

THE FLEURIEU



STUDDERED WITH FOOD AND WINE TREASURES, DOTTED WITH SMALL TOWNS AND RIMMED BY SENSATIONAL BEACHES AND RUGGED CLIFFS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S FLEURIEU PENINSULA IS SERIOUSLY LOVELY...

WORDS: Margaret Barca

Sometimes I wonder why we bother – we are always getting lost. It's typical that we miss the turn off on the road, only 40 minutes or so from Adelaide.

Exasperated, I swing the car around to head back, and there, sitting quietly on the edge of a paddock, right near the road, is a kangaroo and its joey, both sitting bolt upright nibbling on grass.

And really, that's what the Fleurieu Peninsula is like. It's full of small, unexpected surprises. It's on the edge of suburbia but turn off the main road and you're a million miles away.

The Peninsula, jutting into the Southern Ocean south of Adelaide, is a landscape of gently undulating hills, vineyards and olive groves, paddocks peppered with gum trees, rimmed by a coastline of rugged cliffs and surf-washed beaches. The towns are small and friendly, the fishing is good, the surf's ace, the wine is amazing and the food is great. It's Australia at its low-key best.

We pull off the freeway from Adelaide as soon as we can to head to the western coast, zig-zagging in and out, from Port Noarlunga with its silvery pier and marine reserve to beautiful Maslin Beach (the state's first nude or 'unclad' beach) and on to Silver Sands with its views of softly folded hills and then the wide sweep of Aldinga Beach, where ragged red cliffs dip straight into the ocean at its southern end. A little further on, on a rise across from Sellicks Beach, we stop in at the >>

Main image, Children play on pretty Maslin Beach

A VINE ROMANCE



A lush green vineyard in McLaren Vale

Just 40 minutes' drive from Adelaide, McLaren Vale's sweeping vineyards are home to some of the country's best wineries. There are more than 70 cellar doors and with the first vines planted in the 1830s, there's some serious history. The undulating landscape, silvery olive trees, ocean views and dry stone walls add to the area's charm.

Pick up a wine map from the McLaren Vale Visitors' Centre and start exploring. Cyclists and walkers can follow the eight kilometre Shiraz Trail, running from McLaren Vale to Willunga along the old railway line.

On Osborn Road, d'Arenberg is one of the region's best-known wineries. We sample wines at the cellar door in the atmospheric 1880s stables, then walk across to d'Arrys Verandah, one of the region's signature restaurants, with a high-end menu and a lovely view.

We decide we'd prefer something more low key, however, and we've heard about Ekhidna Wines, on Foggo Road, and soon we're sitting in the sunshine beside the vines enjoying a crisp white wine and an Antipasto Platter.



Dining al fresco at Ekhidna Wines

We love the look of The Salopian Inn, on the edge of Willunga, which is in a fabulous heritage building (this was an inn way back in the 1850s). It's renowned for its food, with a surprising menu (everything from Berkshire pork buns to Crispy silken Tofu). This is also the cellar door for Heirloom Vineyards.

For something completely different we stop at Alpha Box & Dice, where winemaker Justin Lane produces distinctive, sometimes eclectic wines (his words). The cellar door is in a converted stables and furnished with kooky curios. It's relaxed and friendly and it's enticing to while away the afternoon beneath their shady umbrellas.

So many wines, so little time. We have to leave... But we'll be back.

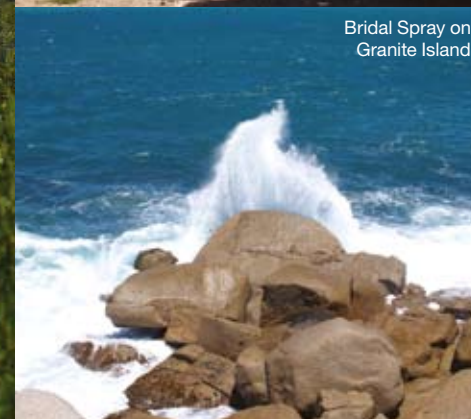
■ For more information about McLaren Vale visit www.mclarenvale.info.

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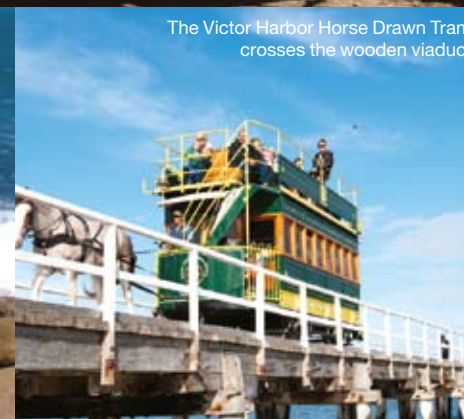
The Cockle Train in Victor Harbor



Bridal Spray on Granite Island



The Victor Harbor Horse Drawn Tram crosses the wooden viaduct



volunteers – the half-hour trip from the river port of Goolwa, skirting the coast through Port Elliot and Middleton to Victor Harbor.

Next stop for us is Port Elliot. It's small – a ribbon of shops and buildings on the road to Goolwa – but you can pick up the buzz even driving through. The Fleurieu's beach towns tend to be beachy, low-key and laidback.

Port Elliot is about as ritzy as they get. We check out the shops along North Terrace, and can't resist a coffee at South Sea Books, the perfect combination of good bookstore and comfortable café. A short drive up, The Strand past solid sandstone houses to the top of the hill is rewarded by a spectacular view of Horseshoe Bay. The ocean washes in on a curve of pale sand and the weathered timbers of the decaying pier are a reminder of the days when goods were loaded onto sailing ships here.

A stone path leads to the foreshore and the Flying Fish Café. A canvas roof, timber decking, espresso machine pumping out great-smelling coffee and the sun glinting off the surf – what's not to love? Kids are ordering ice creams at a side window, but it's a late lunch for us

The Encounter Bikeway offers cyclists a pretty scenic ride



Victory Hotel. They don't just serve up pub meals here – Poached prawn and crispy pork salad with green mango and mint, and Scallops with macadamia nuts, chilli and yellow zucchini are typical fare.

And the desserts. Kaffir lime soaked sponge with mango, sugared peanuts and passionfruit curd, and Dark chocolate and cherry pie. Yum. The wine list looks truly exceptional. The ocean view is pretty impressive too.

It's not much further to Cape Jervis, the jumping off point for famed Kangaroo Island, but on this trip we're headed inland and south-east to Victor Harbor for some history. The countryside is quintessentially South Australian – grazing country with tall stands of gum, golden grass, old stone farmhouses and a scattering of rusting farm machinery.

We're greeted in Victor Harbor by the broad expanse of Encounter Bay and an old-fashioned, family-friendly town with sturdy sandstone pubs, classic old bank buildings, grassy foreshore, towering pines and signs of its rich heritage.

Our first stop is a ride on the Victor Harbor Horse Drawn Tram that wends its way across the causeway to Granite Island. In the 1800s, holidaymakers in

suits and their elegant partners in vast hats and gloves sat sedately on the double-decker timber tram for the trip.

We're a tad more casually dressed but we love the slow, swaying motion and the gentle plod of the Clydesdale.

GRANITE ISLAND

On the small island, we follow the walking trail that loops around and are mesmerised by the water crashing in on

day fishing at sea. In the winter months the cliffs and headlands on this coast here are the perfect land-based sites for spotting giant Southern Right Whales on their annual migration to Encounter Bay to breed and calve.

It's summer though, so from our vantage point we have to make do with a pod of dolphins (okay, that was pretty exciting!) and seabirds whirling overhead, before walking back over the bridge.

“THE HORSE-DRAWN TRAM WENDS ITS WAY ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY TO GRANITE ISLAND”

the rocks at Bridal Spray. In the 1830s the air would have echoed to the sounds of whalers, but today it's a nature reserve and there's just the squawk of seagulls as they swoop in search of fish (or a tourist's abandoned chips).

A colony of Little Penguins, the world's smallest penguins, nest on the island and there's an interpretive centre tucked into the rocks. At dusk you can watch these cute little birds waddling in from their

We stop in at the South Australian Whale Centre, three floors of information and intriguing displays in a former railway goods shed. During the whale season this is the place to go for up-to-date information on sightings and to arrange tours.

Before we leave we wander to the station to see the so-called Cockle Train. The train ran – and still does, with the steam and diesel locomotives manned by



and then we're off to Middleton to hire bikes at Surf & Sand to ride along the Encounter Bikeway.

The shop also hires surfboards and has surfing lessons so we are planning a return trip, but today it's cycling and soon we're whizzing along on our bikes, en-route to Goolwa. The Bikeway is an on- and off-road trail covering around 30 kilometres with some stunning coastal views along the way.

The old river port of Goolwa, where

with boats, kayaking, fishing, birdwatching, or actually, just relaxing, which is what we do. We have a coffee at Hector's on the Wharf, watching pelicans fly by. It's a little early in the day to sample the wares at The Steam Exchange Brewery, but we're planning to do that too. And when we hear about kayaking on the Coorong, we add that to our must-do list.

We cycle back, return our bikes and load the car. We're headed north via

If you can, time your visit for the Saturday Farmers Market. If you're self-catering you can stock up, but if not, it's a great way to idle away a morning.

The concept is 'meet the grower, taste the region' and it's amazing what we learn by chatting to the locals. Who knew there are 'hundreds' of varieties of strawberries, or that the local lavender is hand-harvested with a scythe for the heavenly lavender teas and pink lemonade?

Harts Vegetables is positively overflowing with purple potatoes, heirloom carrots, corn and red shallots. There's goats cheese and fresh honey, Yankaponga lamb and an amazing variety of fresh herbs. Natural, organic, chemical-free, handmade – they're bywords here for the fare produced and sold by passionate locals.

The market is held every Saturday, except for the Saturday in January when the international Tour Down Under cyclists wend there way through town and up the Willunga hill.

After the market, we visit Willunga Bakery for a classic shepherd's pie. Then, sharing the love around, we walk down to the slightly hippie Green Room, for a healthy orange, lemon and ginger juice on their sunny balcony.

And then on to McLaren Vale with its amazing vineyards, wineries and welcoming cellar doors. 🇦🇺

“THE OLD RIVER PORT OF GOOLWA IS THE GATEWAY TO THE MAGNIFICENT COORONG NATIONAL PARK”

the Murray River meets the sea, has a history of sailing ships, paddle-steamers and boat building and is the gateway to the magnificent Coorong National Park, renowned for its wetlands and birdlife.

Some marvellous buildings line the tree-shaded main street, including the grand sandstone Australasian, now a boutique hotel and restaurant. We walk along to the marina, where we can hear the gentle clink of the rigging on yachts and other boats moored on the still water.

Goolwa is now a holiday town, popular with anyone who likes messing about

Victor Harbor and the road winds up to Mount Compass and then on to Willunga, through farming country, past majestic pines and along a magical stretch of road edged by massive old gum trees casting dappled light. On the day we drive, there is scarcely another car. Bliss.

GOURMET HOTSPOT

Willunga is small and usually sleepy, a country town with vineyards and olive groves on its doorstep and – for a small place – a surprising number of restaurants, cafes, wine shops and 'providores'.

Need to know... The Fleurieu Peninsula



Stay or dine at The Australasian, a handsomely restored sandstone pub



The colourful Beach Huts in Middleton



Inside a light and airy Beach Huts cottage

GETTING THERE



Singapore Airlines, Qantas, Emirates and British Airways are among the airlines flying from London to Adelaide. As many travellers will be flying to Adelaide from Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane, Tiger Airlines (www.tigerair.com/au) offers up to three domestic flights daily, consistently priced at A\$45 (£22) or less, each way.

GETTING AROUND



The best way to travel is by car and rental companies including Thrifty, Budget and Avis have offices at Adelaide Airport. Visit www.adelaideairportcarhire.com.au for more information about car hire.

CLIMATE



The region has a typically Mediterranean climate with cool winters from May to August (ranging from 10–18 degrees Celsius) and warm to hot, dry summers (ranging from 24–35 degrees Celsius). The summers really can be hot, but winters can be cool by South Australian standards, with an ocean breeze – perfect for enjoying a local Shiraz.

FURTHER INFO



For more information about the Fleurieu Peninsula visit www.fleurieupeninsula.com.au or www.southaustralia.com/regions/fleurieu-peninsula.aspx. The Victor Harbor tourism website at www.tourismvictorharbor.com.au is also worth a look.



SLEEP YHA Port Elliot Beach House (13 The Strand, Port Elliot, 0061 8 8554 1885; www.yha.com.au) is a historic two-storey sandstone building overlooking Horseshoe Bay. Prices start from A\$25 (£12) per person for a bed in a shared dorm.

EAT Stroll down The Strand and stock up on goodies to cook at the hostel. The Flying Fish Cafe (www.flyingfishcafe.com.au/cafe) on the foreshore is the place to go for ocean-fresh, beer-battered fish and a refreshing ale for lunch.

DO Head to Boomer Beach for a surf – the waves are great here. If it's winter, you'll be whale-watching. Check with the Whale Centre (2 Railway Terrace, www.sawhalecentre.com) in nearby Victor Harbor for sightings and more.



SLEEP The Beach Huts at Middleton (Main Goolwa Road, 0061 8 8554 3933; www.beachhuts.com.au), on the southern peninsula, are self-contained cottages with decks. There's a tennis court, a games room, and it's 500-metres to the surf beach. Self-contained doubles start from A\$160 (£80) per night, including continental breakfast.

EAT Blues Restaurant (0061 8 8554 1800, www.bluesrestaurant.com.au), next to the Beach Huts, serves fine food with a seafood focus (the softshell crab and house-smoked salmon are superb). Mains from A\$35 (£17).

DO Hire bikes and ride the Encounter Bikeway trail – visit www.fleurieupeninsula.com.au for a brochure or take the Cockle Train to Victor Harbor (www.steamrangerheritagerailway.org).



SLEEP Birks Harbour Luxury Retreats in Goolwa (138 Liverpool Road, 0061 8 8555 0338; www.birksharbour.com.au), are sophisticated yet casual, with idyllic river views and a swimming pool. From A\$295 (£148) per night. Another option in Goolwa is The Australasian (1 Porter Street; 0061 8 8555 1088. www.australasian1858.com).

EAT The Australasian Dining Room (www.australasian1858.com/the-dining-room), serves up inventive modern cuisine with an Asian twist. From A\$85 (£42) for a three-course set menu. Open Saturday nights to the public; other nights house guests only.

DO Take a helicopter flight over the Fleurieu Peninsula with South Coast Helicopters (www.southcoasthelicopters.com.au). Flights from A\$560 (£282) per person.