Eating out in Melbourne's most interesting and cosmopolitan bayside suburb, St Kilda, is an increasingly costly business. Like other inner-suburban communities, St Kilda is being gentrified. Rents are soaring, driving out many of the original low-income residents. As the trendy move in, many of the more modest cafes and restaurants are closing and being replaced by ritzy establishments like Caffe Maximus and Di Stasio's.

Luckily for residents of more modest means, as well as the tourists who flock (like seagulls?) to St Kilda at night and on weekends, some good eating places survive. Two of the most popular places for the younger set to eat, where to buy it...

The food tends towards snacks and light meals, — soups, pasta, bratwurst, spiders, coffee, teas... My favourites are the tangy tomato and basil soup and the chicken and leek pie. The service is a bit slow, but that doesn't seem to worry most of the clientele, who are happy to suck on their cappuccinos, chat to friends, peruse the cafe's newspapers and magazines for hours on end, or just watch the world go by. A couple of years ago the Galleon struggled for its existence above a shop in Acland St. In its new location it thrives, and gives heart that the St Kilda social scene can never be dominated by snooty joints like Cafe Maximus...

Carmel Shute

January is festival time in sweltering Sydney, with that curious mixture of avant-garde dance and martial band music which is the Festival of Sydney. Highlights for the impecunious, as usual, are the Opera and Symphonic in the Park (on Sat 14 and 21 Jan respectively, in the Domain at 8pm). Entrance, is, of course, for nix. This year's opera is Puccini's sensual and exciting Tosca, described floridly by the Festival promoters as 'a gripping tale of murder and intrigue amid the splendours of nineteenth century Rome'. The 'Symphony' night, as is also customary, is a more bitty affair, with populist jabs via Gershwin's An American in Paris and Saint-Saen's Carnival of the Animals, among others, and the pyrotechnic extravagance of the 1812 Overture in finale. The Domain won't have been so crowded since the NSW government drew 100,000 with its Education Cuts Fiasco in one Act, last August...

Among the dramatic offerings of the festival (none, alas, free) are Montreal-based contemporary dance troupe La La La Human Steps, Knuckledusters: The Jewels of Edith Sitwell by Sydney actor Kerry Walter, and David Williamson's latest, Top Silk. For more (recorded) info, ring 00-555-0552, any time.

David Burchell

Prahran market could provide one of the few areas of respite this summer for Melbourne followers of Australia's cricketing Eleven. As attendances at Test matches fall in rough proportion to the declining average of Australia's batsmen, resolve Melbourne supporters seem to deserve both the sustenance and diversion the market offers. Before trundling off to the MCG on Saturday mornings to lend vocal support for the locals, the voice as indeed the stomach could be fortified with a strong Greek coffee, a spanakopita and then perhaps a pastry or two. Should you expect the Test to last into the afternoon (and only the most unpatriotic would not) then an ample picnic can be prepared from any one of the numerous Greek delicatessens.

However the reality of the West Indies superiority is never more than a quick tram ride down Chapel Street, that is, unless you decide to opt for that side of Australian cricket which is succeeding internationally. In that case a quick nip across town to Thornbury, where some of Australia's womens cricket Eleven are playing, is more the order of the day.

Peter McNiece