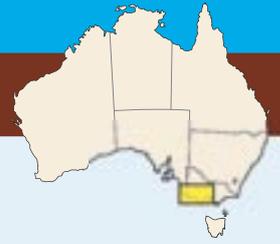


Your great Australian journey starts here

GREAT SOUTHERN TOURING ROUTE



Length: 4–7 days Fly/drive option: Melbourne

Expect more than great ocean on this iconic touring route. The Great Ocean Road in places virtually hangs over the Southern Ocean, then temporarily transforms into a mountain drive beyond Apollo Bay, winding through the tall timber of the Otway Range before descending to the eroded cliffs that serve as a grandstand for The Twelve Apostles. Continue towards Nelson and you'll discover a wealth of wildlife at Warrnambool, Tower Hill and Lady Julia Percy Island, before travelling to the stunning Grampians National Park and then winding back towards Melbourne through the goldfields with their remarkable history, and the spa country at Daylesford.



Travel tip

Pack hiking boots – some of the country's best walking tracks are along the Great Ocean Road and in The Grampians. December–March is the peak tourist season, with holidaymakers lapping up the summer sun along the Great Ocean Road. The coastal towns get extremely busy at this time of year, so book ahead. Winter can be spectacularly wild along the Great Ocean Road, and also heralds the arrival of whales offshore.

Websites

- www.visitvictoria.com
- www.greatoceanrd.org.au
- www.visitgrampians.com.au
- www.ballarat.com

A to B Melbourne to Torquay

After leaving Melbourne (www.visitmelbourne.com), this drive passes below the distinctive humps of The You Yangs (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au), a favourite with mountain bikers and rock climbers, before reaching Geelong (www.visitgeelong.org). Set the seaside mood by wandering among the 100-plus painted bollards on the city's shorefront.

Beyond the city centre is the turnoff for the Great Ocean Road and Torquay. In this famed surfing town you'll find several **surf schools** (www.graw.com.au) and reputedly the world's largest surfing museum (www.surfworld.org.au). If you prefer riding air currents to waves you can take a **joyflight** with style at Tiger Moth World Adventure Park (www.tigermothworld.com).

B to **C** Torquay to Lorne

Ahead stretches the world-famous Great Ocean Road and a journey that can last hours or days. There's a wealth of **accommodation** options along the way; begin your search at www.greatoceanrd.org.au or www.greatoceanroad.com.au.

A short distance out of Torquay is a detour south to **Bells Beach**, a name that resonates for surfers. Even if board-riding isn't your thing, it's worth checking out the beach for a look at its cherished point break. At low tide you can wander along the beach and around the point at its western end.

At Anglesea the Great Ocean Road first touches the coast, brushing by Front Beach, which is set between high cliffs. More sheltered conditions can be found at the Point Roadknight beach. For a wildlife encounter with a difference, play a round at the **Anglesea Golf Club** (www.angleseagolfclub.com.au), where kangaroos are more common than birdies.

The road again hits the coast at stylish Aireys Inlet, where the Split Point Lighthouse – the 'White Queen' – rises from amid a low-key development. Wander about the lighthouse, where a cairn marks the graves of two settlers, or explore the rock pools below at low tide. Fairhaven beach, just to the west, offers a chance to soak up some sun, while you can dine in relaxed style at A La Grecque, the latest offering from famed Great Ocean Road restaurateur Kosta Talihmanidis.

Here, the road begins its love affair with the coast, winding along the shore to Lorne (www.lornevictoria.com.au), Victoria's most cherished seaside playground. Luxury accommodation spills into the forest around town, while there are popular **walking tracks** to a host of waterfalls tucked into folds of the Otway Range. Take the short walk to Erskine Falls, or spend a couple of days hiking between up to 13 waterfalls.

C to **D** Lorne to Cape Otway

Continue along the rugged coast to Apollo Bay (www.apollobay.com) along this spectacular road, which snakes around bays and headlands. Apollo Bay is set on another beautiful beach lined with eateries and great accommodation. If you can find the will to leave the beach, there's a host of activities on offer: plunge through the Otways on a **mountain bike** with Otway Expeditions; **paddle** out to a seal colony with Apollo Bay Surf & Kayak (www.apollobaysurfkayak.com.au); or drive out into the forest in search of more waterfalls. If you can't wait to see The Twelve Apostles, you can take a **sightseeing flight** with Apollo Bay Aviation. And if you're in town in April you can catch the **Apollo Bay Music Festival** (www.apollobaymusicfestival.com).

At nearby Marengo you can hop onto the new, world-class **Great Ocean Walk**, a long-distance track extending to Glenample Homestead, near the Twelve Apostles. Recommended sections include a short circuit out of Shelly Beach, the descent from Milanesia Track onto wild, wonderful and little-visited Milanesia Beach, or a walk around Cape Otway to Rainbow Falls and the Aire River. Guided walk operators are listed on the walk's official website (www.greatoceanwalk.com.au).



Beauchamp Falls

TOURISM VICTORIA/MARK WATSON

Out of Marengo the Great Ocean Road climbs into the Otway Range, which is smothered in temperate rainforest and the straight lines of the world's tallest flowering tree, the mountain ash. You can witness the tree's immensity on the Maits Rest boardwalk or by veering away at Lavers Hill to the Otway Fly Tree Top Walk (www.otwayfly.com), an elevated walkway through the forest canopy.

At the tip of Cape Otway you can settle into a bed in the **lighthouse-keeper cottages** (www.lightstation.com) with the Southern Ocean as your watery backyard.

D to E Cape Otway to Port Campbell

Beyond Lavers Hill the road dips back close to the rugged coast, with **great views** to be had from Moonlight Head. Here, at The Gable, you can stand atop breathtaking cliffs and peer back along the wild coast. Nearby, a short but steep walk descends to Wreck Beach, where the rock platforms support the anchors from the *Marie Gabrielle* and *Fiji* shipwrecks, giving you sudden appreciation of the reasons why this is known as the Shipwreck Coast.

Beyond tiny Princetown is the Great Ocean Road's signature scene: the limestone stacks of **The Twelve Apostles**, spearing out of the Southern Ocean. Wander the boardwalks atop the cliffs for a variety of views (the closest of which comes from descending Gibson Steps to the beach), or see them from the air with 12 Apostles Helicopters (www.12ah.com).

From here it's a queue of ocean-cut scenes: Loch Ard Gorge, scene of a notorious 1878 shipwreck; Mutton Bird Island; delightfully low-key Port Campbell, its square cove shaped so perfectly it could have been cut by machine; The Arch; London Bridge, which has indeed fallen down; and a second assortment of sea stacks at the Bay of Islands.

Port Campbell (www.greatoceanroad.org) offers both a selection of **accommodation** and a growing reputation among divers. The *Loch Ard* wreck is the most popular **dive site**, while you can poke about in marine canyons and arches in The Arches Marine Sanctuary. Dive charters are available through Port Campbell Boat Charters.

E to F Port Campbell to Portland

At the Bay of Islands, the Great Ocean Road departs the coast, swinging inland before reaching Warrnambool. **Whales** now dominate the visitor focus of this town with its rich maritime history. At Logans Beach, female southern right whales and their newborn calves loll offshore between about July and October, and are visible from platforms on the cliffs above the beach.

In town, the Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village faithfully recreates the scenes of an early port town, capped by a sound-and-light spectacular about the fateful sinking of the *Loch Ard*. A complete Warrnambool visitor guide can be downloaded at www.warrnamboolinfo.com.au.

From Warrnambool it's a short hop to Port Fairy (www.myportfairy.com), past Tower Hill State Game Reserve and its plentiful koalas, kangaroos and emus. Port Fairy is one of Victoria's oldest settlements and retains all of its charms, stretching along the mouth of the Moyne River and behind elongated East Beach. It's also the setting for the famous **Port Fairy Folk Festival** (www.portfairyfolkfestival.com), held each March.

There are some great walks around town, whether through the short-tailed shearwater, or muttonbird, rookeries on Griffiths Island, or following the marked history trail through the town itself. For a **wildlife experience** on water, take a boat tour to flat-topped Lady Julia Percy Island, home to the largest colony of Australian fur seals in the country; tours often also see dolphins, whales and sharks. Tours are available through Port Fairy Boat Charters or Michael J IV Charters.

Past Codrington, Victoria's first wind farm (www.myportfairy.com/windfarmtours), which is open for tours, the drive concludes its coastal



The Twelve Apostles

TOURISM VICTORIA/JAMES LAURITZ



Port Fairy

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flirtation at Portland (www.greatoceanroad.org/portland/index.asp). From there it's worth venturing out to Cape Nelson, Cape Bridgewater and the perfect beach at Bridgewater Bay. By Cape Bridgewater you can view an ancient petrified forest, or walk to a **seal colony**. You can also view the seals from an inflatable boat with Seals by Sea Tours.

If you're reluctant to leave the coast, extend the drive west to Nelson, at the mouth of the Glenelg River. **Cruise** through the river's limestone gorge (www.glenelgrivercruises.com.au) or **hire a canoe and paddle it yourself** (www.nelsonboatandcanoehire.com.au). You can also delve underground in Princess Margaret Rose Caves (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au).

The Grampians



TOURISM VICTORIA/MARK WATSON

F to G Portland to Halls Gap

From Portland, the drive heads north through Hamilton, where if you're feeling adventurous you can detour south to Mount Napier State Park and the lava tubes at Byaduk Caves (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au), and then on to Dunkeld. If you're here on race day, seize the chance to visit one of the world's most scenic **racecourses**, where the ultimate grandstands are the looming peaks of the southern Grampians. At Dunkeld you'll also find one of country Victoria's great **dining treats** at the Royal Mail Hotel (www.royalmail.com.au).

Turning north onto the Grampians Tourist Road, the drive traipses along at the foot of the sandstone Grampians towards Halls Gap, passing Brambuk Aboriginal Cultural Centre

(www.brambuk.com.au). As much an attraction as the mountains themselves, the centre has displays about the park and the local **Aboriginal culture**. Head upstairs to the cafe for a feed of bush tucker.

Halls Gap is a great base for exploring the wonderful Grampians. There are a multitude of **walks** through the mountains. For a detailed list follow the links at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au. There are a host of other activities, from hanging off multi-pitch **rock climbs** to floating over the sandstone ranges in a **hot-air balloon** – see www.visithallsgap.com.au and www.visitgrampians.com.au for a rundown of activities, accommodation and dining in the area. The Grampians are also a great place for spotting **wildlife**. You can head to the clearings at Zumsteins for a certain meeting with kangaroos, or try the Halls Gap Wildlife Park and Zoo (www.hallsgapwildlife.com).

G to A Halls Gap to Melbourne

Head out from Halls Gap to the Western Highway at Ararat (www.ararat.vic.gov.au), celebrating the town's Chinese heritage at Gum San (www.gumsan.com.au) and experiencing life behind the bars of an asylum for the criminally insane at J Ward.

Continue east along the Western Highway, past the peaks of Langi Ghiran and Mount Buangor state parks, to reach Ballarat, the heart of the Victorian goldfields. It was here that the **Eureka Stockade** happened. The original Eureka flag can be seen in the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery (www.balgal.com), Australia's first regional art gallery.

Ballarat's turbulent history melds with the present at Sovereign Hill (www.sovereignhill.com.au), the Eureka Centre (www.eurekaballarat.com) and along the Prime Ministers Avenue in the Botanical Gardens, which is lined by bronze busts of every prime minister. This is a city that could enthrall you for days. See www.visitballarat.com.au.

Delay your return to Melbourne with a soothing detour north through Daylesford (www.visitdaylesford.com) and Hepburn Springs. As these are Victoria's spa capitals, there's no excuse for leaving here without being totally refreshed. Melt into some **hydrotherapy**, a scalp massage or that apple-and-paprika facial you've always craved. Dine in style and luxuriate amid some indulgent accommodation options.

Bend back towards Melbourne through charming Trentham and Blackwood, bordered by the deep gash of Lerderberg Gorge (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au), rejoining the Western Freeway for its final descent into Melbourne. ■