

Urban parks, tracks & trails

You don't have to go bush to enjoy our parks. You might be surprised at what's right on your doorstep ...

A mosaic of parks spreads across Melbourne's suburbs; a network of green spaces in urban areas, many of them linked by walking tracks and bicycle trails. From the inner city to the outer suburbs, these parks make it easy to connect with nature, to soak up the fresh air, enjoy a little solitude or time with family and friends. From biking to bocce, kite-flying to canoeing, you'll find something to do. These parks also provide precious areas of native bushland and vital corridors for birdlife and native wildlife.

These well-maintained natural environments are a perfect example of Parks Victoria's *Healthy Parks Healthy People* philosophy, playing a central role in the health and wellbeing of our community.

Right on the fringe of the city lies one of Melbourne's best-loved and most-visited parks, Albert Park – 225ha of beautiful parkland just 3km from the CBD. Black Swans glide across the usually serene waters of the lake, though

there might also be cormorants, native ducks and even the occasional pelican. In fact, 120 bird species have been recorded here.

The lake is a favourite spot for yachting, rowing and kayaking, while the 5km lake track is well known to joggers, cyclists and walkers. Twenty-five sporting fields and two indoor sports complexes ensure there is always plenty of activity. Tee-off on the 18-hole golf course or watch your kids tackle the skate ramp or the playgrounds. Spread a rug and unpack a picnic, fire up a barbecue, or – for something a little more sophisticated – head to the elegant The Point restaurant, or the swish Carousel, where you can sip a pinot gris as you savour the city skyline views.

On the trail

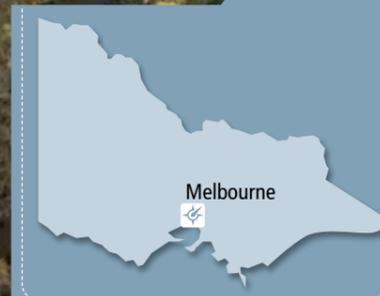
For a day's excursion, cycle along the Main Yarra Trail, winding beside the Yarra from Southbank, opposite the CBD, through natural bushlands and wetlands as far as Westerfolds Park in Templestowe.

The trail passes one of Melbourne's special secrets, the tiny (3.2ha) Herring Island, 3km south of the city. The leafy environs are home to environmental sculptures and a grassy picnic area with barbecues. Access is only by water, but the punt from Como Landing takes just a few minutes and runs Saturdays and Sundays from December until mid April.

Yarra Bend Park, 4km from the city and fringing the Yarra for around 16km, is another inner-urban surprise with its river escarpments, golf courses, parklands and cafes. You can fish or canoe, play golf, stroll along quiet riverside trails, hire a rowboat or enjoy a Devonshire tea (highly recommended!) at the wonderful old Studley Park Boathouse or Fairfield Park Boathouse, or indulge in an elegant meal with city views.

Also on the Yarra Trail are Banksia and Birrarung parks. At Banksia Park, Manna Gums, grasses, wattles and native shrubs edge the riverbank. Walk, jog or cycle; follow the Heritage Trail to learn about the significance

Fact file



➤ Main Yarra Trail

33km from Southbank to Westerfolds Park in Templestowe, connecting to the Mullum Mullum Trail.

➤ Dandenong Creek Trail

49km from the Liverpool Rd Retarding Basin through Jells Park, Bushy Park and Shepherds Bush and connecting to Patterson River.

➤ Maribyrnong River Trail

23km from Spotswood to Brimbank Park in Keilor.

➤ Contacts

For more information about parks, tracks and trails in and around Melbourne see the Parks Victoria website www.parkweb.vic.gov.au or phone 13 1963.

For more information about cycling trails, check out Bicycle Victoria www.bv.com.au or www.visitvictoria.com

For information about boat hire and cafes in Yarra Bend Park, visit www.studleyparkboathouse.com.au or www.fairfieldboathouse.com



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of Indigenous sites, or see paintings from the famed Heidelberg School on the Artists Trail.

Nearby Birrarung Park is a peaceful, bushy retreat; its mix of River Red Gums, woodland and wetlands creating a haven for wildlife including many native birds. You'll often hear the throaty croak of frogs, the echoing call of kookaburras and perhaps, if you're lucky, glimpse a Boobook Owl. Walk or cycle along the trails, toss in a line for a quiet spot of fishing, or just take in the river views.

Headed east

Another oasis of open space and greenery, this time nestled in the eastern suburbs, is Jells Park, which welcomes one million-plus visitors each year. The hub of a network of parklands linked by the Dandenong Creek Trail, the park offers wide-open spaces, criss-crossed by more than 9km of trails. Ride your bike or rollerblade, fly a kite or use the playgrounds. Spotting some of the park's abundant wildlife from viewing platforms and bird hides is another favourite with families.

A conservation trail along the eastern side of Jells Lake passes through tranquil wetlands and past billabongs. Visitors will find shady picnic areas and barbecues, and the teahouse, Madeline's @ Jells, opens for breakfast, lunch and dinner. On the third Saturday of every month (8am–2pm), take your basket and stock up on fresh local and regional produce from the Farmers Market.

Going west

If you're headed west, Westgate Park, near the sweeping span of the West Gate Bridge and the broad mouth of the Yarra, offers quiet wetlands and city skyline views. As you cycle, jog or walk the winding trails around the lakes, watch for stilts, ibis, spoonbills and other birds that feed along the water's edge.



If you are going further west, take the Maribyrnong River Trail as far as Brimbank Park, nestled in a bend of the river. Surrounded by native grasslands and stately river gums, you can explore by canoe, on foot or on your bike (there's a 4.3km circuit within the park). There are three ponding points if you'd like to try fishing with a hand net. Keep your eyes open for wildlife including swamp wallabies and blue-tongue lizards. Noisy cockatoos and rosellas flash through the trees and there are also many waterbirds. Have a picnic or barbecue, or a cup of tea at the Leaping Lizard Cafe, as you enjoy the river views and decide which track or trail to take next. 🍵