



Melbourne & Victoria

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Why Go?

Melbourne, Australia's second-largest city, is the state's urban hub and the nation's artistic centre. Here, culture junkies and culinary perfectionists feast on art, music, theatre, cinema and cuisine for every budget.

Scalloping its way around coves, beaches and cliffs, the Great Ocean Road is great indeed. Wild surf pounds the shoreline and enigmatic coastal towns mingle with lush national parks.

In the High Country, brilliant autumn colours segue into snowfields and back again to sleepy summer towns, haunted by pale gums. Skis get a workout in winter, and cycling, horse riding and cheeky weekends are the mainstays of summer.

If wild landscapes are your weakness, head to the Grampians National Park, sprawled amid the dry plains of the Western District. Australia's southernmost mainland tip is the spiritually reviving Wilsons Promontory National Park. Cosmopolitan tourists can duck just outside of Melbourne and sample fine wines in the Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula.

When to Go?

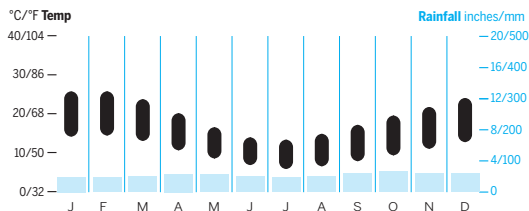
Best Places to Eat

- » Cutler & Co (p504)
- » Loam (p523)
- » Royal Mail Hotel (p553)
- » Stefano's Restaurant (p560)

Best Places to Stay

- » Punhill Apartments (p500)
- » Medina Executive Flinders St (p495)
- » YHA Eco Beach (p541)
- » Dreamers (p596)

Melbourne



Feb School-holiday crowds have left, leaving good weather for swimming and hiking.

Apr Enjoy quiet coastal beaches and camp sites, and live music at the Apollo Bay Music Festival.

Nov Hiking trails are in full colour after spring, while Melbourne is all aflutter about the Melbourne Cup.

Regional Tours

The **Great Ocean Road** is one of the most popular touring routes in Australia, and, blow us down with a limestone outcrop, it's worth the hype. Take plenty of time – two weeks is good – to get the best from this region.

Start in the surfing mecca of Torquay by checking out the waves at **Bells Beach**, then head to family-friendly **Anglesea** to see kangaroos grazing on its golf course. **Aireys Inlet** is next; tour the lighthouse then plan an overnight stay in the resort town of **Lorne**. Spend a day here then break up the sea views with a detour up into the rainforests of the **Otway Ranges**. Back on the Great Ocean Road, head to the fishing village of **Apollo Bay** for a day or two, then continue west into the koala and lighthouse zone of **Cape Otway**. It's quite a stretch to **Port Campbell National Park** and its famed **Twelve Apostles**; take the time to count them and spend a night in **Port Campbell** to get a feel for the area. Look for whales off **Warrnambool's** coast then continue west to quaint, and very Irish, **Port Fairy**. If there's time, head to tiny **Cape Bridgewater** to meet its seal population.

DON'T MISS

Who can resist the nightly parade of cute little penguins waddling out of the ocean and into their sandy burrows at **Phillip Island**? Not the three-million-plus tourists who visit annually, that's for sure. This little island in Western Port Bay also has fabulous surf beaches, a moto-GP circuit and wildlife parks.

For sheer natural beauty, **Wilson's Promontory** has it all. Jutting out into Bass Strait, this national park is isolated but accessible, boasting sublime ocean beaches and some of the best wilderness hiking in the state. With a well-maintained network of trails and bush camping areas, you just need to grab a map, strap on a pack and disappear into the wilds.

Beaches

- » Surfing: try famous Bells Beach near Torquay (p538)
- » Isolation: Ninety Mile Beach attracts those seeking space (p606)
- » Beachside camping: camp for free by wild Johanna Beach (543)
- » Family fun: Anglesea's sheltered Point Roadknight Beach or Main Beach (p538) is a family fave

TOP TIPS

- » Head to the wharf in seaside towns and buy fresh seafood straight off the boat.
- » Half Tix (p514) sells cheap tickets for day trips from Melbourne (think wineries or penguins) and Melbourne theatre performances.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 5,444,000
- » Area: 227 500 sq km
- » Coastline: 2000km
- » Number of wineries: 850

Planning Your Trip

Avoid the coast from Christmas until late January and during Easter; school holidays equate to packed beaches, booked-out accommodation and restricted access to popular hiking trails. See www.education.vic.gov.au for school term dates.

Resources

- » Visit Victoria (www.visitvictoria.com) Official state tourism site.
- » Parks Victoria (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) National park information.
- » The Age (www.theage.com.au) Victorian news.
- » Bureau of Meteorology (www.bom.gov.au/weather/vic) Weather forecasts.