



Destination
Australia,
Beyond Melbourne

Go Beyond Melbourne

By Gary Dickson

I've been to Melbourne dozens and dozens of times, but apart from one time when I had a hastened visit to the Yarra Valley, I have never really explored beyond the city limits. I'm sure most of you have probably done the same, after all Melbourne is an enticing and fantastic city all by itself. Recently I got to spend 5 days self-driving regions I had always heard of and didn't really think much of...how wrong I was!



Coombe Yarra Valley

The Yarra Valley, Phillip Island, The Mornington Peninsula and Geelong are all within easy reach of central Melbourne and all have something special to offer a traveller looking for something different than a Melbourne shopping spree or quick visit on the first Tuesday in November.

Day 1 - Yarra Valley:

In just on an hour I had driven from Southbank in Melbourne's CBD to Coombe Yarra Valley...the majestic estate of world-famous opera singer Dame Nellie Melba (1861 - 1931) - born Helen Mitchell. Peach Melba sounds so much nicer than Peach Mitchell, don't you agree?



Coombe Yarra Valley Restaurant and Gallery



Coombe Yarra Valley

The enigmatic Helen took the name, Melba, from her home town... Melbourne and launched herself upon the world in late Victorian times to become as famous then as the likes of Elvis, Michael Jackson and Freddie Mercury were in their lifetimes...some say, she was perhaps even more famous.

She was certainly very wealthy and built the homestead in the Yarra Valley in 1912. The original cottage is still kept today as it was then, and a walk through the house and surrounding gardens is well worth the time.

Today Coombe - The Melba Estate is also a destination for fine dining and top quality wine. Enjoy a flight of wines at the cellar door, or book the restaurant for lunch and truly experience the food and wine on offer at this award-winning location.

The day I was there the restaurant was full of ladies (and a few gents) enjoying what looked like one of the best High Teas you could want to have put in front of you. At just A\$49 per person (A\$55 on Saturdays), I can understand why.

A mere five minutes drive and I was at Yarra Valley Dairy. What better way to enjoy a boutique wine than to match it with locally produced cheeses! The cheese shop is located in an original 100 year-old refurbished milking shed, right beside the cheese factory.

Enjoy their fresh handmade cheeses and locally produced wines whilst taking in the panoramic view across the Yarra Valley. Most of the cheeses are soft-style, in a French or Italian style, and only use the finest of locally sourced cows and goats milk. My favourite had to be the 'Hot Cow' (fresh cows milk curd with chives, parsley, garlic and chilli)...all washed down with a locally made glass of Chardonnay. With 15 cheeses to choose from there is bound to be one to satisfy any palette.

Just down the road is Napoleone Brewery and Cider House. The Napoleone family has been growing



Yarra Valley Dairy

fruit here since the 1940s, and since their first batch of Punt Road Wines was bottled back in 2001, they have added cider (2008) and craft beer (2014) to their repertoire. Among their many awards they won the Best Cider 2014 for their Pear Methode Traditionnelle.

The Yarra Valley is not really known for beer, so I was very surprised to learn that the history of it, in the Yarra, dates back to the early 1800's, and Napoleone is keen to ensure that continues. And with the 3rd generation of the Napoleone family at the helm, I'm sure it will. A\$15 will get you a tasting paddle of beer and/or cider so you can judge for yourself how they are doing!

I had been to the award-winning Oakridge Wines for lunch a few years ago, so I was excited that it was again included on my trip this time around, and although the menu had changed the exemplary service and high quality food is still there.

Like Napoleone Brewery, Oakridge is still family owned and has evolved in to an iconic destination in the Yarra Valley. It's also helped by the fact that they possess one of the best chief winemakers in Australia in David Bicknell.

The view from their dining area is as good as any across the Yarra, and so it was that I ordered a glass of their most recent Sauvignon Blanc whilst I waited for my food.



Yarra Valley Dairy



Four Pillars Distillery

A two-course lunch of this quality for A\$70 is well worth the 'investment' (A\$85 if you want three courses), so I ordered the Kangaroo shoulder with Yacon (like kumara), Finger Lime and Macadamias for entrée followed by Pork, chorizo, lentils and pear for main...I'm not a dessert person.

Suitably sated I headed to Domaine Chandon for a 'back tour' of their massive facility. Any visitor to the cellar door or restaurant can reserve a spot on one of their Chandon Sunday School tours and discover how 250 years of champagne history and Australian expertise goes in to every bottle of Chandon sparkling. Although at A\$125 per person I do think that is a touch expensive.

Nevertheless, the cool climate and great soil combine to ensure that Chandon maintains their place as Australia's leading methode traditionnelle producer and an increasing presence in the still wine market too.

My last stop on Day One - Yarra Valley of my 'Go Beyond Melbourne' adventure, before heading to the exquisite Chateau Yering for the evening, was Pillars Distillery in the sleepy hamlet of Healesville.

I love hearing stories about why people start their business and how they bring their life experiences and family members in to their success. Four Pillars Distillery is just such an example!

Whilst being shown around the distillery of this fine gin-brewing establishment I couldn't help but notice the names on the stills. 'Wilma' caught my eye!

"Why have you called this one Wilma?" I asked.

"It's named after the beautiful but explosively tempered mother of one of our founders", I was told. Tempting fate for a distillery company was what flashed though my mind! The other two stills are named after the mothers of the other two founders. Jude and Eileen...in case you're wondering, and (apparently) a little more 'mild-mannered'.

All jokes aside a tasting paddle of their finest gin is a must-do. The Rare Dry Gin was my favourite (and their most popular too), but I'd suggest you stay away from the Navy Strength Gin... unless you have a designated driver!



Domaine Chandon Lounge Bar



Phillip Island

Day 2 - Phillip Island:

Before heading off to Phillip Island, I had a date at the top of Mt. Dandenong to look over the beautiful Cloudehill Gardens and Nursery.

What an appropriate name - I really was in the clouds, as a heavy mist descended around the peak. The drive up to near the summit is winding and passes through a couple of quaint little villages along the way, but once you're there it really is a great way to spend a little time. No time to waste...I was off to Phillip Island, about an hour and a half drive away.

I'm no petrol-head, but I did know that once a year the population of Phillip Island swells to accommodate the Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix. It also has a few thousand little penguins that put on a show at the end of each day when they leave the water and return to their burrows.

My first stop was to get an aerial view of the island with Dave Dobson and his team at Phillip Island Helicopters. One word...stunning! The view of the coastline was breathtaking.



Phillip Island Helicopters

They offer a wide variety of choices when it comes to flights. Everyone knows that helicopters are not a cheap 'activity' while on holiday but Phillip Island Helicopters have a great array of flights from 8 minutes to over 40 minutes - something for every budget, with a safety record to go along with it.

Their new 12 minute Scenic Flight 2.5 is what I enjoyed and for A\$120 worth every cent.

My head would rest easily at the boutique Clifftop Accommodation tonight, but first lunch (and a glass of well-deserved Sauvignon Blanc) was calling me from just down the road at The Cape Kitchen.



The Cape Kitchen

With views across the Southern Ocean and food of an exceptional quality, The Cape Kitchen was a pleasant surprise. Their locally sourced produce enticed me to sample their Skull Island Grilled Prawns and Chicken Liver pâté but with their various sizes of tasting platters there is something for everyone to enjoy whilst you contemplate life, the universe and everything...with a stunning view...and a glass of wine.

Wining and dining then turned to adventure as I headed out with Phillip Island's Wild Ocean Eco Boat Adventures in to the Bass Strait. The weather was pretty choppy but the sturdy craft was more than able to 'make way' to the seal colony 2kms offshore.

Thousands of Australian fur seals make Seal Rocks their home, and they are very playful. Coming alongside the distinct odour is perhaps not for the passenger with a queasy stomach but the way the seals play and frolic around will soon dissipate that feeling.

Run by Phillip Island Nature Parks, the journey is no longer than 40 minutes to the rocks and the same back...with a few 'donuts on the water' to finish the journey back at the wharf. The whole waterfront is undergoing a redevelopment at present but will look very nice once



The Cape Kitchen

completed. The daily afternoon trips vary depending on the time of the year, but the 3pm departure will ensure you are back in time to head straight to view the penguins 20 minutes away.

The world famous Penguin Parade occurs every evening at dusk. There are a variety of options with respect to viewing and guiding for this activity so it is best to research what you want to do before you head to the Visitor's Centre. Be warned - it can get frightfully cold - so wrap up and take wet weather gear just in case.

The timing of these little creatures is surprisingly accurate - they run to a routine, so when they say around 5.30pm - they mean it... don't be late.

The Visitor's Centre is worth the admission price alone as it delves in to the region's aquatic environment.

Day 3 - Mornington Peninsula:

I have been, and always will be, a nature lover. So it was great to be able to finally visit Moonlit Sanctuary on my drive of about an hour from Phillip Island towards The Mornington Peninsula.



Moonlit Sanctuary

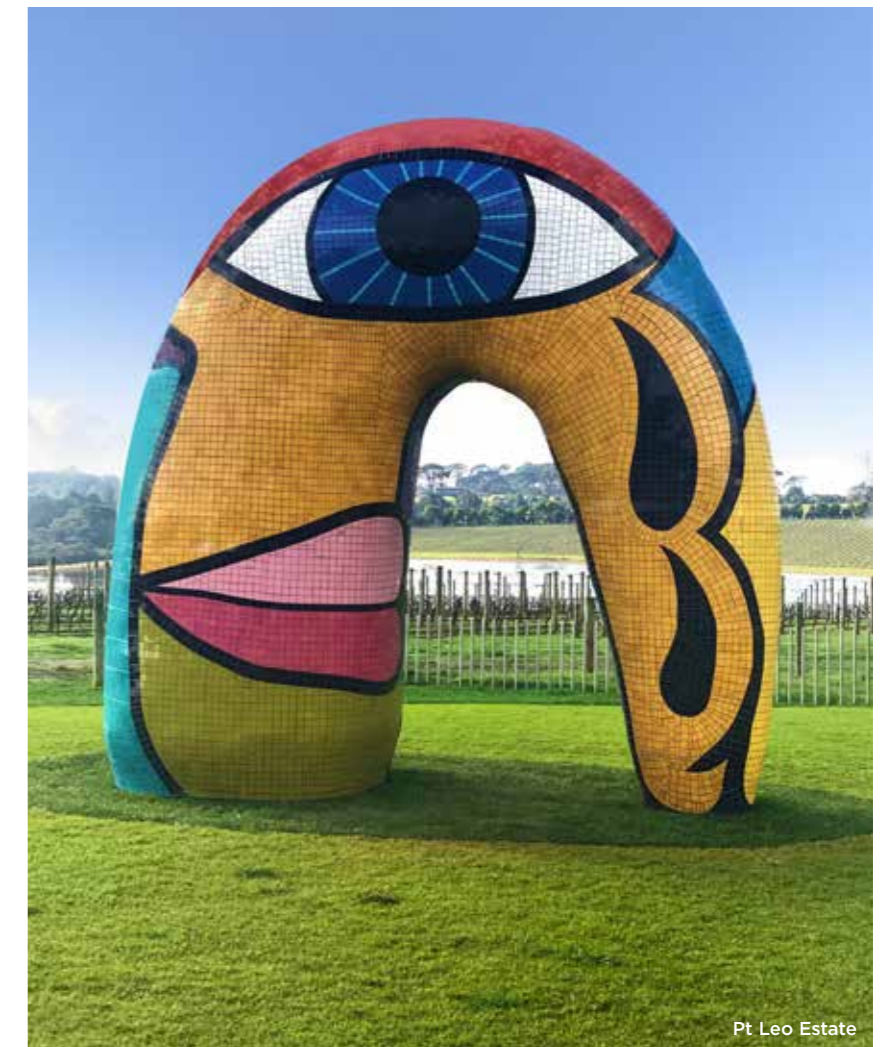
I'd heard much about it through the travel writers' grapevine over the years and was keen to experience.

Michael Johnson (not the runner) and his family have been at the heart of this project since development began in late 1998 (it opened in September 2001). Becoming more than just a place to take your kids to and go..."Oh, that koala is cute", Moonlit Sanctuary is just what it suggests...a sanctuary where much successful breeding of endangered creatures has taken place.

You may have to look a few of these up, but - Bettongs, Quolls, Dunnarts and many more owe their survival and thanks to Michael and his team.

Sure there are the touchy-feely opportunities of posing with a koala, or hand-feeding a wallaby but behind the scenes is what gives this operation huge kudos in my books. No wonder they are such an award-winning entity. Sustainable tourism in a natural environment!

On the road again, I drive the 20 odd minutes to (sigh) another winery and another stunning view...Pt Leo Estate. The point (pun intended) of the grounds at Pt Leo is to showcase the owner's very eclectic collection of modern artwork in a Sculpture Park.



Pt Leo Estate



Pt Leo Estate

Whilst not really my cup of tea the whole experience was very enlightening as I stopped to read many of the descriptions plaques of the 40 pieces of artwork.

I have to admit that my favourite was one called Laura.

The wine tasting and oysters that accompanied the wine were a very pleasant change from the normal 'cheese and crackers', and the aforementioned views really have to be some of the best in this entire region.

But wait...there's more! Montalto can also boast the views, food, wine and has a 30 strong sculpture collection across its abundant grounds. Does anyone see a theme to my trip forming?

Montalto offers three different dining experiences - a la carte in the Chef's Hat restaurant; casual dining in the Piazza and can also cater for private picnics. Produce is sourced from the surrounding estate and locally to ensure a genuine dining experience...Montalto style!

Just 20 minutes up the road is St



Montalto

Andrews Beach Brewery. Set on 92 acres, this was once home to one of Australia's premier horse training facilities. Enjoy a variety of craft beers and something to eat in the former stable of Melbourne Cup and Caulfield Cup winners - including three-time Melbourne Cup winner Makybe Diva (2003, 2004 and

2005). Don't worry the stables have been 'mucked out' and turned into a very pleasant dining area with a generous central courtyard for when the weather is great.

My last stop for the day before heading to the renowned Jackalope Hotel for the evening was a quick visit to The Peninsula Hot Springs, less than 10 minutes away.

Natural thermal mineral waters flow into the pools and private baths at this award-winning coastal oasis. The pools are staggered in a cascade with the view from the top bathing pool as panoramic as I had seen in the previous few days. What an ideal way to end a busy day...it is an idyllic setting for relaxation and rejuvenating the soul. Many of the other customers I spoke to had travelled some way to ensure they included this in their trip.

Day 4 - Bellarine Peninsula:

A mere hour's drive from Jackalope to Sorrento saw me driving my Avis rental car on to the ferry for the 40 minute trip across Port Phillip Bay to the historic town of Queenscliff. The

sleek ship has a comfortable lounge to enjoy the view of the bay from (not that I could see much that day as a heavy fog had descended), and can easily handle 30 vehicles in the hold.

It's worth a quick stop in Queenscliff when you get off the ferry. With beautiful grand old hotels and a proud military and maritime history a walk through the main street can find you all manner of cafés, knick-knack shops and great coffee to warm you up.

I stumbled upon The Queenscliff Brewhouse and was given a brief tour of their on-site brew making facilities. The building dates back to 1878 when it was The Esplanade Hotel and welcomed Melbourne day-trippers and holidaymakers to what became Victoria's premier seaside resort.

An essential destination (and my venue for lunch) is Jack Rabbit Vineyard's restaurant. Executive Chef, David Warmisham, has created a stunning, seasonal a la carte menu for even the most discerning palate.

But the unrivalled panoramic views across the bay to Melbourne, the You Yongs and Geelong really sealed the experience for me. The winery has forged a reputation as a gastronomic showpiece for the Bellarine Peninsula along with their award-winning array of wines too.

I chose the Charred Prawn tails for entrée and a simply superb piece of snapper fillet with Portarlington mussels for my main...all washed down by a glass (or two) of Jack Rabbit's 2017 Sauvignon Blanc.



Montalto



The Peninsula Hot Springs



The Peninsula Hot Springs



St Andrews Brewery



I have to say that for the standard of food I was served (along with the complimentary view) that for under A\$80 this was extremely good value for money.

A quick visit to Flying Brick Cider Co is also a must-do, even if it's just to admire the building it's housed in. The retro-inspired landmark offers up tasting paddles of cider, amazing food (without being fancy) and some of the best wines around. Obviously...they're owned by the same people who own Jack Rabbit!

Day 5 - Geelong:

After overnighting at Oakdene Vineyards, in an original 1920's homestead, I was heading back towards Melbourne, but not before a couple of final stops. Apart from being the home to the AFL Geelong Cats, there was nothing else I knew about this city about an hour southwest of Melbourne.

A stroll through some of the streets and the waterfront soon sorted that out. I'd highly recommend taking some time to visit Little Malop Street Precinct - Geelong's emerging spot to eat (akin to Melbourne's laneways) as well as the Baywalk Bollards. What started out as an art project has morphed in to an iconic trail of painted bollards showcasing the people who have played a part (big and small) in the history of Geelong.

Before I pointed my car back towards Melbourne I had time for a quick tour of Little Creatures Brewery in South Geelong. A bit (lot) like Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory...for beer! Everything about the place is quirky...including the menu, buildings, beer names and staff!

There you have it folks. How to spend five days outside Melbourne without having to drive much more than an hour at a time! I learnt a lot about the region, drank and ate too much, met a load of fun people who simply want to showcase this stunning region to the world with all the passion each fibre of their body can muster. Some were eccentric - all were relatable, interesting and above all friendly. 🍺



facts:

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Montalto
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Red Hill South 3927
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St Andrews Beach Brewery
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Peninsula Hot Springs
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P: + 61 3 5950 8777
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Searoad Ferries
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Queenscliff 3225
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www.searoad.com.au

Jack Rabbit Vineyard
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Bellarine 3221
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www.jackrabbitvineyard.com.au

Flying Brick Cider Co
1251 Bellarine Highway
Wallington 3222
P: + 61 3 5250 6577
www.flyingbrickciderco.com.au

Little Creatures Brewery
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Oakdene Vineyards Restaurant
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www.oakdene.com.au

Gary was hosted on his journey by the amazing staff from Go Beyond Melbourne.
www.gobeyondmelbourne.com

Jackalope Hotel

Set on a pristine property amid the world-renowned Mornington Peninsula wine region, a breathtaking vineyard frames a luxury hotel, unique in both destination and design.



Jackalope's daring emprise, a delicate interplay between the ideal and surreal, is delivered through boldly curated installations and collaborations with some of the world's principal designers.

The 45 designer dens deliver absolute in-room reverie. Interiors are lavished with custom-made comforts, while floor-to-ceiling windows and private terraces connect the room's contemporary design with its country entwine. The result is a new level of luxury in high-end Australia accommodation.

In the spirit of the on-site winery's single vineyard heritage, Jackalope's

hatted restaurant, Doot Doot Doot, delivers food at an exquisite level. Executive Chef, Guy Stanaway, and Head Chef, Elliott Pinn present an ever-evolving five-course tasting menu drawing on seasonal offerings from the hotel's kitchen garden and select Mornington Peninsula producers, and the best cooked breakfast I have had in a long, long time.

Be sure to take a visit, before dining, to Flaggedoot, Jackalope's cocktail bar - where their experienced mixologists will whip up any cocktail you desire without the tackiness of the Tom Cruise movie of the same name.



facts:

Jackalope Hotel
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The vines were planted in 1989 and today the 11-hectare (28-acre) Willow Creek Vineyard has taken root in deep volcanic soils, known for producing rich flavours. This cool-climate vineyard produces pinot noir, chardonnay, cabernet, pinot gris and sauvignon blanc. Under winemaker, Geraldine McFaul, Willow Creek Vineyard has grown in reputation as one of the premier producers on the Mornington Peninsula - renowned for elegant single vineyard wines.

The hotel's winery restaurant, Rare Hare, delivers a food and wine affair, with a devil-may-care air. With room for 90 tails (guests), Rare Hare boasts indoor and outdoor dining overlooking the vine-laced hills and across to Jackalope Hotel's striking silhouette.

Jackalope is a destination in itself; with the imposing Emily Floyd designed 7m Jackalope sculpture at the entrance to the hotel, you feel like you are about to experience something truly unique around every carefully laid out corner of the hotel. A little expensive...perhaps, but then for this level of service and quality of dining I think your budget should accommodate a stay here. 🍷

Chateau Yering

Less than 60 minutes drive from Melbourne's CBD and International airport, this gracious Victorian mansion sits grandly on a 250 acre estate. With sweeping views across the Yarra Valley and their heritage garden, guests are offered an exclusive and refined ambience, not often seen today, to relax and unwind.



The iconic Chateau Yering Hotel was reborn in 1997 as a gracious 5-star property. This historic homestead offers luxury accommodation, award-winning dining at Eleonore's Restaurant and provides the perfect location for a conference, wedding, special event or a romantic getaway.

The accommodation at Chateau Yering consists of 32 suites individually decorated with different colour schemes and fine furnishings.

There are 4 types - Melba, Stable, Yarra and Yering - all as lavish and inviting as each other, and each boasting a private balcony or veranda, many of which offer guests fantastic views into the gardens and the Great Dividing Ranges.

My Yarra Suite of 48 sq.m included a stunning period-themed king-sized bed, an ornate marble ensuite complete with spa bath and separate shower, along with the aforementioned stunning views of the Yarra Valley.



facts:

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The dining at Eleonore's (the hotel's main restaurant) was some of the best during my Beyond Melbourne adventure. Eleonore's Restaurant is elegant, with a menu designed by a creative team of award-winning chefs to delight your taste buds. The creative choice of ingredients and their daring combinations will ensure your dining experience in Eleonore's Restaurant will be long remembered.

For 13 years running they have been awarded a One Chef's Hat rating and nothing I experienced would lead me to believe that 2018 wouldn't lead to a 14th straight year.

Chateau Yering is a throwback to a by-gone era of service and exclusivity with the original dwelling dating back to the mid-1800s. The extensive wine cellar pre-dates the house construction.

In designing the interiors, particularly with the selection of appropriate colours and finishes, Elly Milner (co-owner since 1996) was determined that the hotel reflect its heritage. She searched extensively both in Australia and overseas for suitable antique furniture and fittings - and has achieved a marvel of luxurious elegance. ■■

Oakdene, Bellarine Peninsula

Oakdene is an eclectic property on the Bellarine Peninsula with just three guest rooms, but including a vineyard, cellar door, a café and the unusually named restaurant...Marty@Oakdene. The building is an original 1920s homestead and has been beautifully restored.



Renowned as a fantastic addition to the Bellarine Peninsula with absolutely flawless execution and presentation, Marty@Oakdene (formerly known as Oakdene Vineyards Restaurant) boasts a modern Australian and European cuisine with an array of fresh local produce. Award-winning Executive Chef & Owner, Welshman Marty Chichester previously owned and managed popular restaurants in Wales and Sydney.

The menus at the contemporary dining Marty@Oakdene are designed using local and regional produce, giving patrons a wide variety of carefully prepared dishes representing seasonal ingredients with unique flavours and textures that will suit all tastes. Various dining options are available, including a la carte and degustation menus.

Marty's vision for the future of Oakdene (especially the restaurant) is that it will become a dining complex



facts:

Oakdene Vineyards Restaurant
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that can cater for all occasions and budgets. The food includes a high level of presentation and execution followed by the exceptional service that has been the forefront of the restaurant since the day it started. FYI...try the steak (medium rare of course)!

I slept with Marilyn Monroe that night. Well...not THE Marilyn of course - but that's the name of one of the three rooms. The themed Marilyn's Room features an in-room, all glass en-suite for a romantic and intimate getaway. With countryside views of the vineyards and gardens, a stay in Marilyn's Room is a relaxing and unforgettable experience. The other two rooms are called Attic and Water - not nearly as inviting but luxuriously decorated none-the-less.

Tantalise your taste buds with the relaxed casual menu at the Oakdene cafe. The equally exoticly-named MrGrubb@Oakdene offers an exciting menu of share plates, pizzas, burgers and salads.

They are also open for coffee and cake, or simply to enjoy a glass of Oakdene wine. Sit, relax and take in the garden views or dine outside amongst the magnificent birch trees. Whatever your choice...relax - that is what Oakdene did to me. 🍷



Clifftop Accommodation, Phillip Island

Just 90 minutes from Melbourne's CBD, Clifftop's Phillip Island location is exceptional. Perched between sea and sky offering you views over the ever-changing waters of Smiths Beach, Pyramid Rock and Bass Strait on one side and, on the other, beautiful rolling farmland. Surrounded by native vegetation Clifftop not only offers magical scenic views, you'll be thrilled at the wildlife that makes its home in this beautiful spot.



facts:

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Clifftop accommodation comprises eight elegant and individual rooms. Stay in a bright and airy Ocean View suite, pamper yourself in a Spa suite or make tracks to the beach and get up close to the wildlife in the Grassland suite.

It was great to sit back in the licenced lounge with a glass of wine and one of the best Ploughman's platters I have been served up since I returned home from the UK many years ago.

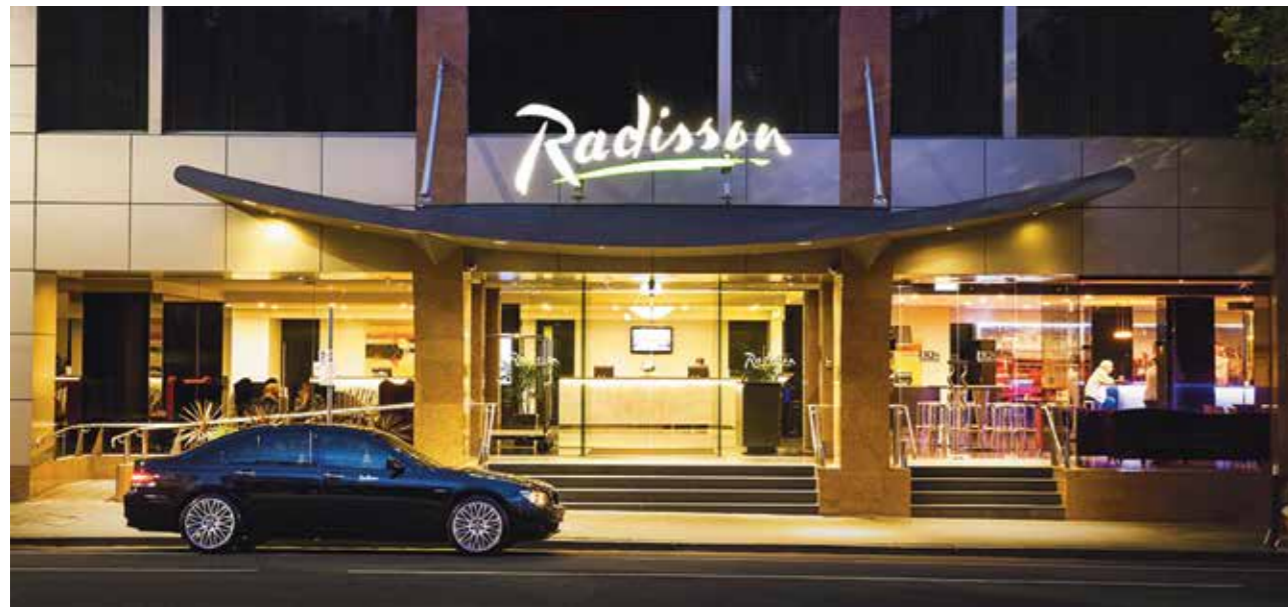
The ambience of the property is what would see me return again but you can also choose from a range of Island experiences to enjoy in addition to your accommodation, or just add a touch of romance to your room; rose petals, spectacular dinner packages, locally produced chocolates, a luxurious in-room massage and other seasonal options.

Why not pamper your significant other half with the Helicopter Package? This includes two nights accommodation in one of the premier Ocean View Suites, a 15 minute helicopter ride in conjunction with Phillip Island Helicopters and a gourmet hamper for two to share after the flight (A\$832). If that doesn't impress him/her then nothing will. ■■



Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens Melbourne

Explore Australia's cultural capital with ease from Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens Melbourne. This modern 4-star hotel is within walking distance of Etihad Stadium, the ideal place to catch a footy match, and the world-famous Queen Victoria Market, where you can load up on fresh produce and local goods.



It is only about a 15 minute walk to Flinders Street Station as well, and the property is in the free tram zone of Melbourne's CBD - making getting around Victoria's capital city all the more easier.

You can also head across the street to enjoy a scenic stroll through Flagstaff Gardens, Melbourne's oldest park, or take in the creative street art on display throughout the district. At the end of a busy day, return to the Radisson for expertly prepared meals and refreshing beverages at HQ's on William. Later, enjoy breathtaking views of the Melbourne skyline from our hotel's rooftop gymnasium and spa. The friendly team includes a 24-hour concierge who can give you insider tips to help you make the most of your Melbourne experience.

Amenities and services include:

- Rooftop gymnasium with steam room and spa
- Free Wi-Fi
- 24-hour business centre
- On-site parking (a rarity this close to the central city)
- 24-hour reception desk and concierge
- 24-hour room service



The 184 rooms and suites can cater to all mix of travellers, families or business people and the award-winning team who work alongside General Manager, Clinton Farley, are some of the most attentive you'll find in my favourite Australian city. I love coming back to The Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens. 🍷

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