

# Round & about the bay



Melbourne skyline from Williamstown; (right) St Kilda pier, Melbourne's bay beaches.

**Port Phillip is both a busy port and bustling playground. But while we enjoy its many coastal pleasures we also need to take care of it for future generations.**

Margaret Barca reports

**T**he picturesque Mornington and Bellarine peninsulas sweep around, almost enclosing Port Phillip, a sheltered harbour covering close to 2000 square kilometres. The bay is a watery playground rimmed by sandy beaches – Melbourne's largest urban park, and it is also the country's busiest port. It is a dynamic and self-sustaining ecosystem.

Port Phillip is a natural habitat for 1,000 marine plants and animals and 500 species of fish. A colony of penguins lives at the end of the St Kilda breakwater, and up to 150 Bottlenose dolphins as well as Australian fur seals feed and breed in these waters. Catch a ferry or take a boat trip and you may well see dolphins playfully riding the bow waves or inquisitively circling your boat. Seagulls swoop overhead, waders can often be seen stalking the shoreline in search of a fishy morsel, while Pacific gulls, Australasian gannets and

White-faced Storm petrels are among the many sea birds. It's not just the wildlife that makes the bay special though.

Port Phillip offers almost endless opportunities for recreation. Promenading along the iconic St Kilda Pier on a balmy summer evening or a wintry afternoon is a favourite pastime for families and couples, who often stop for coffee and cake or an ice-cream at the kiosk. Boats and ferries pull out from the pier regularly, headed for Williamstown and Southbank. The Bay Trail winds from Williamstown past Brighton to Carrum, and is used by cyclists, joggers, rollerbladers and those who just like to stroll along and chat. On both peninsulas there are some lovely bush walks with great bay views.

For the simplest of pleasures, take the family for an old-fashioned day at the beach – swimming, relaxing, picnicking and soaking

**The bay is a watery playground rimmed by sandy beaches – Melbourne's largest urban park**

PHOTOGRAPHY



Fact file



➤ **Getting there**

For the Bellarine Peninsula, take the Princes Freeway from Melbourne to Geelong then the Bellarine Highway.

For the Mornington Peninsula, take St Kilda Road/Nepean Highway or Princes Highway/Springvale Road from Melbourne.

➤ **Nearby parks**

Mornington Peninsula National Park, Point Cook Coastal Park, Rosebud Foreshore Reserve, Point Nepean National Park.

➤ **Contacts**

Parks Victoria  
www.parkweb.vic.gov.au or phone 13 1963.

For general information, including dolphin tours, see www.visitvictoria.com

Queenscliff–Sorrento Car and Passenger Ferry  
www.searoad.com.au or phone 03 5258 3244



up the salty tang of the fresh air. Right around the bay you'll find grassy picnic spots, barbecues and playgrounds.

For a different perspective, catch a ferry (a passenger ferry or the streamlined car/passenger ferry) between Sorrento on the Mornington Peninsula, and the historic township of Queenscliff, on the Bellarine Peninsula. It takes around 40 minutes and the ferries run every day. En route you'll pass the rip; the treacherous entrance to the bay that caused many ships to come to grief and is still a notoriously dangerous channel.

Once through the rip and inside the bay it's a different story – canoes, kayaks, powerboats, fishing boats and yachts are all at home on the usually calm waters. On a windy day, windsurfers skim across the surface, their billowing sails creating dashes of colour against the blue sky.

If you'd like to get up close to some of the



Get up close to the dolphin wildlife.



**Boating and fishing**

Canoes, kayaks, powerboats, fishing boats and yachts are all at home on the usually calm waters.

**Your key to the bay**

Parks Victoria is working to improve boating and fishing facilities on the bay.

For detailed information on boating and fishing facilities, be it moorings and berths, boat ramps or jetties, go to the 'Marine & Coasts' section of the Parks Victoria website at [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au).

To find your way around the rivers and bays, Parks Victoria's waterproof boat guides are essential. Each guide features comprehensive maps including boating zones, navigation aids, exclusion zones, marine national parks, boat ramps and important safety information.

To get your free guide to getting out on our fantastic waterways, email your name and address to: [info@parks.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@parks.vic.gov.au).



**For the simplest of pleasures, take the family for an old-fashioned day at the beach**

wildlife, operators at Queenscliff and Sorrento run tours for dolphin-watching and even swimming with these fascinating mammals. The tours are available during the warmer months from around October to April.

There are plenty of opportunities for fishing around the bay. Day and night you'll see anglers tossing in a line from one of the many piers or jetties, from sleek watercraft or their favourite old tinnies. You can join a fishing charter if you don't have your own boat or need some expert advice. Snapper, gummy shark, bream, flathead, garfish and trevally are a few of the fish that may be biting.

If beachcombing is your thing, when the tide goes out you can discover rock pools and ledges (Ricketts Point and Point Lonsdale are terrific spots). Ramble along and spy some of

the bay's marine life. Be sure not to disturb any wildlife or remove any shells.

There is lots below the water to enjoy too. Don a mask and flippers and go snorkelling in shallow waters – Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean are well known as excellent places for beginners. Rickett's Point Marine Sanctuary, with its diversity of habitats, also provides snorkellers with plenty to see. More experienced divers will be able to explore some of Port Phillip's spectacular underwater treasures – from historic shipwrecks and scuttled submarines to challenging wall dives and vast beds of waving kelp.

Several marine reserves and the Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park help protect the bay's marine environment and wildlife habitats.

**Launch your boat**  
Parks Victoria manages more than 40 piers and jetties on Port Phillip and Westernport. You can launch your boat at a variety of locations including Patterson River – Victoria's biggest and most popular launching facility with 52,000 boat launches a year – or Hastings in Westernport.



TOURISM VICTORIA (BOLLARD ARTIST – JAN MITCHELL)



**The Saints watch over the bay**

Taking care of the bay is essential if we are to continue to enjoy it today and preserve it for future generations. A joint partnership by Parks Victoria and St Kilda Football Club is working to remind people what a fantastic environmental and recreational asset Port Phillip is, and encouraging the community to care for the bay.

Leigh Montagna, Saints wingman and Community Ambassador, lives close to the bay and says he uses it frequently. 'I get a lot of use out of the bay, both for personal use and football, as we have recovery sessions on the foreshore most weekends,' he says. 'It's fairly cold (especially in the middle of winter!) but it's good for our muscle recovery post-game, so we grin and bear it.'

At that time of year the players usually share the bay with hardy dog walkers,

yachtsmen from the bay's many clubs, and penguins.

Luke Ball, Saints co-captain and Community Champion, agrees that while it is cold mid-winter, most players find it relaxing and feel the benefits afterwards.

'I personally use the bay for heaps of activities like jogging and swimming, as well as going out with friends to socialise, particularly in summer,' Ball explains.

In August 2008, Saints players and more than 500 school children got together for some beach games and to help clean up four beaches around Port Phillip. It was all part of spreading the message about caring for Port Phillip's precious marine environment.

As Archie Fraser, CEO of the St Kilda Football Club, says, 'We all need to do our bit to nurture this vital part of Melbourne's environmental and cultural fabric.'



Carousel at Geelong Waterfront; (left) bollards at Geelong