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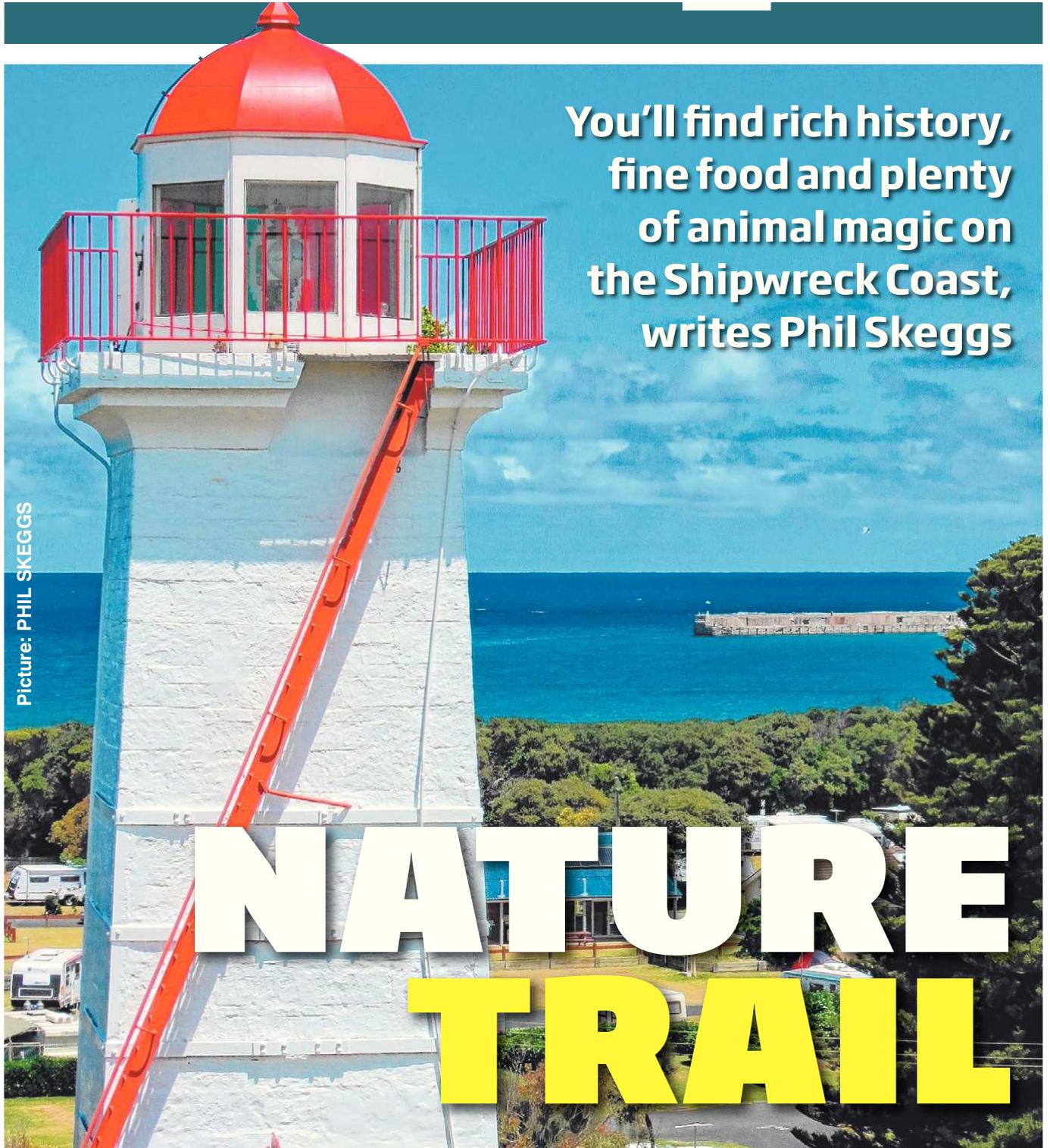
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**slice**

CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

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You'll find rich history,  
fine food and plenty  
of animal magic on  
the Shipwreck Coast,  
writes Phil Skeggs

Picture: PHIL SKEGGS

# NATURE TRAIL



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**S**TARS twinkle and frog song fills the air as we go in search of creatures of the night. Nine species of frog live at Tower Hill Reserve, 14km west of Warrnambool, and John Sutherland — our guide on a two-hour nature walk — can identify them all by their different croaks.

John is a mine of information about the flora and fauna of Victoria's first national park — the tiny bats that whiz through the trees, elusive sugar gliders and the abundant eastern grey kangaroos — as well as its Aboriginal heritage.

When a crash comes from bushes near the Worn Gundidj visitor centre, I wander over to catch the tail end of a full-on boxing match between two big male roos.

Armed with a big torch, John escorts us across a wetlands boardwalk. He shows us kangaroo-apple berries, which are deadly if eaten unripened, but are a natural steroid when they are red.

We scan the trees for more critters and our patience is eventually rewarded when my

14-year-old son hears a rustle in some bushes and shines his torch on a long-necked turtle. John gently picks it up so we can have a closer look.

A short time later he illuminates a boobook owl perched high up in the canopy of a gum tree. It's among the more than 200 species of birds recorded in the park, including flocks of common blue-wing parrots and fewer of the critically endangered orange-bellied parrots.

After our walk, we adjourn to the visitor centre where John whips up a couple of hot

chocolates and chats about the penguin census he was involved in earlier in the day.

Nineteenth century immigrants and mariners feared this jagged shoreline of Victoria's southwest coast, which was the scene of more than 180 shipwrecks.

But these days the Shipwreck Coast is a destination where you can explore rich heritage and natural wonders, not to mention find great food.

Sunday breakfast at Warrnambool's Foreshore Pavilion is an inspired choice. Seated on the deck in the

morning sun with views across Lady Bay, it's the perfect way to whet the appetite for a day of sightseeing.

We set out from picturesque Stingray Bay, crossing a neat footbridge over the Merri River.

A cluster of little islands at the rivermouth form the Merri Marine Sanctuary. Middle Island is home to a colony of little penguins.

The penguins were nearly wiped out by foxes and wild dogs in 2005, but are closely guarded by specially trained maramma dogs nowadays and penguin numbers have grown to about 200.

The island is off-limits to the public except in January when guided tours are run by the local visitor centre.

A well-built boardwalk leads us to Thunder Point. It's easy underfoot and there are viewing platforms to take in the spectacular jagged shoreline of dune limestone. Geologists estimate the Southern Ocean's wind and waves are eroding these rocks by 4cm a year.

**Continued next page**

# Fall for the nature trail

## From previous page

There are many other nature trails, and the track from Thunder Point leads to rugged Shelley Beach and the Mahogany Ship trail.

If walking doesn't take your fancy, take a 15km drive north to see the spectacular Hopkins Falls.

The falls are one of the widest in Australia at 90m and 11m high. For a few days in October each year, they are the scene of the annual upstream migration of short-finned eels. Juvenile eels wriggle up the falls and its banks to get to the river's upper reaches where they grow to be adults. No wonder the

Kirrae whurung tribe named the falls Thangang-poornat, which means "eels bite the stones".

No trip to Warrnambool is complete without a visit to the Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village. At night, you can catch the Shipwrecked sound and laser show, which recounts the tragic sinking of the *Loch Ard* in



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1878 and the story of its two young survivors, Tom Pearce and Eva Carmichael.

Seats rock amid sounds of crashing waves and flashes of simulated lightning and seaspray, as Captain Gibbs and his crew desperately try to save the three-masted square rigged iron sailing ship from impending doom on the rocks of Mutton Bird Island near Port Campbell.

The village is also home to the two heritage-listed Lady Bay lighthouses (pictured on previous page), which date from 1858-59, and are still operating.

We're staying at The Gallery Apartments in Lava St. Owners Brett and Heather Jensen are former florists who for 20 years ran their floristry from a cottage that dates back to 1890. When the opportunity arose to buy a neighbouring property and build self-catering apartments, the cottage was their inspiration to create English heritage-style gardens.

The gardens are full of mature silver birch, acers and conifers, garden beds are edged with English box hedges and filled with roses.

A solar-heated pool is surrounded by topiary English box and gold bunny roses climb the pool walls and over a Balinese hut, which shelters a barbecue and outside dining area. A large peppercorn in the pool area gives beautiful shade.

Inside our double-storey, two-bedroom apartment, a kitchen-meals area has access to a high-walled alcove that offers privacy and a cool spot in the shade.

While Warrnambool is well known as a whale-watching destination during the cooler months, it's also at the end of the Great Ocean Rd.

If you have time, take the coastal route to see Peterborough, with its aquamarine rockpools, and the 33km Bay of Islands Coastal Park including the Bay of Martyrs with

its majestic rock stacks.

Return inland and stop in Timboon, a town synonymous with gourmet cheese and ice cream. The Timboon Railway Shed Distillery's lunch menu has plenty of delectable items.

### Phil Skeggs visited Warrnambool courtesy of Shipwreck Coast Marketing

#### THE DEAL

**Getting there:** Warrnambool is 266km southwest of Melbourne and is a 3½ hour drive via the Princes Hwy (M1/A1). It is three hours via train from Melbourne.

**Staying there:** Gallery Apartments Warrnambool are priced from \$139 a night. Get 10 per cent off the price of your stay when you book online at [warrnamboolgalleryapartments.com.au](http://warrnamboolgalleryapartments.com.au) and enter the promotional code "stay".

**More:** [visitshipwreckcoast.com.au](http://visitshipwreckcoast.com.au)



Amazing: Hopkins Falls is one of the widest in Australia. Picture: PHIL SKEGGS