



## THE SOUTH WEST COAST AND THE GRAMPIANS

### From the Southern Ocean to the Southern Grampians

Known as “the birthplace of Victoria”, the far south west coastal region of our home state is wonderfully wild and remote and our tour here explores this fascinating landscape before we head north across the plains to discover the spectacular mountains of the Southern Grampians. Traditional owners have been occupying these ranges for thousands of years and refer to it as Gariwerd. With three nights in each location we get to enjoy a fantastic variety of hikes, seeing seal colonies, volcanoes, petrified forests, unique rock formations and a rich diversity of flora and fauna.

As with all our tours we focus on the very best local produce along the way and our final evening is at the renowned restaurant at the Royal Mail in Dunkeld where we enjoy the inspirational cuisine of chef Robin Wickens. Not only does it have one of Australia’s finest working kitchen gardens but also an award-winning wine cellar. We stay in two accommodations, a charming guesthouse in Portland by the coast and Mount Sturgeon Homestead in Dunkeld at the southern tip of the Grampians mountain range.

#### What’s included?

- Two professional guides to look after your every need and bring the area to life
- Six nights’ accommodation, 3 nights each in Portland and Dunkeld
- Five fully-guided hikes
- Fabulous dinners every evening with excellent local and award-winning wines
- Final evening in one of Victoria’s best restaurants: Wickens at The Royal Mail in Dunkeld.
- Exceptional picnic lunches and snacks en route
- A private tour of the UNESCO World Heritage site, Budj Bim, with a First Nations guide
- Support vehicle
- Free transfers to and from Ballarat
- Comprehensive pre-trip information

#### Itinerary

##### DAY 1

You have the option to self-drive to Portland or meet the tour in Ballarat. We meet at Hotel QUEST Ballarat Station, 11 Nolan Street, Ballarat at **8.30am**. There is a good train service from Melbourne or you could self-drive and enjoy a few days exploring this wonderful gold-rush town before or after the tour. The Quest Ballarat Station hotel has a multi-storey car park adjacent to it. If you are driving to the start of the tour you can leave your car here. Quest Ballarat Station is a 300 metre walk from the train station. The journey to Portland is approximately 3 hours. For guests driving to Portland we will meet you at our accommodation – ready to depart for our hike - at 12.30pm.



From our guesthouse, a short drive takes us to Mount Richmond, known as Benwerrin or “Long Hill” in the Gundidjmarra language. After lunch in a lovely shady picnic spot we enjoy a short walk in the National Park, exploring the coastal forest which sits at the top of this extinct volcano. Grass trees flourish in the volcanic soil and our hike affords far-reaching views over lush farmland all the way to Discovery Bay. After our hike we return to Portland and check-in to our accommodation. The delightful

and welcoming Victoria House guesthouse is close to the town centre. European settlement history for the Colony of Victoria began on the shores of Portland Bay with the arrival of Edward Henty in 1834. The city is often referred to as “the birthplace of Victoria”. During our stay there is time to take a walk to discover many of the heritage registered buildings, visit the charming museum and stroll through the Botanical Gardens. After a welcome drink we head out to a local restaurant for dinner. **(4km)**

## DAY 2

Our hike starts from just outside Portland. We leave the bustling port behind and follow the first section of Great South West Walk as it heads west, hugging the rugged coastline with stunning views from the cliffs. In the distance we can see the lighthouse marking our destination. The trail meanders along the clifftops, passing through a magical stand of trees aptly named the Enchanted Forest. We duck inland to a sheltered picnic spot amongst the trees and in the afternoon the hike continues along the wild west coast of the promontory and leads to Cape Nelson Lighthouse – a welcome beacon to sailors since the late 19th century and the end of our hike today. **(12.5km + 5km)**. A short drive takes us back to Portland where there is time to relax before dinner in a local restaurant.



## DAY 3



Our hike today again follows the long-distance trail of the South West Coast Walk. We start overlooking Discovery Bay, looking out at the Blowholes, before passing by the fascinating sandstone rock formations of the petrified forest. Our trail hugs the cliffs, with stunning views of the water below. We often see kangaroos and echidnas on the track and maybe a whale out to sea. We have our picnic lunch overlooking the ocean, and can often see the seal colony of over 600 Australian Fur Seals who lounge on the rocks and frolic in the bay throughout the year. Our trail then descends

to exquisite Bridgewater Bay, a tiny settlement overlooking a lovely white-sand beach. We stop in at the local café for a drink before the short drive back to Portland for our final evening there. **(9.5km)**

## DAY 4



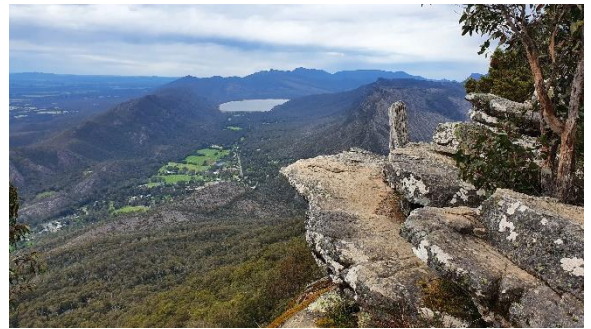
We depart Portland after breakfast (self-drive guests will follow in convoy today). Heading north we stop at Budj Bim UNESCO World Heritage listed landscape – one of the earliest examples of permanent settlement. We spend the morning with a First Nations tour guide and experience a culture that is over 60,000 years old. We see the remains of Australia's first freshwater stone aquaculture system and the foundations of early dwellings. After the tour we enjoy a light lunch featuring local

foods prepared by the Budj Bim rangers.

We arrive in the Southern Grampians in the afternoon and check into Mount Sturgeon Homestead, a beautifully restored, historic 1800's colonial house. The property is set on a working farm and from the verandah and sitting room we can enjoy the sweeping views of Wurgarri (Mount Sturgeon). Enjoy an in-house dinner this evening.

## DAY 5

Today you can choose to curl up with a good book or just relax on the terrace. For the more energetic, after breakfast a short drive takes us to the base of Mud-dadjug (Mount Abrupt) – our hike for the day. The track climbs steadily up sandstone steps through a mixed forest of stringybarks, grass trees, banksias and tea-tree before arriving at the ridge leading up to the summit. From here there are panoramic views over woodland, farmland, the northern ranges of the Grampians and south to Dunkeld. We descend back to the valley and head back to our Homestead for lunch on the verandah. **(8.6km)**



In the afternoon we join the sommelier from the Royal Mail Hotel to visit their award-winning wine cellar. It houses the largest privately owned collection of Bordeaux and Burgundy in the Southern Hemisphere and holds approximately 28,000 bottles! After the tour we'll enjoy a tasting before returning to the Homestead for dinner.

## DAY 6



Our final hike starts from the back gate! We cross the creek before following a private track through bushland – with wonderful views to the Homestead and the adjoining farm property - which brings us to the National Park and the start of our climb of Wurgarri (Mount Sturgeon). A steady climb on a rocky trail leads us to the summit with magnificent views, before descending via a different track to our picnic. This is the final

section of the new Grampians Peaks Trail which will be launched in early 2021. After lunch we leave the National Park and follow a pretty trail along the river through the estate's property to return to our Homestead. **(16km)**

Our final dinner is at the celebrated Wickens Restaurant at the Royal Mail. Robin Wickens is an innovative chef and The Royal Mail is home to Australia's largest working restaurant kitchen garden. The farm where Mt Sturgeon Homestead is located supplies beef and lamb which are born and bred for use specifically in the Royal Mail Hotel dining rooms, and further produce is grown and foraged for in surrounding orchards, olive groves and wild pastures. Our menu is matched to wines from the wonderful cellar we have visited the previous day.

## **DAY 7**

The tour ends after breakfast and we return to Ballarat for 11 am.

### **Walking – Level 3**

4½ days of walking

Shortest day: **4km**, Longest day: **17.5km**

Undulating terrain on the coast with two big climbs (up to 600m ascent/descent) when in the Grampians. The trails are a combination of purpose-built paths, farm and bush tracks. In the Grampians expect more rugged terrain and some boulder-hopping. Sturdy boots with good ankle support are recommended. Walking poles are an advantage, especially for the descents. The support vehicle meets the group at lunch each day. In order to maximize your enjoyment of your holiday we recommend you exercise regularly prior to the trip in order to build up your fitness level.

### **Weather**

Average temperatures on the coast: Max. 16°C Min. 8°. Average monthly rainfall 70mm. It is a few degrees warmer and drier in the Grampians

It is generally mild to warm during the day with cool evening temperatures. Weather can be very unpredictable so bring good rain gear and strong waterproof walking boots. In extreme heat/cold or very wet conditions we may adjust the walking route accordingly. Local forecast: [Cape Bridgewater](#) / [Dunkeld](#)

### **Accommodation**

Portland -Victoria House <https://www.vichouse.com.au/>

Dunkeld – Mount Sturgeon Homestead and Cottages at The Royal Mail

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