



Herald Sun (Melbourne)

Saturday 26/07/2014

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slice

CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

# Fairytale break



Scenic surrounds, good food and open fires make Port Fairy a cosy weekend away, writes **ANDREW WALLACE**

**T**HERE are a select few beach getaways in Victoria that remain equally as appealing when the cold winter months settle in. Though the prospect of lazing on the sand or taking a dip may have passed with the falling leaves (for all but the foolhardy), destinations boasting rich historic elements, fine dining and hospitality, natural beauty and no shortage of roaring open fireplaces still make for an ideal weekend away. And Port Fairy is certainly this.

Located at the end of the Great Ocean Road and a 3½-hour drive from Melbourne, the fishing village is characterised by its heritage stone architecture, wide

country streets and towering Norfolk pines.

A short stroll from the centre of town on the banks of the Moyne River inlet, Douglas on River guesthouse accommodation makes for a warm, quiet, convenient and comfortable lodging. If you're arriving outside reception hours, hosts Ali and Shane Clancey will forward a handy instructional video to your mobile to help guide you to your car space, room and communal kitchen and lounge.

The selling point of Douglas on River is the surrounds; slide open the rear door of your apartment and step out on to the manicured lawn with the clear waters of the Moyne only metres away. Or if it's a tad chilly outside, soak in the vista from the comfort of the glassed lounge and kitchen area.

The drive to Port Fairy will most likely have worked up your appetite; and a chic but fuss-free option to quell both hunger and thirst is the Coffin Sally pizzeria. The stylishly renovated eatery and bar has a takeaway section at front of shop, while down the passage way you'll find a trendy bar and dining area with



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a large, crackling stone fireplace — a slice of inner-city Melbourne at the beach.

The menu offers a range of staple and more fancy traditional Italian thin-base pizzas (the prosciutto at \$17 comes recommended, complete with buffalo mozzarella from the nearby Shaw River buffalo farm), while the friendly crew behind the bar will be more than happy to pick out a suitable craft beer or mix you up an interesting cocktail or three.

Saturday morning is the time to explore the shops and galleries of the township, or if you have landed on the third Saturday of the month, wander through the farmers' market at the showgrounds to sample fresh local produce, arts and craft, and fine preserves, wine and cheese.

If you can spare the time, take the short drive out to Tower Hill Reserve. Set on the site of a long-dormant volcano, the ruggedly spectacular reserve has been painstakingly restored following damage by early European settlers, and is once again flourishing with native bird, animal and plant life.

At the Worn Gundidj Visitor Centre, indigenous guides Shannon and Chris walk you through the fascinating history of the Tower Hill area, showing how the traditional owners lived off the land, including first-hand samples of edible plants (they're surprisingly good, don't be shy!) and even impart you with a crack lesson in the art of boomerang throwing. And if you're really lucky, Shannon will let you try a sample of his homemade wattle seed or gum leaf ice cream. Yum!

On the road back to town, stop by Basalt Vineyard for lunch at The Pantry Door at Basalt cafe, a pleasant restored 100-year-old cottage with a homely menu and excellent service. After you've wolfed down a tasty gourmet pie, head around back for some wine tasting with Alex, a laid-back Warrnambool lad who will step you through the Basalt range of riesling, pinot gris, pinot noir, shiraz, tempranillo (recommended) and chardonnay, while imparting amusing local yarns.

Basalt is among operators driving a Gourmet Port Fairy Trail tourism project, and so is the historic Merrijig Inn, also alongside the Moyne River. With a claim to being Victoria's oldest inn, the Merrijig has the feel of a cosy British country pub and boasts an evolving seasonal menu almost exclusively drawn from local growers and produce, along with a celebrated wine list that features many smaller vineyards and organic winemakers.

## THE DEAL

### GETTING THERE

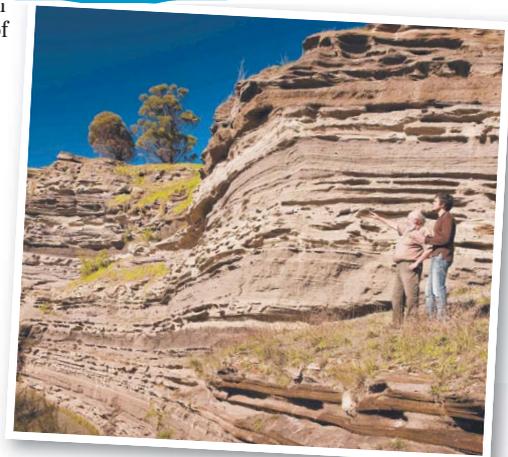
Port Fairy is a 3½-hour drive west of Melbourne, via the Princes Highway.

### STAYING THERE

Douglas on River has a winter special, two nights from \$90 a night in a standard room or a riverside room from \$169 a night.

### ONLINE

[dougasonriver.com.au](http://dougasonriver.com.au)  
[facebook.com/gourmetportfairy](https://facebook.com/gourmetportfairy)  
[visitportfairy-moyneshire.com.au](http://visitportfairy-moyneshire.com.au)



Winter playground: (from top) the charming fishing village of Port Fairy; the Douglas on River guesthouse; and the Worn Gundidj Visitor Centre tours.

