

Different strokes *Sydney*

Preface

Some favour jogging, others hit the gym – but in Sydney the preference is for getting in among the waves when it comes to keeping fit. Saltwater pools can be found all along the coast, or there's the option of jumping straight into the Tasman Sea; in either case it's a way of life that starts almost as soon as Sydneysiders emerge from the womb.

In Sydney, exercise invariably involves water, to the point that locals learn to swim before they learn to walk. Any given morning, swimming clubs meet to train at beaches and the five municipal pools that the City of Sydney manages. Perched on the southern headland of the beach, Bondi Icebergs takes its name from the all-weather swimmers who brave the sea pool's seasonally icy water all year round. Pregnant women, hobbling retirees, business tycoons and rugby league players in training crawl up and down the 50-metre pool.

At Boy Charlton, an Olympic heated saltwater pool perched between Sydney's botanic gardens and the harbour, swimmers arrive early for squad training. Across the water lies the little-known Maccallum Pool at Cremorne Point, where swimmers sunbathe on the deck after finishing their laps.

On the city's north shore at Balmoral Beach, just 15 minutes from the Central Business District, locals chat pre-dip on the promenade. Some are members of the Balmoral Swimmers, the local club founded in 1946. Others only swim seasonally between October and April, when the water temperature rises above 18C. Further along the coast at Manly, "nippers" (Sydney's junior surf lifesavers) swim out beyond the breaks to an ocean buoy, undertaking rescue drills.

On any given day at Bondi Beach, Murray Cox can be seen donning his goggles. A veteran ocean swimmer, Cox has completed ocean swims from Palm Beach at the city's most northern tip to its southern beaches; some 50km of coastline. He occasionally trains in one of Sydney's major pools, which includes the AU\$40m Ian Thorpe Aquatic centre, named after Australia's top freestyle swimmer.

Regardless of the weather, Sydneysiders are always ready for a dip. — (M)

