

Summer Lovin' at the Bay



Low tide goes a long way out.



The area is famous for seafood.

Many people enjoy the warm evenings at the jetty.

Moonta Bay offers plenty of fun for those looking for a South Australian beach holiday

Story and photography by
GLENYS GELZINIS

It takes only two hours driving north of Adelaide to reach the serene hamlet of Moonta Bay. Taking Port Wakefield Road then turning onto the Copper Coast Highway you drive through the Town of Moonta before continuing on another 4 ki-

lometres to the Bay.

Situated on the western side of the Italy shaped leg that is Yorke Peninsula, or "Yorke" to South Australians, the bay stretches for two kilometres along Spencer Gulf. At its panoramic heart is a 500 metre long L shaped jetty popular with fishers and swimmers.

In the summer months the Bay's population of around 2,000, swells with holiday makers of all ages. Its generational popularity is due to the endless choice of activities to suit all members of the family. The township of Moonta itself offers everything you need on holidays with a supermarket, cafes, hotels and a tackle shop as well as many smaller specialty shops to browse. Moonta is one of three towns that make up the Copper Triangle on Yorke Peninsula,

the others being Wallaroo and Kadina. The region's name came from the copper mining industry that happened in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the miners being mostly Cornish immigrants. This also gave the area its other label of "Little Cornwall". Of course with this history you'd be right in thinking the local bakeries would have the best Cornish pasties around and you won't be disappointed.

Making your way to the bay you will find the caravan park is situated in prime position overlooking the sandy beach. It has a walking path along the sweeping curved front of the park and a rock wall separating it from the sand. The tide goes out a long way during the day and exposes the ridged sand making it a mecca for children as well as a great place to let the family

dog stretch its legs. Throughout the day you will see a continuous parade of activities going on, from beach cricket, soccer, boules and more, only limited by your imagination and energy.

During the time the tide is out it's also perfect for pumping for bait. Saltwater yabbies, or clickers as they are called in these parts can be gathered by using a bait pump which can be picked up from any good tackle shop. To find the clickers go looking where the water is washing in and you'll soon see the tell-tale little mounds of sand piled up with holes in the peaks. To get the clickers just dig on in and pump the sand and you're more likely than not to find clickers scurrying about. Beware, the little rascals can nip though. It's best to keep them fresh by putting them

in a small bucket with some sea water in and use them the same day. In the late afternoon as the tide is coming back in you only have to wade out a short distance to find channels with schools of whiting coming through. With a small rod and clickers for bait you can score yourself some King George or Silver Whiting.

On darker evenings when the tide comes back in, you will also see people dabbling for garfish which basically is using a bright light whilst wading in the water and scooping them up in a hand net. For another spot of fishing fun with kids, head to the small rocky patches on the beach towards the northern end of the caravan park and you may catch blue swimmer crabs in the shallow water. Families can have a ball armed with nothing more than

a shopping bag and long barbecue tongs and successfully get legal sized crabs. As the evening goes on the water usually will lap at the wall and depending on how early a riser you are, it will still be there in the morning before making its way out gradually again.

The jetty is central to a lot of the activities and never fails to disappoint the recreational fisher. With just a basic fishing rig, squid jags and a crab net or two, you can catch blue swimmer crabs, whiting, garfish and squid to name a few varieties. There are a few seaweed patches so beware of snags. As is often the case the best times for fishing are early morning or late afternoon into the evening and this is especially the case at Moonta Bay with the huge tide movement.



There is a great surf beach.



Sunset at the jetty.



A jellyfish makes its way with the drifting tide.

The jetty which is maintained by the local council also has a safe fenced swimming enclosure with a ladder to make getting into the pristine water easy. It also has a pontoon anchored within the enclosure which is a hit with adults and children alike. For keeping the kids entertained there is also a new, Splash Town water leisure park on the foreshore with slides and water dumping buckets of fun. This free water park is maintained by the council and Caravan Park owners and provides hours of fun for the younger (and not so young) ones in the family.

For the nature lovers the bay has the expected seagulls but the beach is also frequently visited by the larger Pacific Gulls, small groups of pelicans and sometimes black swans. It isn't unusual even to spot the odd sea lion casually swimming along the length of the jetty helping itself to the catch of the day from unsuspecting anglers.

Because of the bay's sheltered position it is popular with smaller boat fishers in tinnies. The town of Port Hughes a couple of kilometres south of Moonta Bay has a boat ramp suitable for launching all size recreational boats. You don't have to venture out far to find sandy patches amongst the seaweed in the deeper water or the blue line as it's referred to. These areas are a snorkeler's haven as well with crystal clear water making it seem more like an aquarium than fishing grounds. Apart from

a huge variety of fish you can spot crabs, squid and jellyfish.

Canoes and kayaks are another great way of spending time in the bay. On calm days, which are the norm in summer, you can launch from the beach, head under or around the jetty and continue south down the coast towards Port Hughes. On windier days windsurfers and kite surfers make their way to the water for adventure and provide entertainment for onlookers.

Moonta Bay has such a relaxed feel that it can be hard to drag yourself away but a must see for the four wheel drive enthusiasts is to head south on the Moonta Bay to Maitland Road for approximately 24 kilometres and follow sign posts to The Gap. It is mostly a bitumen road drive but there is a short stretch of dirt road to get to the beach. The drive is well worth it for the spectacular long white sandy beach at the end. There are quite a few easily accessible free camping sites here too, nestled behind sand dunes. They are suitable for tents, camper trailers and caravans and there are basic toilet facilities. Dogs on leash are welcome.

Although popular with four wheel drivers in the summer time you can easily find a stretch of beach for yourself and group of friends. Come prepared with some shade and you can spend a day fishing and swimming in the aquamarine water. There are no nasty surprises with the beach dropping off gently making it safe for chil-

dren to swim in and don't be surprised to see a pod of dolphins swim by. Not only is the beach a spectacular sight to see, there are also some perfect white sand dunes behind the beach ideal for trying your skill at sand boarding or for getting some great photos of the sweeping beach views.

Heading back to Moonta Bay at the end of a long and busy day there is more in store for the keen photographer. As the sun sets behind the jetty and into the sea it makes a spectacular backdrop for photographs and hordes of people venture out onto the beach and jetty to get the perfect shot. And if you don't get the money shot on the first attempt don't worry because tomorrow will bring it all again.



FACT FILE

Getting There: Moonta Bay is 167km from Adelaide via National Highway A1 and the Copper Coast Highway.

Where to Camp: The Moonta Bay Caravan Park is situated on the Moonta Bay foreshore, www.moontabaycaravanpark.com.au or you can stay nearby at Port Hughes www.porthughestouristpark.com.au.

For more information on camping at The Gap go to www.harvestcorner.com.au

When to go: Moonta Bay is definitely a summer time mecca but for just as much fun with fewer crowds try the months of Autumn or Spring.