

Rollin' On The River

Immerse yourself in river life without getting your feet wet

Story and photography by
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Wake in the morning to mist on the river, so thick that you can barely see across to the other side. The eeriness is only broken by the occasional pelican poking its way out of the fog as it glides silently atop the water. Welcome to Mannum, a quiet river town on the Murray and less than 100 kilometres from Adelaide.

Mannum has a proud and rich history

running subtly through the town like the serene river it sits on but it wasn't always the placid and unhurried community it is today. There are many reminders around town of flooding, none more alarming than by the banks of the river at Mary Ann Reserve. Flood markers show the heights the river has reached in times gone by. The highest was in 1956 when the river peaked at over five metres. The town was devastated and in many of the businesses today there are photographs depicting the damage caused.

The history of Mannum surrounds you beginning with the main thoroughfare of Randell Street. Named after the son of an early pastoralist, William Randell can be thanked for giving Mannum

its claim to fame as the birthplace of the first paddle steamer in Australia. You will find a wealth of information about the town and river trade history at the Visitor Information Centre just inside the entrance of the Mannum Dock Museum which is open 7 days per week. Here you can pick up brochures and maps on Mannum and surrounding areas before taking a look at the museum. The museum is a must see with fossilised sea creatures, boat building and historical photographs of the early river trade and aboriginal history of the area.

Heading further along Randell Street you will find the caravan park situated in prime position on the banks of the Murray. On arrival at the park we were greet-

ed by welcoming staff and we could conveniently buy bait worms for trying our luck at fishing too. After setting up camp we familiarised ourselves with the rest of the park and found a recently refurbished amenities block, the laundry with plenty of washing machines and dryers, ironing boards at the ready and a very good supply of tourist brochures.

A well-equipped camp kitchen had all the basics as well as a good selection of glasses to use. Looking more like an up market café, the dining area in the camp kitchen also had a combustion heater with a supply of wood.

For the young ones in the family there was a playground, half court tennis, a basketball ring and a small games room.

The park has spacious powered sites and is home to some permanent residents set out neatly on roads giving the park a great community feel. There is also a bunkhouse which can be hired by families or other large groups. When we visited a team of elite junior rowers, their trainers and supporters were using the facility and the river for a training camp.

Staying in the caravan park gives you your own private slice of the river to enjoy. Situated next to the town's two ferries it has plenty of powered sites most of which have scenic views of either the river or the attached Hermann Gass bird sanctuary at the northern end of the park.

This bird sanctuary is home to a vari-

ety of birds from ducks to swamphens, cockatoos to squadrons of pelicans. Dusk can be a noisy but colourful time, making happy hours all the more interesting. When the sun goes down it signals the possums to venture out of the huge gum trees dotted throughout the park to forage for scraps of food. Although friendly critters, there are signs to warn visitors not to feed the local wildlife or birdlife for fear of making them aggressive.

Once you have set up camp you can leave the car behind. The town is within easy walking distance and whether you are a lover of history, friendly country town culture or a river enthusiast it has something to offer everyone.



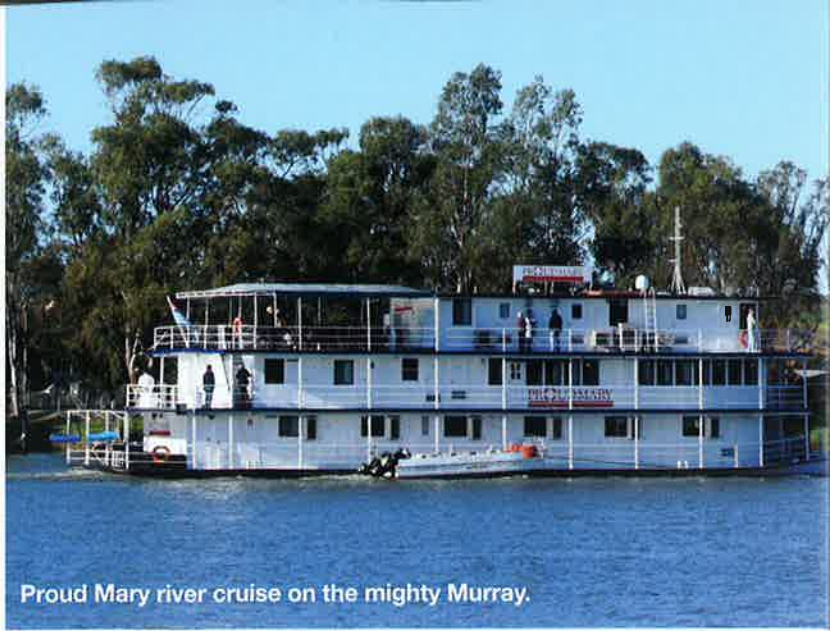
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A steep climb but worth it for the view.



Proud Mary river cruise on the mighty Murray.

There is a number of historic and scenic walks in and around the town to give visitors an appreciation of the region and the chance to view stunning panoramas. Just wandering along Randell Street you will come across a set of steps heading skyward adjacent to the towns bowling club. Don't let the gradient stop you from making the ascent, as the resting spot and view over the township and river from the top is worth it.

As well as many small boutiques and a treasure trove of second hand shops, Mannum has a variety of places to dine with restaurants, hotels and clubs as well as bakeries and a country butcher.

For true country hospitality you can't miss a visit to the two hotels in Mannum. We dined at The Pretoria Hotel (built in 1900) at the top end of town where the spacious dining room overlooks the Murray. The menu choices were wide and

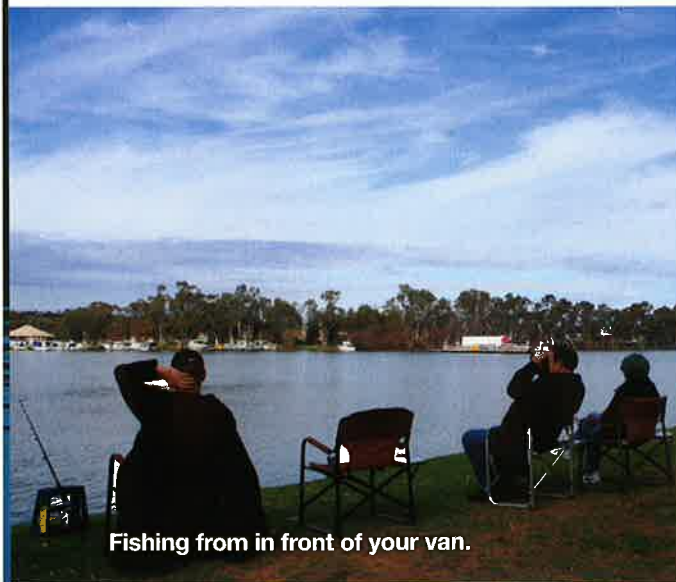
service and meals were excellent. It has a great story of when the major flood occurred in 1956; it didn't stop this hotel's trade with drinks being served from the top balcony to patrons arriving by boat in the main street.

We also visited the Mannum Hotel at the bottom end of town. This hotel was built in 1869 and in the days of river trade, was used by travellers from the river boats and itinerant workers. This hotel also features prominently in pictures of the flood, showing the water level almost up to the second storey balcony.

The Mary Ann Reserve by the river has plenty to offer families with green grass and playgrounds for children to enjoy with the majestic Murray River as a back drop. This is a great spot for a picnic or barbecue using the facilities available. This popular spot on the Murray is home to a few cruise boats which vary in size and tour package

options they offer. They include everything from short one hour cruises up to seven nights on luxury paddle steamers.

Being this close to water you have to try your hand at catching the elusive Murray Cod. The beauty of fishing on the river is that you can buy bait worms locally and be sitting back, bell on rod, waiting for the fish to come to you. Varieties of fish found in these waters include Callop, Catfish and Redfin. Unfortunately there are still plentiful Carp as well which with their muddy taste makes them inedible. It is illegal to return them to the river as they are seen as a pest destroying the river quality and native fish habitats. It's important to read the signs for recreational fishing dotted around the river to know what can be kept and when, and what species must be returned to the river. For boaties, ramps are conveniently located in the caravan park and at plenty of other spots nearby.



Fishing from in front of your van.



Rowers in training.



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Plenty of space to free camp at Bolto Reserve.



A ferry ride across the Murray River and Mannum takes you to Bolto Reserve.



An ideal way to get an overall picture of the winding river is to take a drive along the Youngusband Road on the eastern side of the river. Taking the ferry across the river and heading towards the settlement of Youngusband, the drive follows the river sometimes parallel to the main river and other times passing lagoons.

The road gradually begins to climb and as you come to a clifftop lookout area there is a breathtaking view looking down at the shacks of Teal Flat and the cliffs further up river. Continuing, you will pass the settlements of Bowhill and Purnong. It's worth detouring to see these river settlements and the tranquillity the shacks enjoy especially in the quieter cooler months of the year. Following the road on to Walkers Flat you will wind down to the ferry crossing and back to the other side of the river.

The settlement of Walker Flat is known for its spectacular cliffs and the golden glow they take on when the sun hits them in the afternoon. The lucky owners of the shacks that line the river here get quite a show at sunset. When you leave Walker Flat, follow the road back to Mannum approximately 32 kilometres away.

Evening in the caravan park and the river is quiet with only the hum of the ferries on their occasional journeys and weather and fire bans permitting you can use a small brazier for a camp fire. The park

owners welcome their use and even loan them out to visitors.

Depending on the time of year, Mannum can transform from a quiet sleepy town to a mecca for water sport enthusiasts. Summertime sees speedboats, water skiers and jet skis turning the river into a major highway, and all year round houseboats meander up and down river. It is also a perfect spot to kayak with the river backwaters being safe places to explore.

For visitors wanting to free camp, there is a number of places dotted along this stretch of the Murray River. One popular camp is at Bolto Reserve across the river and downstream from the caravan park. Turn right on leaving the ferry and the road widens out to a free camp situated at the end of the road. For \$10 per night, you can camp right on the river only metres from your caravan. A coin operated ticket machine is located at the toilet block on site. Dogs are welcome too and there are permanent fire pits. Although popular with visitors and locals alike, there are plenty of well-marked sites.

One thing you can look forward to is adjusting to "River Time", which is a lot like the pace of the ferries making their way back and forth across this wide river 24 hours a day. Their repetitive, peaceful journeys will have you mesmerized and meditative in no time at all. Ah the serenity!

FACT FILE

How to get there:

Mannum is 99km from Adelaide on the National Highway M1, or South Eastern Freeway. Take the turn off at Murray Bridge and follow the signs to Mannum. Roads in the area are sealed, except if venturing into river shack settlements but all are easily accessible.

When to go:

The region has something to offer all year round with temperatures generally slightly higher than in Adelaide. My pick of the best time to go would be in the cooler months August to November when you can enjoy campfires and less traffic on the river.

Where To Stay

Mannum Caravan Park, Purnong Road Mannum South Australia www.mannum-caravanpark.com.au

Camping can be found a ferry ride across the river at Bolto Reserve, it is unpowered and costs \$10 per vehicle per night. There is a toilet block, camp fire pits and on river sites for caravans and campers. Another close by camp is Haythorpe Reserve which also costs \$10 per night. Both camps have boat ramps and dogs are allowed.

The Mannum Visitor Information Centre can be found at 6 Randell Street and is open 7 days, www.murrayriver.com.au/mannum-visitor-information-centre



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