



A WEEKEND IN...

# Lorne

Victoria's Surf Coast has long been a playground for boardriders, campers and leisure-seekers, writes **Di Webster**.

THERE'S a surfboard resting on a rail outside Lorne's storybook-cute Swing Bridge Cafe and Boathouse. Next to it, a middle-aged man scans the café's deck for a vacant table, the wetsuit peeled to his hips liberating an executive paunch. Further along the rail, three kids with salt-matted hair and sandy feet swing their legs and slurp ice-creams while Mum and Dad tuck into slow-poached eggs at a nearby table. And where grass rolls down to meet the mouth of the Erskine River, a black Labrador splashes in pursuit of a stick as his master drops into a deckchair and prizes the lid off a takeaway latte. The vibe in Lorne is

relaxed and friendly; the food and coffee lifted straight from the Melbourne hipster handbook. Under an unblemished sky on this unseasonably warm autumn day, all you need to know about this Victorian seaside town is right here, like an artist's exaggerated impression of a cool surf-beach town.

Just a two-hour drive from Melbourne on the majestic Great Ocean Road, Lorne (with a permanent population of about 1050) is the man-made divide between the lush rainforest of the Great Otway National Park and shipwreck-strewn Bass Strait. "I have seldom seen a more fearful section of coastline," wrote explorer Matthew Flinders of Victoria's rugged south-west in 1802. These days, not needing to navigate it in a 19th-century barque, you'll struggle to find a more beautiful one. (Actually, Flinders' words might still hold true. On the way to Lorne we passed a sign alerting tourists to "Drive on Left in Australia".)

Lorne has, since the 1950s when Melburnians discovered the joys of caravanning, been the go-to escape from the 'burbs. And as swank homes spring up on the hillside, it's testament to the town's city-toff defences that campers still claim prime surf-side real estate. "My folks brought us here when my sister and I were kids," drawls a fiftysomething man in board shorts as he waits for takeaway noodles outside local favourite Chopstix. "And my kids have grown up camping here. There are *waaay* more polo shirts now," he adds, chuckling.

Whatever's in your wardrobe, here's how to make the most of a weekend in Lorne...

Swing Bridge Cafe and Boathouse by the Erskine River



Flight path

# MEL

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## Eat

- █** Marks restaurant ([marksrestaurant.com.au](http://marksrestaurant.com.au)) has been sitting surf-side for 20 years but chef Mark Purdie's menu shows no signs of salt damage. Given the location, you'd be mad not to order the blackened local flake on potato mash with caponata.
- █** New kid on the block Ipsos ([ipsosrestaurant.com.au](http://ipsosrestaurant.com.au)) is the baby of Alex and Dominic Talimanidis, whose parents run the one-hat local institution À La Grecque down the road at Aireys Inlet. There is passion aplenty here. Kefalograviera, ouzo and apricot combosta? Say no more!
- █** Swing Bridge Cafe and Boathouse (0423 814 770) is a brekkie scene on a sandbank, offering everything from a fancy bacon-and-egg roll to the Fresh Start – salmon, kohlrabi remoulade, beetroot and nasturtium on seed and sprout. Depends how your evening went, really.



(Clockwise from top left) Marks restaurant; Ocean House, inside and out; Erskine Falls; chargrilled octopus at Ipsos

## Stay

- █** Ocean House ([oceanhouse.com.au](http://oceanhouse.com.au)) is a sleek five-bedroom concrete and timber tribute to the surf-coast landscape, with bush out the back, views of Louttit Bay out the front and walls of glass that nod to both. Carved into a butter-smooth curved wall in the vast living room is an open fireplace, a nook for the TV and a woodpile. Getting to the designer kitchen at the other end when there's a big comfy sofa screaming your name is tricky but worth it, if only for the NASA-esque coffee machine on the bench. The property can be rented as a two-bedroom house or three-bedroom lower-level apartment, or both (they're separated by a hallway door). Note: the house section has a grander living space but smaller bedrooms. Ocean House offers a package that includes helicopter flights from Melbourne and dinner at Brae restaurant in Birregurra.

## Play

- █** Rent a board or a cruising bike from the newish HAH Lorne Beach (0406 453 131). As HAH stands for Health and Hire, fuel up first with a berry, acai, coconut water and banana smoothie (or take it with you – the friendly folks here will make you up a hamper).
- █** Walk to the bottom of Erskine Falls. Then try to get back up. Seven-hundred metres of exquisite torture. For added fun, tell everyone you meet on the way up how easy it is.
- █** Learn to surf with Go Ride a Wave ([gorideawave.com.au](http://gorideawave.com.au)).
- █** Long walks, short walks, easy and tough walks. Pack some sturdy shoes. You'll be rewarded with breathtaking views, almost certainly a waterfall and, being Lorne, probably a cup of single-origin coffee.

