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SUMMER DRIVES

THE WORLD'S BEST ADVENTURES ON THE OPEN ROAD

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Life-side Assistance



GREAT OCEAN ROAD, AUSTRALIA

BY FIONA HARPER

Reminiscent of Jack Nicholson in the scene from *As Good as it Gets*, where he prepared for his epic road trip, I stack the CD playlist of my convertible with favourite driving music. Billy Ocean's *Get Outta My Dreams, Get Into My Car* is just cheesy enough to make it, so too is *Take it Easy* by The Eagles. Overhead, blue sky is all the incentive I need to lower the roof and hit the Great Ocean Road. Leaving the bustling city behind, the 240-km coastal road starts at Torquay, 100 km south of Melbourne. To the south of the road, the Southern Ocean extends all the way to Antarctica.

The only road connecting the Victorian coastal communities of Torquay and Warrnambool, the Great Ocean Road was constructed by returned First World War soldiers. Dedicated to servicemen and women who didn't return from the war, it's the world's largest war memorial.

A third of the way along the route is Lorne, the largest town on the eastern coast and a summer hot spot that overlooks a sweeping expanse of unbroken beach. Apollo Bay, with its fishing boat harbour and pier, is popular with fishermen, while the teeny village of Wye River is a quiet base camp for exploring the natural beauty of nearby Great Otway National Park.

Taking a short detour to the Cape Otway Lighthouse, signs alert me to beware of wildlife. I turn the music down to hear the cacophony of sounds erupting from the forest before reaching the lighthouse, which has both historical and maritime significance. In operation since 1848, it's been guiding mariners to safety ever since. The lighthouse is imperative for mariners—this part of the coast, between Cape Otway and Port Fairy, is known as the shipwreck coast, with over 80 documented shipwrecks.

Driving back onto the Great Ocean Road, I'm soon overwhelmed at the sight of a slumbering koala wedged into the fork of a branch hanging overhead. Bashful creatures that are rarely spotted in the wild, it makes my day. This really is as good as it gets. >>



The Twelve Apostles

STAY

Grand Pacific Hotel, Lorne: Built in 1875, opposite the Lorne Pier long before the Great Ocean Road existed; well-heeled guests arrived by steamer for summer holidays. Now it's fully restored to its original splendour.

Cape Otway Lighthouse Cottages, Apollo Bay: Perched high atop the cliffs that prompted explorer Matthew Flinders to observe, "I have seldom seen a more fearful section of coastline," the Lighthouse Cottages are adjacent to Australia's oldest surviving lighthouse.

EAT

Wye Beach Hotel, Wye River: With a vast sun-drenched deck offering sea views across Bass Strait all the way to the horizon, this is a perfect spot for a seafood lunch accompanied by wine from nearby Bellarine Peninsula.

Growlers, Torquay: An über-cool restaurant morphed from this beachfront bungalow eons ago, sating appetites of trendsetters and beach-goers alike.

MUST SEE

Otway Fly Treetop Walk: High in the lush canopy of the Otway Ranges, the treetop walk features a canopy-level walkway suspended loftily above the ground.

Twelve Apostles: Take a 15-minute helicopter ride over the eight remaining limestone stacks that comprise the Twelve Apostles, which are particularly special in the late afternoon when the low sun lights up the pillars.