



Fodor's Choice Victoria

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Melbourne (say *mel-ben*) is the sophisticated sister of brassy Sydney, and some like to call it Australia's cultural capital. Consistently rated among the world's most livable cities in quality-of-life surveys, Melbourne revels in its great indoors. It's an elegant city with amazing restaurants, fabulous bars, first-rate entertainment, and funky lanes dotted with cafés that beckon you to stay all day.

WORD OF MOUTH

"It was a last minute decision to go to Melbourne, as I was told by many that I shouldn't miss it! I'm glad I went. It's much different than Sydney and I liked it better. Very multicultural city with tons of restaurants and just a great energy overall. Lots to do downtown and lots of shopping!"

—Celine

"If you are going to visit wineries, it might be best to take a tour and then you don't need to watch what you drink. Australian police are very vigilant regarding drunk driving, and the legal limit in Victoria is 0.05. Why not take a car for some of the day trips and a bus for the rest? Then you have the best of both worlds."

—lavandula

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Dozens of wineries with fabulous restaurants, mist-swathed hills dotted with charming B&Bs and curio shops, forested walking trails, and glorious beaches—all are on Melbourne's doorstep. There are many enticing destinations within an easy 60- to 90-minute drive of the city. It's a breeze to visit the Yarra Valley, Morning Peninsula, or Dandenong Ranges on day trips, and the state's excellent road system makes visiting the Great Ocean Road and the Grampians a breeze.

MELBOURNE

Melbourne is built on a coastal plain at the top of the giant horseshoe of Port Phillip Bay. The city center is an orderly grid of streets populated by the state parliament, banks, multinational corporations, and splendid Victorian buildings that sprang up in the wake of the gold rush. This is Melbourne's heart, which you can explore at a leisurely pace in a couple of days. The city teems with top-quality restaurants, particularly in St. Kilda, South Yarra, and the Waterfront City precinct including Docklands. Lygon Street is still a favorite with those who love great coffee and Italian bakeries, and the city center has many back alleys (known as laneways) with popular cafés and hip boutiques.

In Southbank, one of the new precincts south of the city center, the Southgate development of bars, restaurants, and shops has refocused Melbourne's vision on the Yarra River. Once a blighted stretch of factories and rundown warehouses, the southern bank of the river is now a vibrant part of the city, and the river itself is finally taking its rightful place in Melbourne's psyche. Just a hop away, Federation

Square—with its host of galleries—has become a civic landmark for Melburnians. Stroll along the Esplanade in the suburb of St. Kilda, amble past the elegant houses of East Melbourne, enjoy the shops and cafés in Fitzroy or Carlton, rub shoulders with locals at the Queen Victoria Market, nip into the Windsor for afternoon tea, or rent a canoe at Studley Park to paddle along one of the prettiest stretches of the Yarra—and you may discover Melbourne's soul as well as its heart.

If you're short on time, the free **City Circle Tram** and the **Yarra River Shuttle Service** (A\$14) are hop-on, hop-off ways to see many of the city's sights without exhausting yourself. The Parliament House tram stop gives access to the Princess Theatre, the grand Windsor Hotel, **Parliament House**, the "Paris End" of Collins Street, and St. Patrick's Cathedral. Get off at Flinders Street to peek in **Young and Jackson's** pub at the infamous *Chloe* painting, and then walk over the **Princes Bridge**. There you can stroll along the banks of the Yarra, looking back at Federation Square, then wander along Southbank while checking out the restaurants and shops and the **Crown Entertainment Complex**. A trip to the new Eureka Skydeck, the southern hemisphere's highest viewing platform, will put the city in perspective, and you can decide whether to head northeast to Fitzroy to meander along groovy **Brunswick Street**, or north toward **Carlton** to immerse yourself in Little Italy.

GREAT OCEAN ROAD

Arguably one of the country's most spectacular drives, the iconic Great Ocean Road hugs the windswept, rugged coastline west of Melbourne. Along

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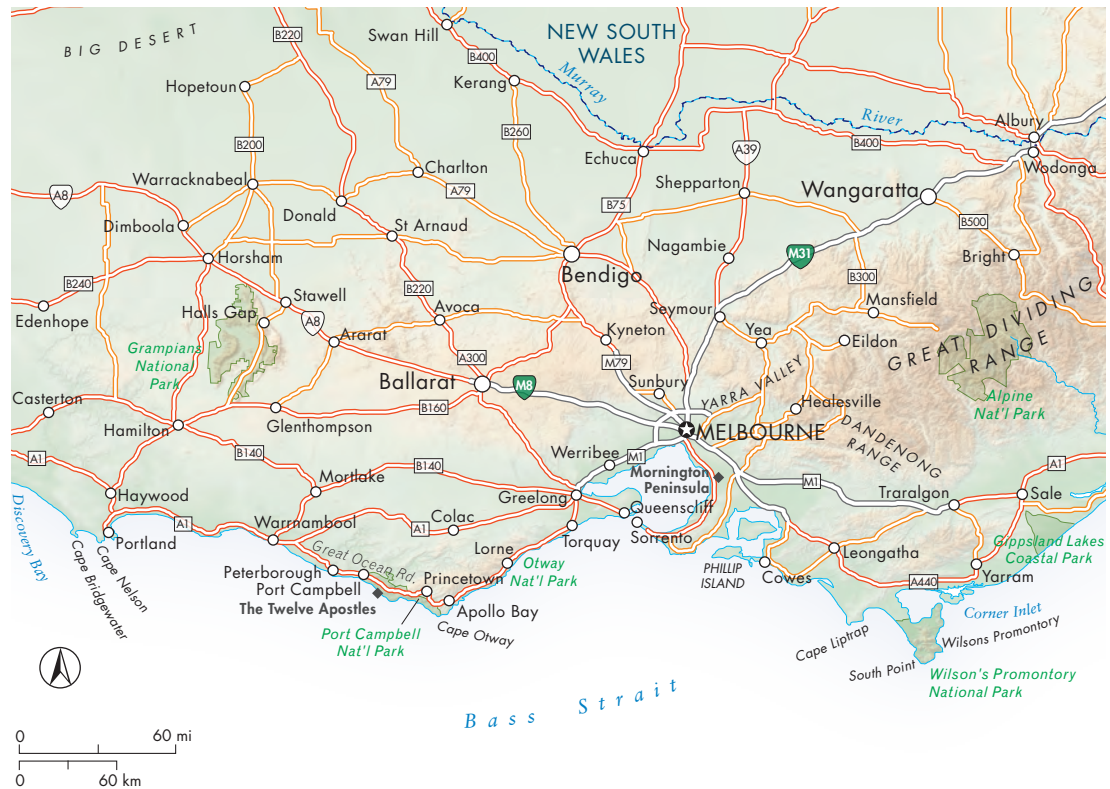
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WORD OF MOUTH

"I highly recommend the Great Ocean Road, staying overnight in Port Campbell—it's breathtakingly beautiful—then driving back via the Otway Ranges. There seemed to be plenty of accommodation at Port Campbell. I also found Sovereign Hill fascinating."

—emerald125

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this coast the ferocious Southern Ocean has gnawed at the limestone cliffs for aeons, creating a badlands-by-the-sea where strangely shaped formations stand offshore amid the surf.

The most famous of these formations is the Twelve Apostles, as much a symbol for Victoria as the Sydney Opera House is for New South Wales. (The name has always been a misnomer, as there were only nine of these stone columns of sea stacks. In July 2005 one of them collapsed into the sea, leaving eight.) If you happen to visit the Twelve Apostles just after sunset, you're likely to see bands of Little Penguins returning to their burrows on the beach. There's a population of about 3,000 of the cute creatures in the area.

Loch Ard Gorge, named after the iron-hulled clipper that was wrecked on the shores of nearby Mutton Bird Island in 1878, is another spectacular place to walk. Four of the *Loch Ard's* victims are buried in a nearby cemetery, and a sign by the gorge tells the story of the ship and its crew. This stretch of coast is often called the Shipwreck Coast for the hundreds of vessels that have met an untimely end in the treacherous waters. The Historic Shipwreck Trail, with landmarks describing 25 of the disasters, stretches from Moonlight Head to Port Fairy.

The Great Ocean Road is ideal for walking, so ideal that a Great Ocean Walk was opened a few years ago. The Great Ocean Walk begins at Marengo, just west of Apollo Bay. It stretches 57 miles to Glenample

Homestead (which is now closed), adjacent to the Twelve Apostles, passing through national parks and rugged coastline. You can set out on the walk on your own, do a few sections of it, or join an organized walking tour that has overnight stays in B&Bs and other comfortable accommodations. The Parks Victoria Great Ocean Walk Web site is www.great-oceanwalk.com.au. It's easy to do something shorter as well. Walking trails and viewing platforms wind past the iconic Twelve Apostles and nearby Loch Ard Gorge, each of which can be viewed just a few hundred yards from the car park. Other major landforms—the Arch, London Bridge, and the Grotto—have boardwalk and platform viewing areas and are only about a 10-minute drive (or a longer walk) from each other. Loch Ard Gorge, a bay flanked by towering cliffs with a narrow opening, is another spectacular sight.

GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK

About 162 miles west of Melbourne are the Grampians, sometimes referred to by their Aboriginal name, Gariwerd. This 415,000-acre region combines stunning mountain scenery, abundant native wildlife, and invigorating outdoor activities. The sharp sandstone peaks here were long ago forced up from an ancient seabed and sculpted by aeons of wind and rain. Today the park has more than 106 miles of walking trails and some 900 wildflower species, 200 species of birds, and 35 species of native mammals. The best time to

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visit is October through December, when the weather is mild and summer crowds have yet to arrive. There are several wineries in the region, including the historic Seppelt vineyard and winery at Great Western, about 16 miles east of Halls Gap, which offers fascinating tours of its underground wine cellars.

Grampians National Park is comprised of four mountain ranges—Mt. Difficult, Mt. William, Serra, and Victoria. Its rugged peaks, towering trees, web of waterfalls and creeks, and plethora of wildlife make it a haven for bushwalkers, rock climbers, and nature lovers. In spring the region wears a carpet of spectacular wildflowers. Significant Aboriginal rock-art sites make it an ideal place to learn about Victoria's indigenous history. Dawn balloon flights over the park offer visitors the chance to see the park's hidden charms without working up a sweat. The township of Halls Gap (population 300) is on the edge of the national park, and with its 10,000 tourist beds becomes quite a busy place in summer and at Easter. If you're staying in a self-catering accommodation it is very wise to stock up on groceries and wine in the big towns of Ballarat, Arafat, Hamilton, or Horsham, since prices at the Halls Gap general store are inflated. One of the most picturesque drives in the park is the 37-mile stretch from Halls Gap to Dunkeld.

Bushwalking is by far the most popular activity in the national park. There are many trails to explore, beautiful wildflowers to admire along the way, and a waterfall to cool off under on hot summer days. Some of the best walks include Mackenzie Falls, the walk to Mt. Abrupt (Mt. Murdadjoog in the Aboriginal language), the Hollow Mountain walk, and another to Silverband Falls. Ask at the visitor center for information and maps.

Owned and operated by Aboriginal people, the **Brambuk Cultural Centre** provides a unique living history of Aboriginal culture in this part of Victoria. Displays of artwork, weapons, clothes, and tools here give a glimpse into the life of indigenous Koori people

(Aboriginal people of southeastern Australia). In the Dreaming Theatre, dancing, music, and educational programs are presented daily, and visitors can learn the significance of paintings at nearby Bunjil's Shelter on rock-art tours conducted on weekdays at 9:30 AM. ✉ *Grampians Tourist Rd., Halls Gap 3381* ☎ 03/5361-4000 🌐 www.brambuk.com.au 📧 Free; rock-art tours and theater A\$35 ☺ Daily 9-5, show hourly 10-4.

THE YARRA VALLEY WINE REGION

Victoria is blessed with 21 distinct wine regions and has over 850 wineries, 650 of which have cellar doors where you can try and buy the product. The Yarra Valley, 25 miles east of Melbourne, is Victoria's oldest wine region and a pleasant place to spend a day on an organized tour. Healesville is a good base for travel to Yarra Valley wineries and the Dandenongs Region, as it's almost halfway between the two. Its main street is lined with antiques dealers, two Art Deco hotels, stylish clothing boutiques, and a huddle of shops and makes for a pleasant wander after lunch at a nearby winery.

Victory Winery Tours (✉ 9 *The Willows*, ☎ 03/5428-8500 🌐 www.winetours.com.au) offers full-day tours departing from Melbourne and visiting four to five wineries, including lunch, for A\$147 per person. **Yarra Valley Winery Tours** (✉ 299 *Maroondah Hwy., Healesville 3777* ☎ 03/5966-2372 🌐 www.yarravalleywinerytours.com.au) runs public and private tours with flexible itineraries. For most tours, on weekends from 11 to 3:30 at A\$100 per person, **Swans on Doongalla** (✉ 2A *Doongalla Rd, The Basin* ☎ 03/9762-1910 🌐 www.swansondoongalla.com.au) takes you to four wineries along St. Huberts Road in a stretched horse-drawn carriage. A light lunch is served at Yering Farm winery. The meeting place is St. Hubert's Winery.

For information, visit the **Yarra Valley Visitor Information Centre** (✉ *Old Courthouse, Harker St. Healesville* ☎ 03/5962-2600 🌐 www.visitarravalley.com.au).

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