



# Gippsland & Wilsons Promontory

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## Why Go?

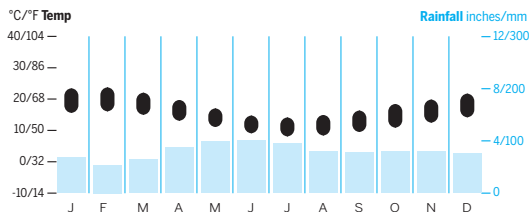
The Great Ocean Road may get the crowds, but Gippsland hides all the secrets. Stretching east along the coast from Western Port Bay to Mallacoota and inland to encompass virtually all of eastern Victoria, Gippsland is home to some of the most absorbing, unspoilt and beautiful wilderness areas and beaches in the state.

A trip to Gippsland could mean swimming, fishing, camping and boating along the coast – much of it practically deserted for a good part of the year (yes, it's busy during school holidays!); cycling from town to town on the network of rail trails; or packing the rucksack and hiking boots and heading into the most remote wilderness national parks in the state.

For many, the Gippsland trail starts at the wild and woolly Wilsons Promontory, and heads east through the sublime Lakes District, the Ninety Mile Beach and finally to the Wilderness Coast – some of the most pristine national parks in the country. Out here, the city feels like a lifetime away.

## When to Go

### Point Hicks



**Feb–Mar** For toe-tapping jazz festivals at Inverloch and Paynesville.

**Oct–Nov** Spring is the time for wildflowers and wildlife, as well as bushwalking.

**Dec–Jan** It gets busy, but there's no better time to hit the oceans and lakes than summer!

## WEST GIPPSLAND

The Princes Hwy heads east from Melbourne to the Latrobe Valley, an agricultural area where the increasingly controversial coal-fired power stations supply some 85% of the state's electricity. This industry, along with farming and timber, largely supports the main towns of Moe, Morwell and Traralgon.

North of the valley are the foothills of the Great Dividing Range, where you'll find Baw Baw National Park, the Thomson Dam and the historic gold-mining town of Walhalla.

### Walhalla

POP 18

Ensnconed high in the green hills and forest of west Gippsland, tiny Walhalla is one of the state's best-preserved and most charming historic towns. In its gold-mining heyday, Walhalla's population was 5000, today it's just 18. There's still plenty to see in here, and the winding forest drive into the town from Rawson or Traralgon is beautiful. Stringers Creek runs through the centre of the township – an idyllic valley encircled by a cluster of sepia-toned historic buildings set into the hillsides. During August the town lights up for the **Walhalla Vinter Ijusfest** (Winter Lights Festival). Remarkably, mains electricity only came to Walhalla a decade ago. Up some steps behind the Star Hotel, a trail leads to the **Walhalla Cricket Ground**, while the **Walhalla Cemetery** gives a somber insight into the history of the area.

### 1 Sights & Activities

The best way to see the town is on foot – take the **circuit walk** (45 minutes) anti-clockwise from the information shelter as you enter town.

#### Walhalla Historical Museum MUSEUM

(%5165 6250; www.walhalla.org.au; admission \$2; h 10am-4pm) Located in the old post office in the group of restored shops along the main street, Walhalla Historical Museum also acts as an information centre and books the popular two-hour **ghost tours** (www.walhallaghosttour.info; adult/child \$25/18) on Friday and Saturday nights.

#### Walhalla Goldfields Railway TRAIN

(%9513 3969; www.walhallarail.com; return adult/child/family \$18/13/40; h from Walhalla Station 11am, 1pm & 3pm, from Thomson Station 11.40am, 1.40pm & 3.40pm Wed, Sat, Sun & public holidays) A star attraction is the scenic Walhalla Gold-

fields Railway, which offers a 20-minute ride between Walhalla and Thomson Stations (on the main road, 3.5km before Walhalla). The train snakes along Stringers Creek Gorge, passing lovely, forested gorge country and crossing a number of trestle bridges.

#### Long Tunnel Extended Gold Mine

GOLD MINE

(%5165 6259; off Walhalla-Beardmore Rd; tours adult/child/family \$20/14/50; h tours 1.30pm Mon-Fri, noon, 1.30pm & 3pm Sat & Sun, public & school holidays) Relive the mining past with guided tours exploring Cohens Reef, once one of Australia's top reef-gold producers. Almost 14 tonnes of gold came out of this mine.

### T Tours

**Mountain Top Experience** (%5134 6876; www.mountaintopexperience.com) operates nature-based 4WD tours, including the Walhalla Copper Mine Adventure (\$20) and ghost-town tours (\$25) on weekends and Wednesdays.

### 4 Sleeping & Eating

You can camp for free at **North Gardens**, a camp site with toilets and barbecues, at the north end of the village. Walhalla has a handful of cottages and B&Bs, and there are a couple of old-style cafes among the group of shops in the village centre.

#### Walhalla Star Hotel HOTEL \$\$

(%5165 6262; www.starhotel.com.au; Main Rd; d incl breakfast \$219, with dinner \$319; a ) The rebuilt historic Star offers stylish boutique accommodation with king-size beds and sophisticated designer decor making good use of local materials such as corrugated-iron water tanks. Guests can dine at the flash **Parker's Restaurant** (mains from \$30; h dinner); others need to reserve in advance. Or you can get good breakfasts, coffee and cake at the attached **Greyhorse Café** (mains from \$5; h 11am-2pm).

#### Windsor House B&B \$\$

(%5165 6237; www.windsorhouse.com.au; off Walhalla Rd; d \$160, ste \$175-200; h Thu-Mon) The five rooms and suites in this beautifully restored two-storey 1878 home are fittingly old fashioned and ghost-free.

#### Wild Cherry B&B B&B \$\$

(%5165 6245; www.wildcherrywalhalla.com.au; Church Hill Rd; d incl breakfast \$160) The Wild Cherry is a sweet little B&B perched on the hill above town with comfy motel-style rooms.