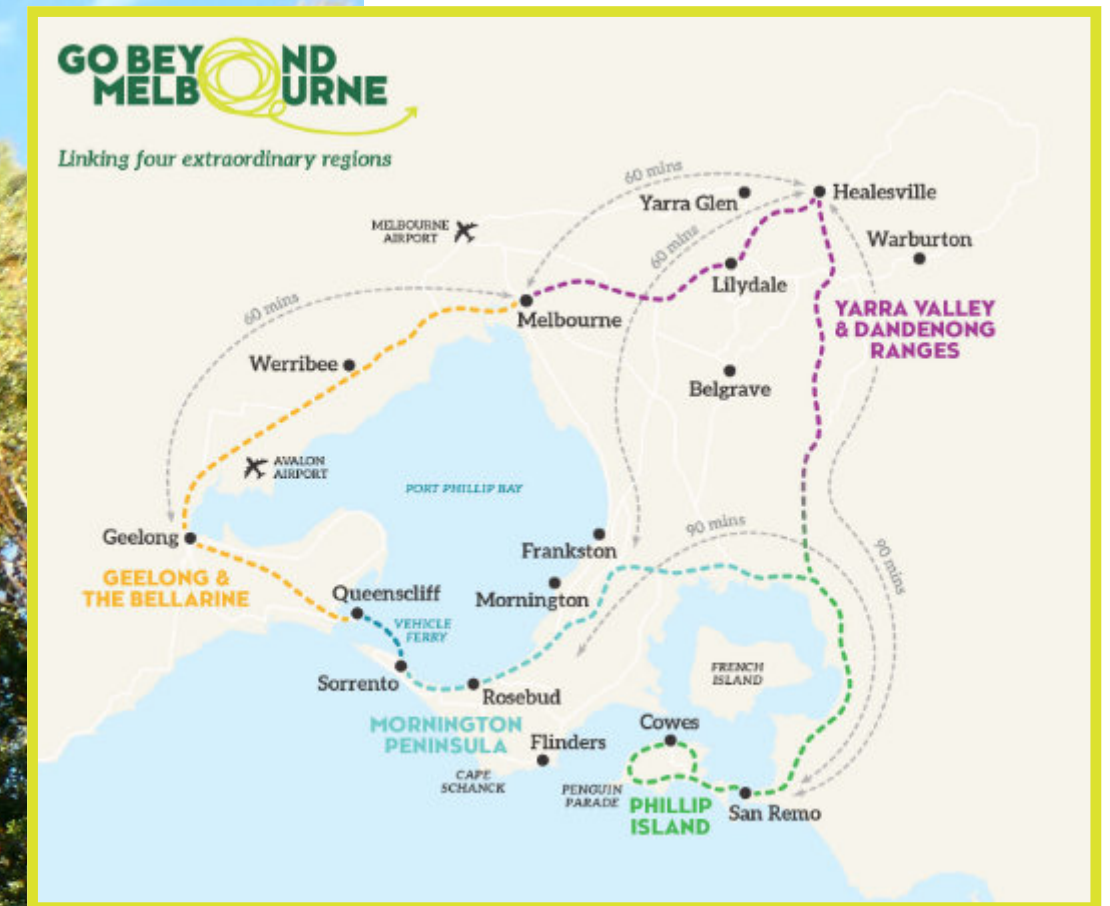


BEYOND MELBOURNE

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IMAGES: MY AUSSIE TRAVEL GUIDE

FOUR DISTINCT REGIONS WITH AN ENDLESS VARIETY OF EXPERIENCES, AND ALL WITHIN A STONE'S THROW OF MELBOURNE'S CBD.



Victoria is packed with destinations well-suited for those travelling in an RV, so we hit the road to see what the four regions of the Go Beyond Melbourne route had to offer. With seven days up our sleeve to pack in as much as possible, our travelling extravaganza uncovered a range of experiences within these regions. Here's a taste of what you can do in a week when you go beyond Melbourne... and it's all just 90 minutes from the CBD.

THE GO BEYOND MELBOURNE ROUTE

The Go Beyond Melbourne (GBM) website is an excellent planning resource for the four regions: the Yarra Valley, Mornington Peninsula, Phillip Island, Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula. While the website provides suggested itineraries to cover a variety of interests, it's the site's online trip planning tool that's a standout.

The tool allowed us to personalise our itinerary, and the map displayed our selections while providing detailed directions and distances between things to help us navigate. Modifications were easy if changes were necessary, and everything could be printed if need be.

The aim of our GBM visit was to experience a good mix of what each of the four regions offered, and we kickstarted things off in the Yarra Valley.

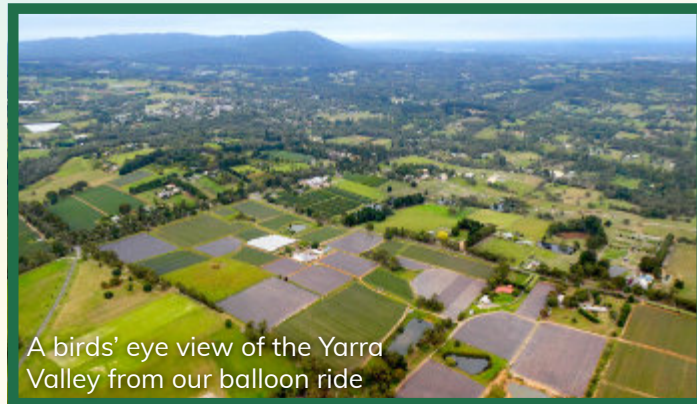
YARRA VALLEY

Beginning our trip from the outskirts of Melbourne, we made a beeline up the highway to Yarra Glen.

It's no secret the Yarra Valley produces top-notch wines. And with 70 wineries around the valley, there's plenty of choice. Rochford and DeBortoli wineries were on our radar this time around. We also visited Coombe, which was once home to opera singer Dame Nellie Melba. The property is exceptionally beautiful, with stunning formal gardens through to exquisite wines and a restaurant. Guided tours of her house are also available.

But there's far more to the Yarra Valley than food and wine. A visit to Healesville Sanctuary will get you up close to some iconic Australian wildlife. The sanctuary is also home to the Australian Wildlife Health Centre, so swing by to watch veterinary staff treat and care for sick, injured or orphaned wildlife.

For something special in the Yarra Valley, we took to the skies in a hot air balloon. It was smiles all around as we floated over the vineyards and farms of the valley below. And the smiles didn't stop once we landed, as this is when the champagne flowed and hot breakfast followed.



A birds' eye view of the Yarra Valley from our balloon ride



Kids having fun on the treetop walk at the Enchanted Adventure Garden

The valley has the complete gamut of accommodation, and we bunkered down at the Big 4 Yarra Valley Park Lane. The park is situated in a natural bush setting and has a bunch of facilities for those travelling in an RV.

PHILLIP ISLAND

The island is renowned for its beaches, wildlife encounters, seaside villages and motorcycle racing, so it's little wonder it is popular with tourists and those simply looking to escape the city. It's also one place we'd had on our radar for years.

The island's compact size (26x9km) was easy to get around, using the Anchor Belle Holiday Park in Cowes as our base for a couple of nights. Eco-tourism is a hot activity on the island, so we started with a visit to the Antarctic Journey at Nobbies Centre to learn more about this virtual attraction.

Taking one for the team at Moonlit Sanctuary Conservation Park

But for a real-life encounter, we couldn't pass up a visit to the Koala Conservation Centre and the Penguin Parade. Watching hundreds of Little Penguins from a distance while they make their dash up the beach ended up being one of our island highlights.



Phillip Island's Grand Prix Circuit is the perfect place for enthusiasts



Little Penguin nesting on Phillip Island



Getting ready to take to the skies





Puffing Billy in full swing



Getting our L plates to Segway at Rochford Wines



Getting the lowdown of Queenscliff and its surrounds during the heritage walk



Point Lonsdale beach is popular with those learning to surf

MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Dramatic coastal views, farmgate experiences and the region's history are all the things we looked for when planning our Mornington Peninsula stay. We knew it would be a lot to cover, but we were up for the challenge. For this visit, we based ourselves in the middle of the peninsula at the local shire's foreshore campgrounds in Rosebud.

The gondola ride at Arthurs Seat is suitable for folk of all ages. The ride provides stunning views across Port Phillip Bay and towards Melbourne. Another activity that's suited to the whole family is a visit to the Enchanted Adventure Garden. There's plenty to do here, including treetop walks, slides and zip-lining.

If you've worked up an appetite from all that exercise and activity, there's always a winery or two to visit. Wine lovers will be in their element, with over 200 vineyards in this region that produce a variety of cool climate wines.

A restored chicory kiln on French Island

Further down the peninsula, we lapped up the dramatic coastal scenery at Cape Schanck and visited the reserve's 160-year-old lighthouse. Further around the peninsula, the Point Nepean National Park is home to the historical Quarantine Station, which dates back to 1852.

At the end of an action-packed day, it's easy enough to slow your touring pace down with a visit to the Peninsula Hot Springs. With more than 50 baths of varying temperature, it was a blissful way to end our Mornington Peninsula stay.



Andrew from Narana Aboriginal Cultural Centre introducing us to a couple of his friends

BELLARINE PENINSULA

A 45-minute ferry ride across Port Phillip Bay from Sorrento to Queenscliff Harbour is all it took to reach our final region. And with the motorhome unloaded shortly after docking, we were on our way before we knew it.

For our Bellarine Peninsula stay, we based ourselves at the Big 4 Beacon Resort at Queenscliff.

With our limited knowledge of the area, we joined a 90-minute heritage walking tour arranged by the visitor's information centre to learn more. We were quick to learn that Queenscliff oozes history at every turn.

On the foreshore, Fort Queenscliff was built in 1860 and was just one of our peninsula highlights. Originally built to defend the entrance to Port Phillip Bay, today it's an active Australian army base with public guided tours available.

If we hadn't squeezed enough out of our seven days touring along the Go Beyond Melbourne route by now, our last stop was Geelong's Gaol Museum. Another place on our list for a while, our visit finally came to fruition.

Without giving too much away, let's just say our night tour was interesting! Originally opening in 1853, the gaol's history spans nearly 140 years in some shape or form, before closing its doors in the 1990s to become a museum.

OUR FINAL THOUGHTS

We found the four regions of the Go Beyond Melbourne route well-suited for travelling with an RV, with our large RV's size not posing any issues with parking or access. Our initial research on the Go Beyond Melbourne website made selecting attractions and destinations easy, but it was the trip planning tool that went a long way towards stress-free navigating.

This alone is worth its weight in gold. Yes, we crammed a lot into the seven days we were on the road, and you could easily spend a week or two in each of the regions. So you could say we're treating our week-long sojourn as an excellent introduction and we can't wait to go back.

+ READ FULL STORY



We made a quick visit to Cape Schanck on the Mornington Peninsula