

The romance of the road

#ROADTRIP
#AUSTRALIA



Avoid the crowds, feel the wind in your hair and choose your own adventure with a classic Australian road trip. *By Natarsha Brown*

THE RISE OF THE HUMBLE ROAD TRIP can be traced back to the early 20th century, when the post-WWII automobile boom and the publication of the first AAA TripTik guides started reshaping what it meant to travel. In the following decades, it was sentimentalised by a number of writers, from Jack Kerouac to Hunter S. Thompson, and Hollywood eventually caught on to the romance with a roll-call of films hitting the road – *Thelma & Louise*, *Easy Rider* and *Almost Famous*, just to name a few.

Although the roots may lay in American pop culture, Australians have adopted and adapted this rite of passage, and I daresay become the experts. In fact, you could argue that this nostalgic pastime has been entrenched in our way of life long before it became fashionable overseas. In large part because we never had a say in the matter: our homeland is vast and wild, and the only way to truly explore its far-reaching corners is on four wheels.

While the road trip has been a popular holiday of choice for generations, in a post-pandemic world, it is set for a renaissance. Your car remains a private and hygienic space, and the safest way to explore a world that we have had limited access to in the past year and a half.

According to Tourism Research Australia, the September 2020 quarter showed that caravan and camping is the most popular holiday type for Aussies. Moreover, there are more than 750,000 recreational vehicles registered on our roads, and a record 3,628 units built in the first two months of 2021.

It's no longer the domain of families and grey nomads, with younger generations, groups of friends, solo travellers and pet owners now just as keen to explore our backyards; accommodations have pivoted to meet the demands of this changing market. Long gone are the days of 'roughing it': expect glam, off-grid, one-of-a-kind and Instagram-worthy sleeping arrangements. Holiday parks haven't missed the memo either, with a large number undergoing reboots and refurbishments to attract fresh (and better-heeled) guests.

In the words of CCIA's CEO, Stuart Lamont: "While the traditional 'road trip' experience is very much still alive, many holiday parks now feature very different accommodation, amenities and experiences – from wildlife encounters and water parks to vintage vans and wellness facilities."



GREAT EASTERN DRIVE, TAS
Travel time: 5 days

If finger-licking-good seafood, excellent pinot noir and powder-white beaches equal your idea of a good getaway, then you simply can't go past this journey between Hobart's waterfront and the bright-orange boulders of the Bay of Fires, passing through the pretty-as-a-postcard Swansea, Bicheno and St Helens en route.

Highlights: Book into the Mona Ferry's Posh Pit and sample complimentary Moo Brew beer, Morilla wine and canapes on your return trip to the provocative museum. Pull into one of the many fabulous cellar doors that line the coastline for a tasting (Priory Ridge and Devil's Corner are always winners), hike to Freycinet's stellar Wineglass Bay Lookout and then, onwards to the beach itself, to take a dip among the lapping azure waters. Add an extra day or two to hike, camp and bike around the captivating, car-free Maria Island.

Where to stay: Set right on the cliff's edge of a private peninsula overlooking Great Oyster Bay, Thalia Haven is home to *that* Insta-famous bathtub with an equally dreamy view. The four rustic stone cottages are all self-reliant – water, electricity and warmth are drawn from the surrounding land, wind and sunshine. Up north, bunker down in one of Bay of Fires Bush Retreat's 10 king bell tents, just a 2.8-kilometre drive to Binalong Bay's main beach.



GREAT OCEAN ROAD, VIC
Travel time: 3 days

When the journey matters as much as the destination, head out on the Great Ocean Road. Straddling Victoria's coast from Torquay to Warrnambool, the rollicking 250-kilometre ride traverses some of the most scenic coastline in the country.

Highlights: Pockets of lush rainforest, sheer limestone cliffs, around 700 shipwrecks, calm seaside towns, dairy farms and glorious beaches... stopping along the way is the best part. Don't miss the Twelve Apostles (of which there are now eight), the koala spotting capital of Kennett River, whale watching from Cape Otway Lightstation's observation deck and taking a walk among the towering redwoods at Beech Forest.

Where to stay: Situated directly across from the beach, BIG4 Beacon Resort comes complete with an indoor heated swimming pool, a mud day spa, free yoga and pilates, a 24/7 fitness studio, a coffee delivery service and swanky villas. For those looking for something more romantic, the architect-led, self-contained Sky Pods located on a private wildlife refuge on the rugged coast of Cape Otway make for a memorable stay.

OPENING SPREAD, FROM LEFT: Bunyeruo Valley in the Flinders Ranges © Amixlouise/Tourism SA; Explorer's Way © Greg Sullivan/Discovery Parks - Glen Helen. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Wildlife along the Great Ocean Road © Visit Victoria; Maria Island © Stu Gibson/Tourism Tasmania; Taylors Beach © Stu Gibson/Tourism Tasmania. OPPOSITE PAGE: Diving into Maguk Falls in Kakadu © Kylie Hunter & Hayley Anderson/Tourism NT

NATURE'S WAY, NT
Travel time: 7-10 days

Linking Australia's only tropical capital city with the swimming hole- and waterfall-laden Kakadu, Nitmiluk and Litchfield national parks, the 800-plus-kilometre Nature's Way highlights the very best of the Top End.

Highlights: Take in the stunning views of Kakadu's wetlands from Ubirr's Nadab Lookout; explore the many gorges of Nitmiluk via canoe, foot, boat or helicopter; learn about living off the land with the Top Didj Cultural Experience; and drop by Darwin's Mindil Beach Sunset Markets for some of the best street food in the country.

Where to stay: Bamurru Plains is an extraordinary bush experience on the edge of Kakadu, with nine suites blending seamlessly into the surroundings – there are no TVs, mini-bars or telephones here, so as not to distract from the wildlife. If you wish to stay more central, go glamping at Cooinda Lodge or head to Hideaway Litchfield, which consists of two shipping containers turned lavish escapes in the heart of the wilderness.



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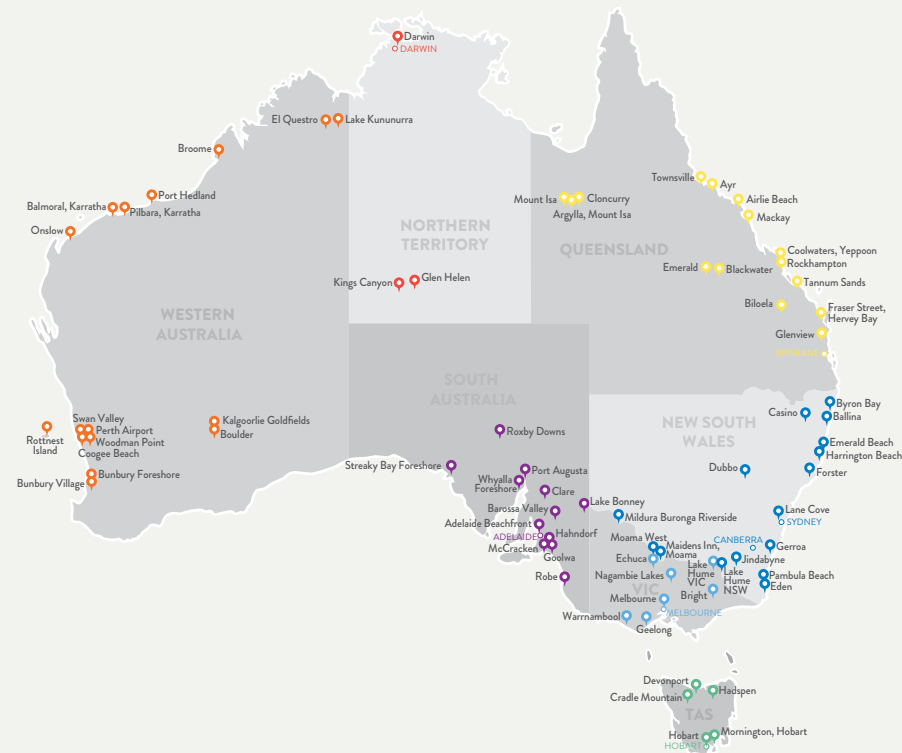
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AUSTRALIA

GIBB RIVER ROAD, WA & NT

Travel time: 14 days

Cutting a bright orange swathe through the Kimberley from Derby to Kununurra, this 660-kilometre outback odyssey is an endless sea of vast starry skies, red dirt, hidden-away gorges and waterholes, and cattle stations the size of small countries.

Highlights: Wading through pools of water along Tunnel Creek to hike through WA's oldest cave system, then paddling to the edge of the natural infinity pool at Bell Gorge, boarding a scenic flight over the four-tiered Mitchell Falls, braving the Pentecost River Crossing, soaking in the thermal pools at Zebedee Springs and admiring the fossilised remains of marine life on the limestone walls of Windjana Gorge.

Where to stay: Now under G'day Parks management, El Questro caters to all budgets and tastes, with a 10-suite homestead, rooms on the banks of Pentecost River, a number of camping sites and safari-style tented cabins at Emma Gorge to choose from. Further up the road, Discovery Parks - Lake Kununurra sits at the gateway to the dramatic rock formations of Mirima National Park, the Bungle Bungle Ranges in Purnululu National Park and the dazzling sunsets of Lake Argyle. Dogs are welcome, and the deluxe cabins sitting on Lake Kununurra's waterfront make for a dreamy stay.



SOUTH COAST, NSW

Travel time: 4-7 days

A perennial favourite with holidaymakers come summertime, the stunning NSW South Coast has few peers when it comes to soft-as-silk sand, verdant rolling hills, fantastic fish and chippies on every street corner and friendly locals. Here, the coast meets the country in the most charming way possible.

Highlights: Nibble on a cinnamon-smothered sweet from The Famous Berry Donut Van; take a cruise in the nature-filled wonderland of Jervis Bay to spot seals, dolphins, penguins and whales; shop for antiques in the twin villages of Central Tilba and Tilba Tilba; slurp oysters in Merimbula; jump on a tour to the wildlife-rich Montague Island; and snap a pic of the dramatic Horse Head Rock in Bermagui.

Where to stay: Set among thick bushland, Paperbark Camp features 12 glamping tents, with no luxury spared: hot water thermoses for tea and coffee are dropped outside of tents every morning, picnic hampers and in-tent massages can be ordered in advance, and an on-site fine-dining restaurant surrounded by treetops dishes up seasonal dinners.

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Gibb River Road © Matt Deakin/Tourism WA; Central Tilba © Tim Clark/Destination NSW; Dive Jervis Bay © Jordan Robins/Destination NSW. NEXT SPREAD, FROM TOP: Wilpena Pound © Tourism SA; Discovery Rottneest Island © travishayto.com

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EXPLORER'S WAY, NT & SA

Travel time: 14 days

Meandering all the way from Adelaide to Darwin, the 3,000-kilometre Explorer's Way cuts through the heart of Australia's outback, passing some of our most legendary natural treasures along the way.

Highlights: Winetasting in Clare Valley, going underground in the opal capital of Coober Pedy, marvelling at the sandstone walls of Glen Helen Gorge (aka our stunning cover), listening to creation stories at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, catching a brilliant sunset at Kings Canyon and standing atop a giant granite boulder at Karlu Karlu.

Where to stay: Recently taken over by NRMA Parks and Resorts, Wilpena Pound Resort is set to undergo a \$3 million makeover. The only accommodation located within Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park currently offers plush glamping tents and a postcard-worthy camping ground, but the real drawcard is the resort's guided cultural walks and scenic flights over the natural amphitheatre of Wilpena Pound. The G'Day Group has also expanded its footprint in the outback, with the acquisition of Glen Helen Lodge: the only accommodation in the West McDonnell Ranges National Park. It reopens in September as Discovery Parks - Glen Helen, with plans to develop the property to include glamping tents, cabins, an infinity pool and a restaurant overlooking Glen Helen Gorge. For now, enjoy helicopter rides across nearby gorges and 4WDing through 800-million-year-old landscapes.

SOUTH WEST EDGE, WA

Travel time: 10-12 days

Encompassing world-class wineries, forests home to some of the tallest trees in the world, and a long list of blindingly-white swimming bays – not to mention fields of wildflowers come spring, and sperm whales, orcas and dolphins frolicking offshore – this 1,200-kilometre stretch from Perth to Esperance has it all.

Highlights: Meet Lucky Bay's beachcombing kangaroos, bounce on a walkway amid the treetops at the Valley of the Giants, fly over the bubblegum-pink Lake Hillier, splash around in Greens Pool and Elephant Rocks (both framed by huge boulders which act as a protective shore break) and sip a glass of chilled chardonnay at one of the many Margaret River vineyards – Cape Mentelle, Vasse Felix and Voyager Estate are a good place to start.

Where to stay: Positioned on the edge of Lake Beedelup and surrounded by majestic Karri Forest, RAC Karri Valley Resort's rustic lakeside chalets and brand-new campsite are perfect for getting back to nature. Explore the surrounding walking trails; hire a SUP, canoe, bike or fishing equipment; meet faunal residents at the on-site animal farm; or wind down at the restaurant nestled beside the misty waters. Also, be sure to include a side trip to the Discovery Rottnest Island to meet the famous friendly quokkas. The first low-impact glamping experience on the car-free island, the property features 83 eco-tents connected by elevated boardwalks, to keep the landscape undisturbed. 🌿



TRAVEL FACTS

STAYING THERE

Bamurrup Plains bamurruplains.com
 BIG4 Beacon Resort beaconresort.com.au
 BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park goldcoastholidaypark.com.au
 Brisbane Holiday Village brisbaneholidayvillage.com.au
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