

From Times Online  
June 16, 2009  
Arion McNicoll

## **The best of the Great Ocean Road**

### **A helicopter ride over the Twelve Apostles, golfing with kangaroos, boomerang throwing in an extinct volcano and other highlights...**

The Great Ocean Road is unquestionably one of the [great drives of the world](#). Stretching from the sleepy town of Torquay to the South Australian border, the road weaves along the southern coast of Victoria revealing breathtaking vistas and stunning landscapes.

The road travels through rolling hills, plunging cliffs, pristine beaches, quiet fishing villages and lollipop sunsets. But rather than just travelling the well-worn paths why not use the road as an opportunity to do something different.

Learn to surf in Torquay, take a walk over the trees at Great Otway National Park, play golf on a course littered with kangaroos, sample some of the country's finest wines in one of the world-class restaurants that dot the route, or take a helicopter ride over the crumbling cliffs of the Twelve Apostles.

There are a myriad of different ways to see this road. Here is a collection of ideas to help you on your way:

#### **Surfing lessons**

Though tiny, Torquay is Victoria's surfing capital and a major holiday resort town, with an entire economy based around beach culture. Some of the biggest names in surfwear and accessories are based here, with huge retail outlets at Surf City Plaza selling everything imaginable connected with the surfing. The Surfworld Museum is a Mecca to wave riding with a bunch of displays to explore hands on. For the real experience though, why not just jump in the ocean a few hundred metres down the road.

Go Ride a Wave has been teaching Surfing for 15 years and their instructors almost guarantee to have you standing up within a single lesson. Wetsuits, boards and instruction for two hours are all provided. Classes are run in Anglesea, Torquay, Ocean Grove and Lorne.

[Go Ride a Wave](#); tel: 1300 132 441

### **Lunch with a view**

Offering brilliant contemporary Australian seafood and a superlative local wine list, Scorched is an outpost of fine cuisine on the coast of Victoria. An innovative menu with plenty of vegetarian options and big glass windows that open out to a view of the sea have made Scorched a popular destination for urban foodies who rarely stray outside the Melbourne city limits.

[Scorched](#), 17 The Esplanade, Torquay VIC 3228, tel: (03) 5261 6142

### **Eat and sleep in style**

**Sitting atop a winding drive, Chris's Beacon Point Restaurant & Villas has quite breathtaking views, plus good food and wine in a restaurant that over the years has developed a devoted clientele. Situated on a cliff overlooking Apollo Bay Harbour, and out towards the Bass Strait, the restaurant is a perfect place to watch the sun go down with a cold drink before retiring to your villa.**

[Chris's Beacon Point Restaurant & Villas](#), Skenes Creek Road, Skenes Creek VIC 3233; tel: (03) 5237 6411

### **A walk on the park**

The Otway Fly Tree Top Walk is a 600-metre-long walkway perched above the tree line that looks over a national park. The walk ascends gently through a rainforest featuring towering myrtle beech, blackwood and mountain ash trees. In the centre of the steel structure a spiral stairway ascends to a 45-metre-high lookout over the forest, which sways slightly (and a little unnervingly) to the footsteps of your fellow visitors.

[The Otway Fly Tree Top Walk](#), Directly accessible from Phillips Track and is 15 minutes drive from Lavers Hill, tel: (03) 5235 9200

### **Cliffs and clouds**

12 Apostles Helicopters will take you on a 10-minute flight over the crumbling amber rock formations that make up the Twelve Apostles and Loch Ard Gorge. The short flights are surprisingly affordable and offer a totally different view of part of Australia's most beautiful coastline.

[12 Apostles Helicopters](#), 9400 Great Ocean Road, Port Campbell VIC 3269, tel: (03) 5598 6161

### **Golfing with kangaroos**

Anglesea Golf Club offers 18 holes with a difference. Hazards include over 50 bunkers plus more than 300 kangaroos. Members may find them a nuisance, but the club itself enjoys the twin benefit of tourists attracted to the course to photograph the creatures, and free maintenance – the kangaroos efficiently trim the grass over the entire course.

Anglesea Golf Club, Golf Links Road, Anglesea VIC, tel: (03) 5263 1951

### **Big food in a little village**

The small town of Port Fairy has retained much of its colonial architecture, providing a fascinating snapshot of one of Victoria's earliest ports. The township has a sheltered harbour, wharf walk and fishing fleet, which keeps the town supplied with fresh seafood including quite spectacular crayfish.

Port Fairy is also home to the Merrijig Inn, one of Australia's only two Chef's Hat restaurants (the equivalent of two Michelin stars) which is not located in a major city. Contemporary Mediterranean cuisine with a dash of experimentation. Abalone with oysters three ways is astounding. How exactly do you turn oysters into delicious foam? Head chef Ryan Sessions has found a way.

[Merrijig Inn](#), 1 Campbell Street, Port Fairy VIC 3284, tel: (03) 5568 2324

### **Boomerang throwing in an extinct volcano**

Tower Hill State Game Reserve sits snugly inside an extinct volcano, and after years of rejuvenation has become a haven for wildlife with koalas, emus, kangaroos and many species of waterbirds roaming freely. In 1961, Tower Hill was declared a State Game reserve and is now managed by Parks Victoria. Since then, more than 300,000 trees have been planted with the help of many volunteer and community groups. The park now employs Aboriginal staff who will teach you to throw a boomerang, and tell you all about the park.

[Tower Hill State Game Reserve](#); Tel: (03) 13 19 63; Direct: (03) 5561 5315

### **Eco-friendly accommodation before the flight home**

Most trips along the Great Ocean Road will start and end in Melbourne, so while you are there, why not offset the carbon you spend on your drive by choosing an environmentally friendly place to lay your head. Alto Hotel on Bourke is one of Melbourne's newest boutique apartment hotels and makes concerted efforts to minimise its environmental impact through a range of measures including economical lighting, minimal waste and conservative use of gas, water and air-conditioning.

[Alto Hotel on Bourke](#), 636 Bourke St, Melbourne VIC 3000; Tel: (03) 9606 0585

### **How to get there**

[Etihad Airways](#) has recently opened a route from London to Melbourne. Return economy fares from London Heathrow to Melbourne start from £504 including taxes (restrictions apply) in economy, business class fares are £3,450.20 including taxes. Etihad flies daily from London Heathrow to Melbourne, via the airline's hub in Abu Dhabi.