

# Road Tripping Beyond Australia's Great Ocean Road

by Carolyne Kauser-Abbott

Lunch at a car wash – the Water Café – with a selection of stale breakfast buns was not how I expected to begin our drive from Melbourne to Australia's legendary Great Ocean Road. We weren't starving, however, only surprised that this restaurant did not embrace the "Paddock to Plate" philosophy followed by so many local kitchens.



2 of the 12 Apostles



12 Apostles Food Tour

The Great Ocean Road (GOR) was a farsighted work project for returning World War I veterans. A permanent route allowing access to remote fishing communities was envisioned in the 1880s; however, the southern coastal road only became a reality once survey work began in 1918. Some 3,000 veterans worked with pickaxes, shovels and small machinery on the GOR's construction. Completed in 1932, the GOR remains a striking memorial to the sacrifice of those who were involved in the war effort.

It's an easy drive from Melbourne to the official start of the 243-km coastal road in Torquay, which is Australia's surfing capital and hometown to retailers Rip Curl and Quicksilver. This town, with its throng of surf shops, is a magnet for surfers hoping for a "wicked right-hander" on legendary Bells Beach. We stopped for mid-afternoon flat whites at Surfcoast Wholefoods, where the coffees appeared, finally, on "surfer time."

We covered the first section of the GOR in the dying light of an autumn afternoon, passing the Memorial Arch and Split Point Lighthouse, at Aireys Inlet. Our road trip coincided with a long weekend and a school break, bad timing that limited our accommodation options. The Lorne Coachman Inn was located on the edge of town, next to a caravan park, and our first impressions of it were grim.

The damp evening restricted our desire for exploration to the closest restaurant, but the team at Saporitalia exceeded our expectations with a delicious tomato, red pepper and goat cheese soup, spicy prawn pizza and Tasmanian salmon salad. The portions were generous, and we were happy to have to walk home.

The next morning, we awoke to the noisy combination of cockatoos fighting to open garbage cans (these birds are not to be reckoned with) and the preparations of campers for the next legs of their road trips. We headed to Lorne, a popular destination graced with a long curve of sand, a family-friendly beach with enough white water to satisfy some surfers. We ventured out for a pre-breakfast walk to Teddy's Lookout, a hilltop vista point, where the sun sparkled on the water like treasure stretching towards Tasmania.

Australians have perfected the art of great coffee and healthy, satisfying breakfasts. It was hard to choose between the tempting coffee shops, bakeries and restaurants on Lorne's energetic main street. We picked Moons Espresso Bar, based on its apparent popularity with the Saturday morning crowd, and shared a table with a lady psychologist from the Country Fire Authority. As we ate fried eggs on sourdough, sides of bacon and spinach, she explained that we would see kilometres of charred trees along the next section of the GOR, the results of a devastating Christmas Day (2015) bushfire that destroyed 116 Wye River homes, but blessedly took no lives.

We thought maybe Saturday was not the best day to drive the GOR – we were jockeying for parking and conscious of photo-bombers at the notable stops. We made several pit stops along the route, including at the Inukshuk-style rock piles at Carisbrook Creek, the farmers market at Apollo Bay, and the viewpoint at Cape Patton. We descended to the beach via the Gibson's Steps to gawk at the first of the towering limestone stacks in the ocean just off the beach – the 12 Apostles.

The 12 Apostles Visitors Centre serves a purpose in attempting to control and safely corral the crowds, prevent erosion and eliminate the possibility of someone falling from the steep cliffs. But, for me, arriving at what seemed like a bus terminal diminished my interest in seeing the iconic rock formations. We toughed it out for a few photos.

Our next choice was the most challenging of the whole trip: Do we stick to the official GOR route to see the balance of the coastline, or drift off and explore a portion of the 12 Apostles Gourmet Trail?

We chose to leave the mobs behind on the coast and sample some of the wares from food artisans located along a 75-km route. Afternoon munchies enticed us to stop at the Timboon Cheesery, which carries products from the Schulz Organic Dairy. Re-fuelled after eating hot vegetable soup, toasted sandwiches and samples from the cheese selection, we headed to the Timboon Railway Shed Distillery. Local records confirm that whisky has been made in the village – not always legally – since the 1890s.

The owners of Timboon Fine Ice Cream opened an outlet in the town's old railway shed, where you can buy products from several of the food producers found along the Gourmet Trail. Stop by this gathering place for a light lunch, stay for a pizza dinner and sample the single malt whisky or other spirits made in the 600-litre copper pot still.

The drive through the countryside from Timboon to Port Fairy reminded us of Ireland, with verdant rolling hills and grazing dairy cows and sheep. We rejoined the GOR at Port Campbell, knowing we'd missed some coastal sights, but happy we'd taken the time for a foodie detour.

Warrnambool may be the official termination of the GOR, but it's not the end of Victoria's beautiful seascapes. We spent the night in Port Fairy, a fishing town with plenty of history and a beach that stretches to the horizon. Our charming hosts at Douglas Riverside Inn welcomed us with a glass of Yellow Tail's pink bubbles. It was a perfect way to toast our journey along the Great Ocean Road.

## Visitor information on the Great Ocean Road:

[visitgreatoceanroad.org.au/visitor-information](http://visitgreatoceanroad.org.au/visitor-information)

12 Apostles: [visit12apostles.com.au/#&panel1-1](http://visit12apostles.com.au/#&panel1-1)

12 Apostles Gourmet Trail: [12apostlesfoodartisans.com](http://12apostlesfoodartisans.com) and [visit12apostles.com.au/food-wine/12-apostles-gourmet-trail](http://visit12apostles.com.au/food-wine/12-apostles-gourmet-trail)

Timboon Cheesery: [schulzorganicfarms.com.au](http://schulzorganicfarms.com.au)

Timboon Railway Shed Distillery: [timboondistillery.com.au](http://timboondistillery.com.au)

Carolyne writes about food travel for Perfectly Provence, Ginger and Nutmeg, and curates Canadian designer products for e-commerce site Atelier.