

Port Elliot Ahoy

South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula is full of amazing beauty and one of its best kept secrets is this tranquil coastal town

Story and photography by GLENYS GELZINIS

Have you ever been to a destination so idyllic, that you're torn between letting people in on it or not? Well the secret is out about Port Elliot on South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula.

This relaxed and welcoming town is under an hour and a half from Adelaide and is well deserving of its number nine ranking of *Australia's Best Seachange Towns for 2016*, according to a recent report in 'The New Daily'. Easily traversed by foot this town has been a firm favourite for generations of South Australians. With the caravan park situated on the spectacular Horseshoe Bay you won't find a more scenic place to set up camp for a while. There is so much to see and do in and around Port Elliot though, you

won't be idle for long.

The aptly named Horseshoe Bay has rocky promontories at both ends of the bay, with the caravan park at the North East end overlooking the beach and Commodore Point. At the opposite end of the bay is a small jetty, surf lifesaving club and cafe, as well as a park and children's playground. The Caravan Park has spacious grass sites and stretches from Horseshoe Bay around to Crockery Bay. This popular park is set up with everything you need for an enjoyable holiday for everyone in the family, having a camp kitchen, bouncy pillow, basketball court and playground.

The interesting names given to landmarks along this stretch of coast come from

the numerous shipwrecks that occurred in the 1850s when Port Elliot was chosen as a major seaport for the Murray River Trade. This turned out to be a disastrous decision with seven ships wrecked from 1853 to 1864, amongst them the 'Commodore', 'The Flying Fish' and the 'Athol'. 'The Flying Fish' which was lost during a storm in the harbour, lends its name to the cafe which sits on the bay and is popular with visitors, it also sells a pretty mean cone of fish and chips for a take away option.

The schooner 'Athol' sank after dragging its anchor in yet another storm. Most of its cargo was salvaged at the time but the exact location of the wreck became a mystery. Later, when a case of crockery from the ship



A fish shaped seat to watch the waves.



A rainbow shines over the stone monument.

was washed ashore on a nearby beach, the name stuck and Crockery Bay it is to this day. The maritime history of the bay is really fascinating and taking a leisurely stroll along the foreshore heritage walk you'll find explanatory maps and signs as you go.

The white sandy beach of Horseshoe Bay is framed by a park of green lawn and it's a perfect spot for a picnic with a few large wooden picnic tables dotted around. This foreshore area is home to what has to be one of the most spectacular lawn bowls clubs in Australia. Participants could be forgiven for being a little distracted, but perhaps that is the home ground advantage.

A must do to appreciate the weather-beaten rocky headlands and take in some

Like most of the Peninsula coast Port Elliot doesn't disappoint.



Experience the iconic Steam Ranger train.



The small jetty is popular for fishing.



The town has many historic buildings.



Enjoy a walk through the gardens.

breathtaking seascapes is to take the 'Harbourmasters Walk'. From the surf lifesaving club there is a moderately steep incline that will set you off on the path which undulates around the clifftops. There is bench seating well placed along the walk for resting and taking in the views. Keep your eyes on the water as you go to spot seals, dolphins and in the winter months whales, as they pass this part of the coast. The first beach you pass is Lady Bay, so named as it was used by women for bathing separately from the

men from the 1880s to 1930s. Historical photographs in the nearby Port Elliot Hotel show a series of huts that were erected there in this time and served as changing rooms. Today it's a lovely sheltered spot accessible by a set of stairs, away from the main beach where everyone is welcome to swim together these days. Continuing on the walking path you're led to more spectacular coastal scenery with Green Bay and then Knights Beach unfolding before you. From the cliff top vantage point of Knights

Beach the town of Victor Harbor and The Bluff are easily visible. The long sandy stretch of beach in the distance is Boomer Beach, named for its loud crashing surf. If you're feeling up to it steps will take you down to all the beaches passed along the way and they are all worth the effort. However, the views from above are pretty hard to beat. At almost any time throughout the year the reef break and consistent surf at Knights Beach is popular with body boarders and surfers, making a good spot to sit a



The very popular Port Elliot Bakery.



Sunrise over the bay.

FACT FILE

How to get there:

Port Elliot is approximately 85 kilometres south of Adelaide on the Fleurieu Peninsula, taking the Southern Expressway and Main South Road.

Where to stay:

Port Elliot Holiday Park, located on the Victor Harbor to Goolwa Road at Horseshoe Bay.

www.portellioholidaypark.com.au

When to go:

Summer months are very popular in Port Elliot but a great time to visit is from late autumn to winter, April to July, when the weather is mild and there is a very good chance of seeing southern right whales as they migrate through the area.

More information:

SteamRanger heritage railway: www.steamrangerheritagerailway.org

South Australian Whale Centre: www.sawhalecentre.com

while and enjoy the scenery.

Heading back towards Horseshoe Bay along the road at the end of the Harbourmasters walk, you will pass by the restored harbourmasters cottage on the corner of The Strand and Merrill Place. Thankfully it still stands despite being threatened with demolition and keeps watch over Horseshoe Bay.

Another calming and restful spot to sit and appreciate this peaceful part of the world is the soldiers' memorial garden, above Horseshoe Bay. During World War 1, Port Elliot was a destination for soldiers to get some rest and recreation and many of the larger houses were converted to guest houses as a result. It's very humbling to walk past the giant pine trees commemorating the names of local boys who served in the Great War. A century later and it still provides rest and recreation to current generations.

The street called The Strand contains many small shops and eating establishments both of which are plentiful in Port Elliot. It has a country charm and laid back feel as you stroll through town and the welcoming locals are happy for a chat. The two hotels in Port Elliot are both worth spending some time in whilst getting to know their respective histories and the small cafes with alfresco seating won't disappoint either.

A not so best kept secret is the Port Elliot bakery. It is renowned for its freshly baked and extensive range of goodies. You'll know

you've found it by the line of customers leading out the door and stretching down the main street of Port Elliot. Again it is worth the wait or just get in early! It's never too early for meat pies and cream buns is it? Do try the honey logs if they're not sold out.

Another unique experience is to board the iconic Steam Ranger train. You can take a day trip as it travels between the towns of Goolwa, Middleton, Port Elliot and Victor Harbor. It is known affectionately as 'The cockle train' which harks back to its early days when locals would use the then horse drawn train to get to Goolwa to collect cockles (pippis) from the beach. These days depending on weather conditions, the carriages are pulled by either a diesel engine or if you're lucky a fully functioning steam engine. Yet another experience you'd be hard to find anywhere else especially with the tracks hugging the shoreline on its way into Victor Harbor. Having done it you can tell everyone that you've travelled on what is acclaimed as Australia's first public railway.

Victor Harbor is an easy destination for a day trip with the train station delivering you directly into the heart of town. Here you will find the SA Whale Centre which is open every day from 10.30am to 5.00pm and houses an interactive visitor centre and displays over the building's three floors. They can also let you know of the latest whale sightings in the local areas. Whales are mostly spotted from late autumn and throughout the winter months. Victor Har-

bor is also home to a horse drawn tram, pulled by Clydesdales as it makes its way over a 630 metre causeway to Granite Island. This iconic ride is a must do and when on Granite Island keep a lookout for Little Penguins as you take a walk around the island on the one and a half kilometre walking trail. The trail has lookouts and seating along the way.

For those looking for a different way to travel, there is the Encounter Bikeway. The bikeway is a shared walking and bike riding path that winds its way for around 30 kilometres between Victor Harbor and Goolwa. From the heart of Victor Harbor it is around nine kilometres to Port Elliot and it passes directly behind the Caravan Park. Or from the Caravan Park you can take an easy walk to the next town of Middleton around a six kilometre return trip. The payoff at the other end is the Middleton bakery or the Middleton Tavern, the latter of which you can't miss with a massive whale mural covering an entire wall of the building. In the winter months Middleton is known by whale watchers as the place to spot whales and their calves making the most of the sheltered waters.

Returning to Port Elliot, once the sun has set behind Horseshoe Bay you will see an obelisk lit up on the clifftop at the end of The Strand. The obelisk was constructed in 1852 as a navigation mark and a guide for shipping and makes for an interesting destination for a night walk.

