

JETSTAR

January 2008

Open Season

Take a whirl around centre court for the nation's biggest tennis tournament – the Australian Open

WORDS CARLA CARUSO

Scorching hot weather, zinc-stripped noses... and the Australian Tennis Open. The tournament is as synonymous with the Aussie summer as eating fish and chips at the beach, and throwing the leftovers to the seagulls.

"Where the world comes to play" is the tagline of the 2008 championships and Melbourne Park will certainly be centre court – and centre of the world – on 14–27 January. No less than 500 of the globe's top players will descend upon Victoria's capital for the first of four annual Grand Slam tennis tournaments, with the largest prize-pool to date up for grabs – AU\$20.6 million. (The men's and women's singles winners will each pocket a cool AU\$1.37 million.)

Once again, the crème de la crème will lob into Melbourne for the event, including defending singles champions, Switzerland's Roger Federer, who has been ranked men's world number one for a record-breaking three years, and America's flamboyant Serena Williams, who is women's world number seven, just above her sister, Venus.



Samantha Stosur, Alicia Molik and Roger Federer will all be swinging into Melbourne for the first tennis tournament of 2008

The rest of the world's highest ranked players will also meet on centre court, including Belgian Justine Henin, who didn't attend last year's Open but has finished the year ranked women's world number one, and Cypriot Marcos Baghdatis, ranked men's world number 16 – a virtual unknown outside the game before he was a runner-up to Federer at the Aussie Open in 2006.

A crowd attendance of more than 540,000 is expected at the tournament, with another 1.9 billion set to watch from the comfort of their lounge rooms worldwide. The two main courts, Rod Laver Arena and Vodafone Arena (Melbourne Park, Batman Ave, Melbourne, tel: +61 (0) 9286 1600), which have retractable roofs in case of wet weather, will be lives of activity.

This year, centre court is sporting a new look – a blue, plexiglass, acrylic surface, replacing the former rubberised Rebound Ace. The eye-catching azure hue has been dubbed "Australian Open True Blue". The new surface marks the most radical change to the tournament since it moved from the grass courts at Kooyong in Melbourne's inner southeast to hardcourt Melbourne Park two decades ago.

It's all a long way from when the first tournament of its type was held in 1905 – it was then known as the Australasian Championships and was held at the Warehouseman's Cricket Ground in St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Due to Australia's geographic remoteness, very few foreign players entered the competition in the beginning – understandably so, as it took European players 45 days to take the trip by ship in the 1920s. It wasn't until 1968 that the "Open era" began.

It was American Andre Agassi who propelled the tournament into the stratosphere, when he entered the comp' for the first time in 1995 (by then, the contest had moved to Melbourne Park, next to the Melbourne Cricket Ground). Since then, no great players have missed the tournament – unless, of course, due to injury or suspension.

Queensland-born competitor Samantha Stosur, ranked women's world number 47, certainly wouldn't miss the event for the world. "I don't think any other event has the type of atmosphere the Aussie Open has," Stosur enthuses. "The crowds get so into it and it makes for a real carnival atmosphere."

Stosur was an avid Australian Open fan even as a young girl. "When I was eight years old, my parents took my brothers and I to the women's final of the Aussie Open. It was between Steffi Graf and Monica Seles, my two favourite players. I remember I was dressed in my Steffi tennis outfit and it was just the best day!"

Spectators can take Stosur's lead in soaking up the carnival atmosphere. Aside from the tennis, there's plenty of activities on-site, including pamper sessions at Garnier World interactive games and player autographs at FanFest, shopping at the Australian Open Shop and bands in Garden Square. Off-site, matches will also be broadcast on a giant screen over four key days at "live site" Federation Square (near Flinders and Swanston sts, Melbourne, tel: +61 (0) 9655 1900).

Visitors will also probably want to take in Melbourne's stylish surroundings while in town, with some shopping on Chapel Street, South Yarra, cakes and coffee in St Kilda, and Italian dining on Lygon Street, Carlton.

Adelaide-born competitor Alicia Molik, who will be competing in both the singles and doubles at the Open, can vouch for the local dining experience. "I always go for a pre-match short black. Melbourne has the best coffee – we're spoilt!"

Molik, who is ranked women's world number 58, says: "The location is second to none – you can be watching a match at Rod Laver, jump on a tram and be in a great restaurant either in the city or in South Yarra within 15 minutes, or 20 if you decide that St Kilda is your spot."

Finally, spectators should be prepared for the weather, as the Aussie Open is known for its notoriously hot days – sunscreen, hat and water bottle are essential. The most important thing, though? To have fun.

After all, how often does the world come to play on your doorstep?



WIN A AU\$100 FLIGHT VOUCHER WITH OUR READER SURVEY!

WELCOME TO JETSTAR MAGAZINE. LOG IN OR SIGN UP

Jetstar BEST LOW COST AIRLINE ASIA PACIFIC 2008

WIN A FAMILY TRIP TO AUSTRALIA 2008

SPONSOR

What Makes
Hairfree
the Number 1
choice for
PERMANENT HAIR REDUCTION?
Click here to find out

RELATED

Twin Delights

As Melbourne and Osaka celebrate the 30th anniversary of their sister-city relationship, we size up some attractions in these two towns which, with their mutual love for food, nightlife, fashion and art, have more in common than you'd imagine

[Go to article >>](#)

Cool Cult Clothing

Stand out from the crowd in unique designs found in these secret Melbourne shopping spots

[Go to article >>](#)

Shopping Heaven

Your bags will be helping after visiting these super shopping cities

[Go to article >>](#)

Drink It Up

We hit the streets of Melbourne to uncover some of the city's best drinking holes, with a little help from TV host Andrew G

[Go to article >>](#)

The Hot Sounds Of Summer

We beat the drum for the most sizzling outdoor music festivals

[Go to article >>](#)

