



# Melbourne & Victoria

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## Best Regional Dining

- ➔ Koonwarra Store (p606)
- ➔ Lake House (p584)
- ➔ Royal Mail Hotel (p555)
- ➔ Stefano's Restaurant (p561)

## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Ovolo (p502)
- ➔ Art Series (Cullen) (p504)
- ➔ YHA Eco Beach (p543)
- ➔ Theatre Royal Back Stage (p580)

## 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.

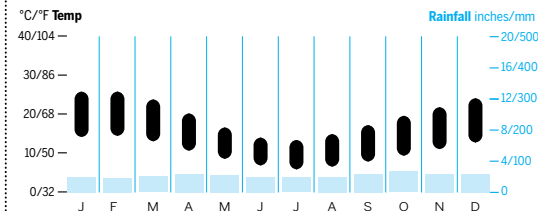
Scalloping its way around coves, beaches and cliffs to the west, the Great Ocean Road is great indeed. Wild surf pounds the shoreline and enigmatic coastal towns mingle with lush national parks.

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.

## When to Go

### 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 in late spring, while Melbourne is all aflutter about the Melbourne Cup.

## TOP TIPS

➔ Head to the wharf in seaside towns and buy fresh seafood straight off the boat.

➔ **Half Tix** ([www.halfixmelbourne.com](http://www.halfixmelbourne.com)) sells cheap tickets for day trips from Melbourne (think wineries or penguins) and Melbourne theatre performances.

## Fast Facts

- ➔ Population: 5.6 million
- ➔ Area: 227,500 sq km
- ➔ Coastline: 2000km
- ➔ Number of wineries: 850

## Advance Planning

➔ 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](http://www.education.vic.gov.au) for school term dates.

## Great Ocean Road

This 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 – at least a week – 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 the golf course. Aireys Inlet is next: tour the lighthouse then plan an overnight stay in the resort town of Lorne. 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. 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, Wilsons Promontory has it all. Jutting into Bass Strait, this national park is isolated but accessible, boasting sublime ocean beaches and some of the best wilderness hiking in the state. To take advantage of its 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.

## Best Bike Trails

- ➔ **Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail** Scenic High Country ride from Wangaratta to Bright (p597)
- ➔ **Great Southern Rail Trail** Ride through the South Gippsland hills (p607)
- ➔ **Goldfields Track** Epic mountain-biking trail from Ballarat to Daylesford (p578)
- ➔ **Mt Buller** Victoria's premier downhill and cross-country mountain-biking (p592)
- ➔ **East Gippsland Rail Trail** Cycling trail in Victoria's far east (p610)