



THE MELBOURNE RENTER'S GUIDE

For Deciding to Rent or Buy

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Abstract

Deciding whether to rent or buy a house in Melbourne can be perplexing. The real estate landscape is dynamic, and various factors influence this critical choice. Explore our guide for a concise breakdown of key considerations, helping you navigate the complexities and make an informed decision tailored to your unique circumstances in the Melbourne housing market.

1. Introduction

If you're grappling with the decision to rent or buy a house in Melbourne, this PDF guide could be your solution. Packed with valuable insights and considerations, it provides clarity to simplify your decision-making process. Explore this resource to make an informed choice tailored to your housing needs in the vibrant city of Melbourne.

2. Is It Better to Rent or Buy a House? How to Know Which Is Best for You

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to where you live and how you pay for it.

There are a number of major life choices that often feel predetermined—even though they are, in fact, choices. Take the common trajectory of getting married, buying a house, and having kids. While the norms around marriage and kids have long been shifting, the pressure to buy a house can still be pretty strong.

However, like every other major life choice, the decision to rent vs. buy property deserves careful consideration. So we asked personal finance experts to help us navigate the often intimidating process. Keep reading for everything you need to consider and all the tough but necessary questions to ask when deciding between being a homeowner or a renter.

Focus on What You Want

You may have heard the common warnings that renting is wasting money, or that owning a home is the only way to build wealth. However, these arguments are conditional, and it's important to cut through the noise to determine what you value most in your life. If you're considering whether to rent or buy your next home, Marsha Barnes, a certified financial social worker, recommends getting a notepad and writing down some big questions. Do I want to move states in the near future? Do I plan on extending my family? Do I want to work remotely or in person?

"Some of these may not be answers that you have readily available, but it's definitely important for us to consider these little soundbites or voices that we hear [about renting versus buying] in the context of what this means for our lifestyle as individuals," Barnes says.

In other words, ignore what others say you "should" be doing and focus on what you want. "There is no one-size-fits-all approach to where you live and how you pay for it," says Andy Taylor, vice president and general manager of Home & New Ventures at Credit Karma.



Consider Your Life Situation

Many financial experts challenge the blanket statement that renting is a waste of money. "If [renting] provides you with a roof over your head and a place to live, all of us have to have that," says Barnes. "So it's definitely not a waste of money." Taylor agrees, saying, "It all comes down to what you can afford and where you're at in your life."

For someone who's still saving for a down payment, or who'd rather let a landlord manage the upkeep of the property, renting is a great option. "Or maybe you're exploring a new city or trying out how a new neighborhood feels," Taylor says. Sometimes, the flexibility that renting affords you is more than enough to make up for what you're paying in monthly costs, he explains.

Crunch Some Numbers

If your goal is to take the most cost-effective route, it's important to compare all the numbers involved. In some cases, purchasing a home can save you money on your monthly expenses. "You may find that what you'll pay on a monthly mortgage is less than what you'd pay in rent for a comparably priced space, even as you're building equity," Taylor says.

However, that widely circulated argument that renting is throwing away money can also be applied to certain situations of homeownership. The return in the stock market on investment might be averaging at about 10% year over year, says financial expert Shang, host of the Money Confidential podcast. And the average annual growth in home prices might be 4% a year.

"If I'm talking to an average person who's considering putting money into the stock market versus trying to build equity slowly into a home, I just look at those two numbers, and I say that doesn't match up," Shang says. "You're actually throwing away more money by buying that house."

Determine Your Readiness to Own a Home

The vision of having your very own home can be a beautiful thing—but that vision doesn't often include all the upkeep and expenses that come with it. "Owning a home comes with more than just the sticker price—things like property taxes, maintenance, and utilities add up," Taylor says. If you're not ready to be (or interested in being) solely responsible for all the upkeep of your home, then continuing to rent may be a better option for you.

However, Taylor says, "there is something truly special about your own patch of dirt, being able to paint the walls or install a dog door, that has its own appeal." If you're ready to take on all the less-glamorous aspects that come with this dream, it might be time to think seriously about buying a home.

Assess Your Financial Standing

Once you've decided you're ready to own a home, there are several steps to take. "Getting your finances in order should always be the first step in your home-buying journey, and it's never too early to start," Taylor says.

Taylor recommends that you assess your financial standing: Are you secure in your job? Do you feel confident you're in a position to continue earning a steady income? How's your credit? Are you underwater on high-interest debt?

While the answers to these questions won't determine a definite answer to whether you're ready to buy a home, they can provide a map for what you need to do to become more financially ready. Barnes also suggests calling in help from an expert like a mortgage lender, because they can provide you with a checklist and help you create a plan.

Take Your Location Into Account

Sometimes, you might be financially ready to own a home—just not in the place you're currently living. For example, you may be more than able to afford a home in a state like Michigan, but the same (or less) amount of real estate could cost you twice as much in a city like Melbourne. Conversely, if you're living in an area where the homes are out of your price range, you'll have to consider whether the dream of owning a home is worth moving to a more affordable area, or if it's more important to stay where you are and continue renting.

Explore Renting and Buying

Sometimes, you don't have to pick just one option. If you're financially ready to buy a home somewhere but aren't ready to give up your renter lifestyle in a more expensive city, consider buying a property elsewhere and continuing to rent where you are. You can also invest in a home to rent it out, creating another income stream for yourself and building equity in a property, while also renting your own home.

To Shang, buying a property to rent it out can offer a much better return on investment than simply buying a home to live in. "If you pull back, you look at the investing portfolios of people in much higher net worth stratospheres, the bulk of their net worth does not sit in homes that they live in, but it can be in real estate that they rent out," she says on the podcast. "And that's a key difference for me. I've come to learn that a home is an investment if I'm a landlord, but if it's a home that I live in, there are so many costs on top."

Determine Which Choice Might Set You Up for Future Success

One of the most common arguments for homeownership is the opportunity to build equity with your home. However, owning a home doesn't always offer the best return on your money, so it's important to be smart about your choices—not just follow the most popular trajectory.

"There's so much emphasis on [the ideas that] you're not an adult until you're independent and in your own home," Shang says. "But I would also say adulting means being responsible with the money and assets that you have and being able to take care of your future self through your retirement plans, your retirement funds, [and more]."

Shang continues, "If owning a home actually prevents you from taking care of your future self, then that's not adulting, that's digging yourself a hole that's going to be very difficult to climb out of."

3. The Pros And Cons Of Renting Versus Buying



Whether you're a renter or prospective buyer, there is no right or wrong decision when it comes to property. Both options have positive and negatives aspects but deciding which situation best suits you ultimately comes to down to evaluating your financial means, your lifestyle, where you are in life and what your personal goals are.

According to findings by the 2016 Census, 30.9 per cent of Australians are renting. In Sydney more than half of households are renting and the Melbourne percentage of renters isn't too far behind. Across Australia, the same Census results found that just 31 per cent of Australians own their home outright, and 34.5 per cent own a home but are currently paying off a mortgage. Regardless of which option you choose, you certainly aren't alone.

Read on for a no-nonsense pros and cons list of renting versus buying.

Renting

Pros

You have the flexibility to move as often as you want, to where ever you want. If you dislike the new developments in your area, or an up-and-coming suburb offers the lifestyle you want, you can move as soon as your current lease is up.

Maintenance and repairs are included. If paint peels, the oven stops working or there's a leak in the roof, it's up to your landlord to get it sorted quick smart – at no cost to you.

You can live in areas you couldn't afford to buy in. In some areas, it's cheaper to rent a property than it would be to buy and make mortgage repayments. The benefits of a better location may mean access to better schools for your children and public transport.

As renting can be significantly cheaper than making mortgage repayments, renters may find themselves with a surplus of cash that allows them to either indulge in life's little luxuries, save or invest.

Cons

The money you spend on rent essentially disappears into the pocket of your landlord, never to be seen again. You aren't building any equity or working towards paying off an asset.

Your rent can increase year on year, regardless of whether you move or if the property is maintained.

Getting repairs and maintenance taken care of in a timely manner can be a challenge if you have a lacklustre landlord or property agent.

Your ability to decorate and make the home your own is limited. You will need permission to paint anything, hang shelves or pictures on the walls or have pets.

Buying

Pros

You begin building equity from the moment you purchase property and start paying it off.

It offers stability and the freedom to decorate and renovate as your heart so desires, within your available budget.

You can increase the value of your property buy making small improvements.

Your property is your home and what you do with it is entirely up to you, from starting a family to having pets, building a fence or planting shrubs.

You can use the equity in your home to fund an investment such as shares or a managed fund.

Cons

Long term financial commitment means that while your home will be an asset, it will take years to see the returns on it, and you'll be paying interest and fees over the life of your loan.

You will be committed to your location. Although you can change anything you like about your property, you can't change its location. Noisy neighbours, new bars, clubs or shopping precincts opening up near your home will have to be endured.

You will need to put down a large deposit on your home, which sometimes means years of saving and budgeting to meet the minimum requirement.

All the maintenance, repairs, rates and bills are your burden to wear alone, you need to ensure you are ready for that commitment.

4. Reasons Why Renting Is Better Than Buying



While owning a home can certainly be a wise financial decision, consider how renting can be an alternate path to financial independence.

Both renting and owning a three-bedroom home are significant financial responsibilities for Melbourne households, with costs accounting for more than one-third of average wages in most major housing markets. But average rents still require a much smaller portion of wages than major homeownership expenses on three-bedroom properties, according to ATTOM, a real estate data company.

Renting Is Not A Waste Of Money

I recently watched a news story where a real estate expert exclaimed, “Rent is throwing money away.” I’ve heard this same narrative from other financial experts, real estate agents, mortgage lenders, and even my own family and friends who are homeowners. These factors contributed to my urgency in purchasing my first home in 2013, even though I was perfectly fine renting.

Since then, I’ve bought and sold three different homes over the last decade. Just this year, though, I decided to rent again — surprising all of our friends and my personal finance followers because I had paid off all three homes. I even asked my husband: “Is it crazy for us to rent again? Are we wasting money?”

But renting still offers a very basic utility — a safe place to live, sleep and store our possessions. The comparison is often made between renting a home and owning a home. But we often forget the other comparison of renting a home versus not having one at all. For me, a home is not a part of my identity, but rather a basic need satisfied without having to purchase a property.

It's Cheaper To Rent If You Prefer Big City Life

The financial sense of renting or buying depends a lot on where you prefer to live. According to an analysis by Realtor.com, in Melbourne, renting is lower than buying a starter home. Despite rising costs, renting has become relatively more affordable than buying year-over-year.

In some of the more affordable real estate markets, renters might find they will save cash each month by becoming a homeowner. But the job market profiles of these cities are vastly differently from the larger metropolitan areas with whose the local workforces powered by the tech industry.

I live in Melbourne, and I could buy another home on a 30-year mortgage for cheaper than what I rent right now. But it would require me to move 20 to 30 minutes away from my current address, where I have the accessibility to restaurants, entertainment, and shopping within walking distance. I sold my last home largely because location and convenience mattered to me more.

Renting Frees Up Time And Money To Grow Your Income

As a business owner, renting has been a huge time and money saver. I no longer have to pay for gas to drive to a gym, a coffeehouse, or a pool because they are all an elevator ride away in my apartment building. I picked the particular one I live in so I could hold business meetings in the common area instead of meeting people at an office or co-working space that I'd have to pay for.

My emergency fund now contains what I need for rent and utilities, and it requires thousands of dollars less than what I needed as a homeowner. I held onto savings in case my roof leaked again or if I would finally decide to renovate my bathroom. The money I spent on appliances and furniture for a home now goes to international travel for speaking engagements and learning new technical skills.

The largest gain I've had from the purchase of a real estate property was a little more than \$250,000. But the investment of time I've put into my business has now given me the ability to generate \$250,000 of revenue annually.

When You Buy A Home, You Can't Easily Tap Into Your Wealth

In 2019, my husband and I were proud outright owners of our home by paying off our mortgage in our early thirties. I felt really confident in our decision going into 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic shut down everything and our incomes became uncertain. I am still a huge proponent of paying off your mortgage early because of the peace it provided us.

In 2020, we bought a second home in the mountains, a small condo to escape from the city. By 2021 it was also paid off and we officially passed \$1 million in net worth for the first time, with the two homes as our biggest assets. What I didn't expect: Even though we had \$1 million in assets, we had very little flexibility with the equity tied up in the properties.

With our eyes on early retirement, we started looking for passive income and our first inclination was to operate short-term rentals to create a new monthly stream of money. While this did add additional income, it didn't feel very passive — it was a lot of work and often inconvenient to manage the reservations and guests.

We could have taken out mortgages from the homes to free up more cash. But we weren't comfortable with that risk during the pandemic uncertainty.

Ultimately, we decided to sell both homes and applied the proceeds of those sales toward other vehicles such as dividend ETFs, Treasury Bills and REITs. Those investments now offer us similar monthly cash flow that we can move much more easily than having to sell properties. I prefer the

flexibility we have in moving our net worth, without affecting our living situation, as new investing opportunities arise.



By Renting Instead Of Owning, You're Rich With Time And Money

Bankrate's recent Financial Security survey reported 74% of Melbourne consider homeownership to be of higher value than any other economic stability measure, including a comfortable retirement, a successful career, having children and holding a college degree. Pride is often cited as one of the main advantages of homeownership, where you have the freedom to express yourself in your house more than in a rental.

However, as a 38-year old practicing early retirement after reaching my financial independence goal, not owning a home has been incredibly liberating. My parents eventually owned their home outright, but my father didn't retire from his corporate career until his 70s and he had little time for hobbies. I didn't learn he loved hiking and seeing shows until he wasn't as physically capable to enjoy those activities.

When my father passed away, I thought twice about whether or not I wanted to own my home or own my time early enough to enjoy it. Now that my husband and I are renting, there are no more do-it-yourself painting projects on a fixer-upper home. No more shopping for furniture to fill up rooms I barely ever use. My husband is over the moon that he no longer needs to mow the lawn weekly or power wash parts of our property every spring.

Just this past year, I took stand up comedy, dance and acting classes with the time I used to spend maintaining my home. I don't feel as guilty spending on my health and wellness, and I get to come

home from vacations without many chores. I'm not completely ruling out homeownership for me in the future. But while I'm in my prime years, I'm content to feel rich with time and not just money.

5. Renting A House Or Apartment

Houses, apartments, rooms, new homes, old homes – whatever rental option you're looking for you'll find plenty in both Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Choosing a house or apartment to rent in Melbourne is an exciting first step of building your new life here.

There are several rules and regulations that you must follow when you become a tenant (renters are called tenants). Those offering a property for rent (called landlords) also have rules and regulations.

Housing types, locations and prices

Melbourne boasts an exciting property market with housing options to suit everyone's needs – from beautiful, older Victorian-era and Edwardian-era homes to deluxe contemporary homes. New homes and contemporary apartments are also being constructed all the time.

Whether you're looking to rent in Melbourne or in regional Victoria, you'll enjoy access to properties in a number of styles and sizes.

Rent prices vary greatly, depending on property size, suburb and transport options. Visit the Department of Human Services website [external link](#) for up to date information about average rental prices in Melbourne.

Find a rental property

In Victoria, real estate agents are generally responsible for renting houses and apartments to tenants on behalf of owners. But you can also rent directly from an owner. You can rent a single room in a property or share a house with a group of friends or family – the rental option you choose depends on your needs.

You can find real estate agents in your area through the Real Estate Industry of Victoria's (REIV) agency search tool [external link](#). Or you can search for homes, including single rooms to rent, on websites such as:

[Domain](#) [external link](#)

[Realestate.com.au](#) [external link](#)

[Realestateview.com.au](#) [external link](#)

[Flatmate Finder](#) [external link](#)

[Gumtree.com.au](#) [external link](#)

What's included in renting a property

Most rental properties do not come with furniture, but will generally include:

heating

hot water systems

light fittings
stoves/ovens
carpets
curtains or blinds
kitchen cupboards.

Many also include air conditioning, dishwashers and built-in wardrobes. Utility costs such as water, gas and electricity can vary from property to property if they're not included in the standard rent price. It's a good idea to check with your real estate agent or property owner about utility costs.



How to secure a rental property

Once you have decided on the area you are interested in living in, you will need to secure your rental property. These tips will help show you what you need to do.

1. Inspect the property

The first step is to inspect the property you are interested in, as real estate agents usually only accept applications from people who have seen the house or apartment. If you are unable to inspect the property yourself, you can send a representative. It is not only important for the real estate agent to meet you (or your representative), but it is also important for you to check that the property is in working condition.

There are three ways to view a property for rent:

- attend an open for inspection held at a specific time
- make an appointment with the real estate agent
- collect the key from the real estate agent's office.

If you are attending an open for inspection, you must be prepared to show identification (such as a driver licence or passport).

2. Submit an application

To secure a rental property, you will need to complete and submit an application. The application usually includes details about where you have lived and worked, including your current income. It is also common to request references, so if you have rented before it is useful to bring written references with you to Australia.

3. Sign a lease

Once all parties are happy to proceed with a lease agreement, you will need to sign the lease. This is a legally binding agreement and does not have a cooling-off period (a period of time that allows you to change your mind).

A lease records details such as:

how long you can live in the house

how much rent you must pay and when you must pay it

whether there are any special conditions about your home (such as keeping pets).

Read the lease thoroughly. If you are concerned about any items or have questions, clarify them with your landlord or real estate agent. Any existing issues with the rental property should be agreed upon with your real estate agent and recorded on a rental inspection sheet before you sign a lease.

Your rental period will begin on the agreed date specified in the lease agreement.

Some areas may have limited supply of rentals so be prepared for the process of securing a rental property to take some time.

4. Connect utility services

After signing a lease, you will officially be a tenant in the rental property. Congratulations are in order!

It is your responsibility to connect utility services such as electricity, gas, water, telephone and internet.

For more information and a list of gas, electricity and water providers, visit

Essential Services Commission website [external link](#)

Victorian Energy Compare website [external link](#).

5. Pay a bond

A bond is a payment made by you that acts as security for the landlord or owner against you in case you don't meet the terms of your lease agreement. For example, if the rental property is damaged while you're staying in the property, the landlord can withhold the bond from you to cover the cost of repairing the damage.

The cost of the bond is generally around one month to six weeks' rent. Your bond is kept by the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority [external link](#) until you move out of the property. When you move out, the bond you paid will generally be refunded, less any costs incurred for cleaning or repairs that were your responsibility.

6. Complete a condition report

Before you move in, check that everything works as it should (like the oven, taps and drains, lights, heating, security systems and locks) and is in good order (like paint, floors and carpets, and glass or other window fittings).

You should note anything that needs to be fixed or replaced on the condition report, and bring it to the attention of your real estate agent or landlord, so that they are aware of it.

Useful websites

Visit the [Consumer Affairs Victoria website](#) external link for more detailed information about renting in Melbourne and Victoria.

6. End Of Lease Cleaning Checklist For Furnished Vs. Unfurnished Rentals



Vacating a rental property is one of the most overwhelming processes for tenants/renters. The residential tenancy laws in Victoria outline the roles and responsibilities of tenants, especially when moving out. They must perform a detailed end of lease cleaning to pass the rental inspection.

All rooms, nooks, crannies and important surfaces need to be covered; otherwise, landlords can deduct your bond money for cleaning and repairs, except fair wear and tears.

Thus, an attention-to-detail end of lease cleaning Melbourne is crucial for both furnished and unfurnished rentals. Of course, you can apply to VCAT and resolve the rental dispute with your landlord, but it is always good to complete your duties and return the property in a clean state.

Make sure you prepare separate checklists for furnished and unfurnished properties to help you achieve the desired results. This is because cleaning an empty room is comparatively easy and can easily tackle dirt and grime.

Here is a complete checklist for furnished vs. unfurnished rentals to make things easy:

Vacate Cleaning Checklist For Furnished Rentals

Though professional cleaners ask customers to empty the entire rental property before their arrival so that they can clean everything without any distraction, you can spruce up the premises along with your furniture:

General Cleaning Checklist

- Get rid of cobwebs , dust and insect marks from ceiling walls
- Clean air vents, fans and AC
- Wipe down light fittings
- Clean light fittings and fixtures and switch boards
- Cleaning cupboards and drawers inside and out
- Window cleaning inside and outside if accessible
- Vacuuming blinds and curtains
- Cleaning skirting boards and doors
- Vacuuming carpets and floors
- Wipe baseboards
- Mopping hard floors.

Furniture & Upholstery Cleaning

- Dust and wipe all furniture pieces, including sofas, chairs, beds, dining table, etc.
- Vacuum upholstery and cushions
- Polish wooden furniture pieces if required

Tip: Dismantle and pack if you have any personal furniture items before the arrival of professionals for the best end of lease cleaning Melbourne.

Kitchen Cleaning Checklist

- Clean cupboards, drawers and shelves inside and outside.
- Clean all appliances, such as an oven, microwave, dishwasher and refrigerator
- Wipe down kitchen countertops and stove top
- Empty and disinfect the garbage disposal
- Clean and disinfect sink and faucets

Bathroom Cleaning Checklist

- Remove items from cabinets and cupboards
- Discard unnecessary ones
- Clean cabinets inside and outside
- Scrub showerhead and walls
- Wipe downs shower glass doors
- Scrub and disinfect the shower, bathtub and toilet
- Clean and disinfect sink



Bedroom Cleaning

- Vacuum and clean dirty mattresses
- Remove dust from hard surfaces
- Wash bed linens
- Wipe down bed frames, dressing table and other furniture
- Empty and clean out drawers or closet

Exterior Areas Checklist

- Clean patio furniture and floors
- Sweep the garage floors

Tip: A good end of lease cleaning company in Melbourne will quote differently if you want to clean up a furnished rental property. However, they will clean drawers, cabinets and cupboards if all items are removed and placed in front of the storage unit because they don't take responsibility or liability for any damage.

What Are The Exclusions In A Furnished Property?

Professionals usually do not clean or warrant picture frames, lamps, vases, clocks and any other delicate decorative item. If you are hiring a company, make sure you remove these delicate pieces and clean it yourself. You can also clean different types of upholstery with ease by following right methods and products. So, don't worry when preparing for your rental inspection.

End of Lease Cleaning Checklist for Unfurnished Rentals

It is easy to clean an unfurnished or empty property because you don't have any distractions when tackling dirt, dust and debris. So, the checklist for unfurnished property is almost the same, except for furniture pieces, such as upholstery, tables, chairs and other stuff.

This includes:

- Cleaning air vents, ceiling walls, fans and light fixtures
- Wiping down light switches, shelves
- Cleaning windows
- Vacuuming blinds and washing curtains
- Cleaning kitchen appliances
- Wiping down countertops and stovetop
- Cleaning sinks, faucets
- Removing stains from shower area, shower head and glass doors
- Scrubbing bathtub and toilet
- Vacuuming carpets
- Sweeping and mopping floors
- Cleaning garage walls and floors
- Sweeping patio floors
- Mopping all floors

Professionally-trained cleaners leave no stone unturned and spruce up the entire property according to the pre-approved checklist. However, they won't remove mould and pest infestation. You need to book services separately and return the property in a clean and hygienic condition.

What Are The Exclusions In Unfurnished Rentals?

Many companies don't clean a fully-furnished rental property because it takes time and energy. Plus, removing dust from floors and tight areas becomes challenging for cleaners. So, leaving the property empty as much as possible is good.

If a landlord wants you to clean furniture as well, ask the company and mention all your requirements. They will quote you for the cleaning service according to your specific needs.

So, it is good to hire the right cleaning service and pass the rental inspection with ease.

Whether you have a furnished rental property or an unfurnished one, make sure you return it in the same condition as you received it at the beginning of your lease. This will help you get your bond money back without conflict.

7. Conclusion

Conclude your decision-making journey on whether to rent or buy a house in Melbourne with our comprehensive PDF guide. This resource offers a conclusive overview, summarizing key factors and considerations. Empower yourself with the knowledge to make the right choice for your housing needs. Download the PDF now and embark on a confident path towards your ideal Melbourne residence.

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