**The perfect seaside town? A visitor's guide to Port Fairy**

Far away enough from Melbourne to deter day trippers and overwhelming crowds, but with enough of the trappings of a big city – Port Fairy may well be Australia’s most perfect holiday destination.

Almost four hours from Melbourne, at the end of the Great Ocean Road, the coastal town was voted in 2012 as the most liveable community under 20,000 – in the world.

So what makes Port Fairy so special? An intact historical centre, preserved bluestone cottages, a wide and shady streetscape perfect for cycling, wild and stunning coastline, a variety of bird life, walking tracks and great cafes and restaurants for a start.

Jock Serong, author of five novels, the latest being Burning Island, has moved to Port Fairy twice. In the mid-1990s he was a young solicitor in Melbourne looking for sea change with good surf and “where I could still hold down a law job” and in 2004, with a young family in tow, he was looking for a strong community and a great place to raise children.

“Back in the 90s it was still mostly a fishing village and rural community. There was one espresso machine – and that was at Rebecca’s – and it was easy to rent a house. There was not much in the way of holiday accommodation. It was more basic than it is now.”

But a long running folk music festival (the Port Fairy Folk festival established in 1977), and rich western district farmers that would spend money in the town, meant that “Port Fairy has always had outside influences and outside money and that puts it at a huge advantage, compared to other rural communities”.

Why does Serong love it? “On the one hand there’s this incredible coastal environment, 180 degrees of sky over your head. The elements are powerful, the air and weather is very clean but in your face. There’s a strong Indigenous history and a strong community. I’ve seen it when people get sick, or need a hand – locals rally. All the tourist attractions in the world are of no use if you don’t have that.”

**Don’t miss**

The fortnightly markets by the old rail shed. Local products include fruit and vege but if you’re a visitor there’s also goodies you can take back to your accommodation. Basalt Wine, the only vineyard on the Great Ocean Road, has a weekly market stall. Their pinot and riesling pairs well with local cheeses, and Jane Dough bread.

**Culture fix**

Port Fairy pre-Covid was a town of festivals – with a crowded calendar that included the world-renowned Port Fairy folk festival, the spring music festival (classical music) and a jazz festival.

The bigger events are off the cards for now – but organisers are already looking ahead to 2022.

**Where to eat and drink**

You won’t go hungry in Port Fairy. For a special occasion meal, the Merrijig operates out Victoria’s oldest inn, with a focus on farm-to-table dishes.

For breakfast or coffee Bank St and Co and Rebecca’s are great, with hearty breakfasts, including bubble and speak with poached eggs and Otway bacon (Bank and Co).

Newcomer Oak and Anchor is a major refresh on an old pub and is great for lunch in the courtyard.

For more casual dining the Thai at Lemongrass is consistently excellent, as is old favourite is Coffin Sally, which does excellent wood fire pizza and cocktails.

Decorated former Fen chef/owner Ryan Sessions has opened a casual burger bar – Randy’s. The cheeseburger is sensational – and even better when washed down with a vanilla milkshake. To be on the safe side, make a reservation if you want to go out for dinner. Visiting late November most restaurants were booked out and not taking walk-ins.

## ****Where to stay****

Port Fairy has a huge range of accommodation ranging from holiday houses to three caravan parks to luxury accommodation.

Many of the homes for rent via booking sites such as Port Fairy Holiday Rentals are historic and located in the town centre. East Beach is where you will find the more expensive beach houses, some of which are available on Airbnb.

## ****Get out of town****

You’re at the end of the Great Ocean Road – so there’s plenty of beach towns, forests, and waterways within two hours’ drive. But if you want to stick closer to Port Fairy, visit the nearby extinct volcano at Tower Hill, where emus and koalas are regularly spotted. You can drive into the volcano crater.

Check out the visitor programs on offer from Worn Gundidj, an enterprise that provides work, training and skills opportunities for indigenous people in areas of tourism, horticulture, textiles and environment.