VENUES

October 2026

MELBOURNE
INTERNATIONAL
COMEDY
FESTIVAL

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INTRODUCTION

Melbourne has a range of venues suitable for Festival shows. From purpose-built theatres to pubs and clubs, pop-up venues, galleries, restaurants, cafes, and live music venues, we have a rich performing arts landscape. Your ideal venue will depend on your performance type, budget, location, target audience and other factors.

The Festival maintains a database of potential independent venues, updated each year (see here). The Festival also builds, manages and programs a range of Festival Managed Venues (FMV's). It's great if you have a venue in mind, but don't limit your choices. It's better to apply for a range of venues, in case you don't get your first choice.

Many venues have a competitive application process, so contact them early in your planning.

A BIT MORE ABOUT US

The Melbourne International Comedy Festival has three major roles during the delivery of the Festival:

1. Supporting artists, presenters and venues. We provide opportunities, support and advice to create the best possible environment within which participants can present their shows and make the most of their Festival experience;
2. Producing and presenting a large, inclusive program of contemporary comedy for Australian audiences. This includes international artists, special events, free outdoor shows, family programming and professional development opportunities to support artform growth in Australia and overseas.
3. Building, staffing and operating a large range of temporary (pop-up) venues to supplement Melbourne's permanent venues and help house the huge Festival program.

INDEPENDENT VENUES

A database of potential venues (click here) is available to artists and producers interested in registering a Festival show. Individual show producers must contact venues directly.

We've created a venue checklist here. To get started:

1. Make a list of potential venues, considering location, capacity and suitability.
2. Call or email each venue to check their availability. Arrange a visit if possible, to check it is suitable.
3. Once you have confirmed a venue, we strongly recommend getting a hire agreement in place. See our Venue Agreeement template here. The agreement is between the producer (or artist) and the venue, NOT the Melbourne Comedy Festival.
4. Keep in regular contact with your venue and provide them with marketing materials.

Tip – speak to other performers for venue recommendations. Look through street press, social media and arts listings for venues hosting open mic or live performances. Look at Program Guides on our website for venues with similar shows.

As well as location, capacity, accessibility and availability, consider the following when deciding on a venue:

Venue Infrastructure: What is included in your venue rental and what costs extra? Does the venue provide staff, technical equipment, staging, dressing rooms, box office, toilets and storage? Is there a plan for accessibility, noise bleed between rooms, and emergency evacuation?

Venue Support: What arrangements are in place for marketing support, front of house staff, box office staff, bar staff, merchandise sales, parking, signage, and displaying posters?

Ticketing: The Festival's ticketing service (Red61) is the preferred ticketing platform for all shows and should be used wherever possible. This will allow easy reporting, door lists, customer support and customer sales (more information can be found here). The only exception is where a venue has an existing exclusive agreement with another ticketing provider. In these cases, tickets can be accessed via an external link from the Festival website. While use of the Festival's ticketing system is not yet mandatory, it's expected to become standard in future years.

Warnings: If your show has nudity, use of haze, strobe lighting, coarse language, adult themes etc., where and how will audiences be warned?

Licensing: Do they have a Liquor Licence and are they 18+ only? Do they have an APRA Licence for music? Both the venue and artist must have Public Liability insurance to participate in the Festival.

Code of Conduct: The Festival is committed to providing a safe, respectful, inclusive and flexible workplace environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and bullying. We do not tolerate or condone any form of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment or bullying in any of our workplaces including the venues we build and operate. All participating venues should be safe for performers, staff and audiences. If you would like to discuss implementing a similar code with your venue, we can provide templates.

FESTIVAL MANAGED VENUES

Festival Managed Venues (FMVs) are programmed by the Melbourne Comedy Festival, through a competitive EOI process. As with independent venues, consider whether a FMV is suitable for your show.

All FMVs are equipped with sound, lighting, staging, seating, front of house and box office staff and are run with OH&S and public safety considerations as a priority. The number of technical staff required/included depends on the venue.

All Shows in FMVs are sold through the Festival's ticketing provider Red61, for a fee. Ticket prices are determined by you, but the Festival ensures they are appropriate.

In an FMV you are still responsible for the creative and financial aspects of your show as well as marketing and publicity.

See the Performers page on our website for deadlines and more info. Sign up to the Participant Newsletters for announcements and contact registration@comedyfestival.com.au with any questions.

Each year the Festival Managed Venues program includes around 150 shows in 30+ spaces of varying sizes.

Past venues have included:

- Melbourne Town Hall
- Arts Centre Melbourne
- ACMI
- Chinese Museum
- Trades Hall
- The Victoria Hotel
- The Westin Melbourne
- Max Watt's
- Swiss Club
- fortyfivedownstairs
- Melbourne Museum