The big topic of outdoor conversation this summer in Sydney has been the turd factor—the sudden belated publicity of the sewage levels off Sydney’s beaches. It’s been a running story in the newspapers for months, eclipsing Soviet earthquakes and Boeing crashes. In response, so the papers tell us, people are staying away from Sydney’s beaches in droves. Though it has to be said this isn’t obvious to the naked (or sunglassed) eye.

Well, whether they are or whether they’re not, what is there to do on a Sydney beach outing other than swim? Eat, of course. And the premier location for the sunned but not surfed gastronome is Bondi, with its pleasant beachfront walk and cosmopolitan eateries. Taking a quick stroll down from the hill at South Bondi (where the trams used to run) takes you past the seriously yuppified Lamrock Cafe, with its elegant glass front and quite exorbitant prices. Pass by the equally pricey (but not so pretty) Wet Bar and you come to Gabbie’s, a cafe with a name for good healthy food. Have a coffee there, then drop by a few doors later at the Bondi Gelataria, where Sydney’s best cap-pucinos and fine wholemeal foccaccias can be followed down by some excellent gelato. Then, if you can make it past the fresh seafood shops without stopping, there’s the Hungarian Gelato Bar with its dramatic cakes (and again, alas, prices), or, around the corner, The Kushi Bar And when the sun sinks slowly over Bondi, you may wish to try some of the many restaurants within easy walk of the beach. For cheap eats the Bondi Trattoria on Wairoa Ave, is inexpensive and pleasant. And, halfway up the hill back to the station, there’s The Nosherie serving inexpensive vegetarian dishes with an Italian influence.

But while you’re there, a quick dip may still be in order. David Burchell

One of the cruel jokes about living in Melbourne is the summer. December and January are notoriously fickle months. You’re just as likely to spend Christmas day huddling around the fireplace as you are to swell. This summer has been pretty typical—lots of coolish days interspersed with the odd scorcher. And, of course, now that the summer holidays have officially ended, the weather is warming up nicely.

So what to do on those precious lovely days? Lots of Melburnians not fortunate enough to live in bayside St Kilda do the next best thing—visit for the day. The trams and light rail are jammed with holiday makers armed with beach bags and suntan lotion.

St Kilda beach is usually the first stop. While it doesn’t rival Bondi, it sure beats being holed up in Brunswick on a hot day. The sand is very clean these days thanks to a marvellous machine purchased by the council and the water is clean enough for schools of baby fish to lurk in the shallows (though apparently that’s not enough to indicate the absence of E—coli).

After a stretch at the beach, St Kilda offers scores of delights for both the tourist and locals—the old favourite Luna Park with its wonderful clown’s mouth entrance and scenic railway; the best continental cake shops in Australia in Acland Street; the mixture of kitsch and art at the Sunday markets on the Upper Esplanade; bike rides along the foreshore; picnics in Catani Gardens and Blessington Street Botanical Gardens; Zydeco music at the Esplanade Hotel, and many, many eating places.

A great Sunday haunt is the Stoke House set on the St Kilda foreshore. As the sun goes down, you sit on the verandah munching on decadent cakes and strudels (including a sugarless variety favoured by hypoglacaemics) or a plate of hummus and pita bread. Some good news is that the Stoke House now opens on weekdays, not just Sundays.

Further along the foreshore is Jean Jacques, a very ritzy French restaurant situated in what used to be the Surf Life Saving Club. Most ordinary people could never afford to eat there but if you’re prepared to swallow your politics you can partake of their excellent take-away fish in beer batter and French fries and join the hot polloi on the grass. Better still trot up Fitzroy Street and get some of Cleopatra’s famous take-away Lebanese food or visit Eat, a newish sidewalk cafe which serves fabulous breakfasts (including flapjacks with maple syrup), and light meals of curries, hamburgers and salads plus fresh fruit and vegetable juices.

And don’t forget to pay a visit to the very moving Living With AIDS Art Exhibition at Linden and take some kids to see Theatrework’s latest play, Fabulous Tales from the Horses’ Mouth, which is set in the Blessington Street Gardens. The only rub is—after a day in St Kilda you won’t want to go back to the suburbs. Carmel Shute