

Media Backgrounder

Why you shouldn't miss dawn and dusk When you Go Beyond Melbourne

Every traveller knows there are special sights you can only see at dawn and dusk. And when you Go Beyond Melbourne, those sights may well become the highlights of your travels.

The four extraordinary regions that make up Go Beyond Melbourne - the Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges, Phillip Island, the Mornington Peninsula, Geelong and the Bellarine - are just 90 minutes' drive away. But you're a whole world away from the city, because this is where some quite magical things happen.

Stay overnight in these regions in a vineyard estate, an historic mansion or a luxury seaside apartment, and you'll quickly realise that dawn and dusk are the best times to see kangaroos, wallabies and other animals going about life in their natural habitat. Australia's colourful and sometimes vocal birdlife, including the elusive and beautiful lyre bird, venture out to forage in peaceful forests and bushlands at dawn and dusk when few people are around.



Many holiday activities are best experienced in the early morning...you can tee off in the crisp dawn air at a world-class golf course where kangaroos and wallabies may watch from the edge of the fairway...catch a wave and call the ocean your own on a sunrise surf...cast a line from a village pier when the fish are most likely to be biting...watch the sunrise from a breathtaking beach.

The night skies and stars are also at their very best away from the city's bright lights. So pull up a comfortable chair on your verandah, pour a glass of local wine, hand-crafted beer or cider, sit back and watch nature's spectacular light show.

So here are eight good reasons why you should stay overnight for some very special experiences when you Go Beyond Melbourne.



1. Wildlife

Early morning and late afternoon are the most rewarding times to see kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, echidnas and other native animals. Top spots: the rainforest walks in the Dandenong Ranges; Seawinds Gardens at Arthurs Seat State Park on the Mornington Peninsula, the Yarra River banks at Warburton to see native platypus playing in the river in the late afternoon; Serendip Sanctuary at the foot of the You Yangs for kangaroos, emus and more than 150 species of birdlife; a sunrise snorkel with wild dolphins and seals in the quiet waters of Port Phillip Bay; pelican feeding at San Remo on Phillip Island and spotting the giant manta rays under the pier.

In the evening, there's the celebrated Penguin Parade on Phillip Island, while at the Mornington Peninsula's Moonlit Sanctuary there are lantern-lit tours where rare and endangered nocturnal species give a whole new meaning to nightlife. Werribee Open Range Zoo on the Bellarine Peninsula has an overnight glamping experience where lions, giraffes, zebras, rhinos, hippos and gorillas roam.

2. Birdlife

From mid-April to early May 300,000 shearwater chicks make a spectacular sunset departure to fly 16,000 km from Phillip Island to feed near Alaska in the northern summer. The beautiful Lyre birds, with their decorative and showy tails, imitate just about anything and anyone from chain saws and trains, to motorcycles and other birds. The best spots to see them are the forests of the Dandenong Ranges. Try the Eastern Sherbrooke Forest Walk in the early morning, stopping at Grants Picnic Ground afterwards to feed wild birds such as sulphur crested cockatoos, crimson rosellas and brilliantly coloured lorikeets. The laughing kookaburra's distinctive call is often heard in bush in the late afternoon in all regions.



3. Hot air balloons, Mustangs and sunset cruises

Nothing compares to drifting upwards at dawn, floating over mist-wreathed vineyards in a hot air balloon, then celebrating at Global Ballooning's traditional champagne breakfast in the Yarra Valley. On the Bellarine Peninsula, early mornings are the best time to have your driver flip the roof down on your convertible Mustang as you tour the beautiful coast. Tip: have breakfast as the sun comes up at The Heads Restaurant which perches right over the ocean. A favourite sunrise spot on Phillip Island is the Cape Kitchen, with its oceanfront setting looking out to Cape Woolamai, Pyramid Rock the Southern Ocean and Bass Strait. Bayplay's champagne sunset sailing cruise of Port Phillip Bay leaves from the Mornington Peninsula, and is often accompanied by playful dolphins.



4. Stars and lights

No city lights, just pure, clear country air and a vast canopy of stars in the southern skies. Lie back in the naturally heated mineral water hilltop pool at Peninsula Hot Springs on the Mornington Peninsula and look for shooting stars; drive to the Peninsula's highest point of Arthurs Seat for the stars overhead and the lights of seaside villages sparkling for miles below; walk under the star-studded sky at Cowes, Newhaven, Rhyll or San Remo on Phillip Island. At Marysville in the Yarra Valley, the dramatic 84 metre Steavenson Falls are brilliantly lit at night; on the Bellarine Peninsula you should head right to the end of Point Lonsdale Jetty, to The Bluff at Barwon Heads or the hills around Portarlington for star gazing.

5. Gardens and landscapes

Blue Lotus Gardens in the Yarra Valley has exquisite night flowering waterlilies, including the famous Giant Lily. Arrive at 9am on a summer weekend when these vivid flowers are still open and creating a brilliant swathe of colour over the ponds. Sunrise over the vines is a magical sight, particularly when the early morning mist hovers over them. Stay overnight in luxe vineyard apartments and hotels in the Yarra Valley, Bellarine Peninsula and Mornington Peninsula. In the Dandenong Ranges, the 100-year-old Puffing Billy steam train chugs through virgin forests, and will take you for a classic Australian 'dine and dance' in an historic packing shed.

6. Golf

Some of Australia's top-ranking courses are on the Bellarine Peninsula and Mornington Peninsula. Be first on the tees, and you may have an audience of kangaroos and wallabies, birds of prey, and colourful parrots swooping and calling in the trees.



7. Photography

The early morning and late afternoon light can't be beaten for landscape photography. On Phillip Island, go to Cape Woolamai and Pyramid Rock at sunset, and to San Remo, Rhyll or Newhaven at sunrise. On the Mornington Peninsula head 314m up to Arthurs Seat with views right back to Melbourne, go to the lighthouse and cliffs of wild Cape Schanck, or to the tip of the Mornington Peninsula at Point Nepean. In the Yarra Valley, the pros go to Maroondah Reservoir just past Healesville for the views back at the Yarra Valley, and they snap the 360 degree views from the lookout tower on top of Mount Donna Buang. The Dandenong Ranges reveal stunning sunset views over Melbourne to the west; on the Bellarine, head for the Geelong Waterfront, Portarlington or Queenscliff as the sun rises magnificently over the water.

8. Surfing

Surf in the pristine early morning when the water is clear, there are fewer people and less wind. Six of Victoria's top 10 surf beaches are right here: Thirteenth Beach and Ruffs Beach on the Bellarine Peninsula; Cape Woolamai and Smiths Beach on Phillip Island; Gunnamatta Beach and Point Leo on the Mornington Peninsula.



For more information or themed 5-day itineraries beyond Melbourne:

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