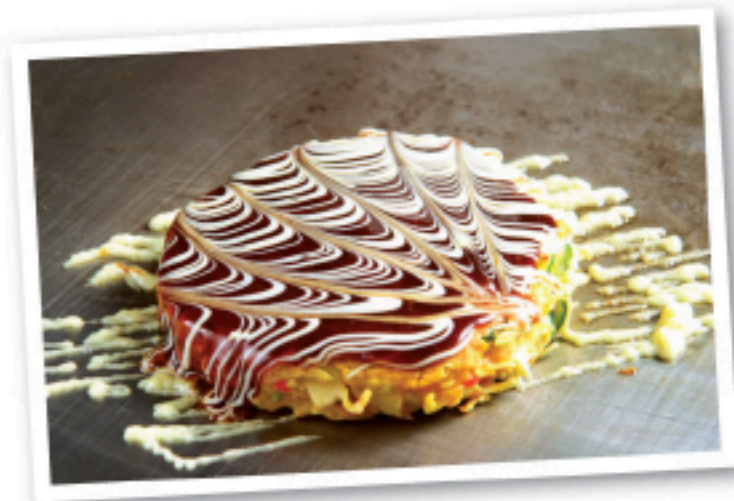
In 2006, work was finished on the iconic City of Melbourne Council House building. The unique building, conceived



and developed to foster a holistic green work environment for employees, is self-sustainable and designed to conserve energy and water. Furthermore, its quirky architecture constantly turns the heads of locals and tourists alike.

#### Penguins at the port

The stunning **Port Phillip Bay** plays backdrop to the ever-growing metropolitan area of Melbourne, and in order to protect wildlife and environmental interests, a not-for-profit community organisation has been at the forefront of sustainable development in the city. Of particular interest is the EcoCentre's cultivation of the famous St Kilda penguins. A colony of *eudyptula minor*, the smallest of the penguin family, has established itself in and around the St Kilda beach area – an unusual occurrence given the ▶



## ▪ City break

large number of locals and tourists that make use of the beach and pier. A larger colony of around 20,000 penguins live in the sand hills of Phillip Island, some 120km south of Melbourne.

### A wildlife free-for-all

Nowhere in Australia is the love for flora and fauna more pronounced than around the Melbourne metro area. In order for fauna to live in its natural habitat, a number of free-range zoos like the **Werribee Zoo** and **Healesville Sanctuary**, have opened their doors. Not only do these establishments set the bar when it comes to protecting the natural habitats of the animals they house, but visitors also have the pleasure of seeing the animals roam freely in protected areas.

### Los Angeles, USA & Dubai, UAE

- Distance: 13,401km
- Twinned in April 2004; Los Angeles (LA) is one of Dubai's 32 sister cities
- Purpose: To promote cross-cultural relations and create cultural dialogue
  - Both aim to create strong economic links to each other
  - Both cities hope to foster a coastal culture unmatched by other cities in either country
  - Both are design hubs and keen to promote sustainable development



### LOS ANGELES

#### A million and counting

It is a universally-known fact that deserts do not have a plethora of trees. LA, founded on the parched landscape of a south Californian desert, has kick-started the popular **Million Trees** programme in order to see the city become as green and sustainable as possible. As of January 2011, participants are provided with up to seven free trees and any further trees are heavily discounted. All money received is put back into the programme.

### Strut the green

Those who claim that decadent fashion and sustainability cannot co-exist have not met members of LA's **Green Youth Movement**. The pioneering youngsters have brought the environment onto the catwalk through the well-received Green Initiative Humanitarian Fashion Show, which takes place during Los Angeles Fashion Week. The event aims to promote sustainability in fashion and features a variety of revolutionary and creative designers such as Jonano and Emily Factor. All designers involved with the event are known for their responsible use of sustainable materials.

### Green Transport

Hiring a car in Los Angeles is a must if you want to get around. However, driving is a veritable headache as the traffic is among the worst in the world and putting another car on the road just adds to the city's pollution woes. **Naturalismo** is a genius eco ▶

(Facing page) LA actually sits on a south Californian desert but its Million Trees programme has added much-needed green lungs to the city, including at its famous shopping strip, Rodeo Drive; (this page) a model on the runway during the Green Initiative Humanitarian Fashion Show 2008



## ▪ City break



(Top) Dubai is emulating its twin in embracing a Million Trees Campaign; (bottom) an indoor ski slope at DubaiLand

travel initiative which provides green transport solutions throughout the city. And a pleasant surprise awaits as luxury transport is the order of the day. With ecological taxis and low emission vehicles, visitors and locals will be able to choose the green machine of their dreams.

### DUBAI

#### Another million

The sharing of ideas and resources is one of the many reasons why cities are twinned, and Dubai is taking a leaf out of LA's environmentally friendly book. The **Million Trees Campaign** has been well-received in Dubai. It aims to convert large desert cityscapes into lush gardens and is executed under the banner of the UNEP's Billion Trees programme, which has already seen more than 1.5 million trees planted throughout the UAE.

#### Eco accommodation


In a city that has long been dubbed a runaway construction site, it's a welcome relief that accommodation providers are

embracing the eco trend. One such establishment is the **Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa (www.al-maha.com)**. Not only does Al Maha provide excellent luxury accommodation at considerable value, but it is also leading the way in sustainable desert tourism. The resort is giving back to the local area and making sure that visitors travel responsibly. The establishment has been involved in large-scale rehabilitation of surrounding habitats, including the reintroduction of various native trees and shrubbery.

#### DubaiLand

Dubai Zoo was heavily criticised for the cramped conditions its animals lived in, so it decided to up and move the much-loved attraction to DubaiLand,

a variation of the famed Disneyland. The eco-friendly new home certainly provides extra roaming room for the animals – the original five acres of zoo space has expanded to a whopping 198 acres in order to allow for more sustainable living conditions for its animals. 🌱

 Malaysia Airlines flies nonstop from Kuala Lumpur (KUL) to Melbourne (MEL), Osaka (KIX), Los Angeles (LAX) and Dubai (DXB)

