

## TRAVEL



# GREAT CATCH

If you've got a taste for fresh seafood, the Bellarine Peninsula is well worth a visit, writes **SUE WALLACE**.

**L**OVE mussels? Then Portarlington, on the Bellarine Peninsula, is the place to go for these tasty seafood treats. The picturesque coastal town is Australia's mussel farming capital, with tonnes of Australian blue mussels harvested each day, washed, sorted and shipped off to markets, supermarkets, wholesalers, cafes and restaurants.

If you ask locals, the best way to eat them is in a mussel soup, but plain or garnished you will never get fresher.

Sea Bounty Mussels and Advance Mussel Supply are the leaders in mussel farming on the Bellarine.

If you really love mussels there's even a Mussel Stout produced by the Bellarine Brewing Co — a flavoursome stout brewed with those Portarlington mussels.

You can buy mussels at local fish suppliers or enjoy them at cafes and restaurants in Portarlington, which is just 44 kilometres from Melbourne as the seagulls fly.

It is a popular fishing and holiday spot with a population that swells during the summer holidays, but it's also great for a short break any time of the year.

Located on the northernmost tip of the Bellarine, the main street climbs a slight hill, providing spectacular views of the area and beyond. Holidaymakers are well-catered for with restaurants, cafes and bakeries lining the main street.

Many of the best food producers and wineries are clustered around Portarlington so it's an excellent base for those embarking on a Bellarine Taste Trail tour.

The pier is also a fascinating stroll, with plenty of boats including the town's mussel fleet berthed there, some selling seafood direct from the boat.



You can usually find a local fisherman or two throwing in a line from the pier.

For the first time, native Angasi oysters are being farmed off Portarlington in Port Phillip Bay, which is creating lots of interest.

But it's in January each year that the town celebrates the region's iconic mussels at the Portarlington Mussel Festival that always attracts a big crowd.

There are plenty of fun activities celebrating the produce of the region.

Another great celebration is the National Celtic Festival, held over the June long weekend. It has become Australia's largest and most diverse celebration of Celtic music and culture — just wear a touch of tartan.

If you love fishing or just getting out on the water there is plenty of boating access to the bay.

The shady foreshore is a great place to spend time, and the town has a scenic golf course where children can enrol for the action at Port Mini Masters clinics.

The Heritage Mill is one of Portarlington's heritage landmarks, which has been fully restored by the

National Trust and well worth a visit.

Built from stone quarried on-site in 1857, it is one of the few preserved Victorian flour mills.

Catch a glimpse of 19th century life — it is open on weekends from midday to 4pm between September and May.

During the warmer months the foreshore camping grounds of Portarlington and St Leonards overflow with visitors, some who keep coming back annually over generations to enjoy the calmer bay waters.

Nearby Indented Head is another great spot to throw in a line or put your feet up.

The small coastal village, which owes its name to explorer Matthew Flinders, is a six-kilometre drive south-east of Portarlington.

The captain surveyed the coastline from the summit of Arthurs Seat, across Port Phillip in April 1802 when he observed the shape of the Bellarine Peninsula coastline and named it Indented Head.

He was completing the first circumnavigation of Australia and making a detailed survey of the coastline for the British government when he named the area.

## fastfacts

- Stay: Starhaven Retreat  
13 Calimo Place, Indented Head, Portarlington, Phone: (03) 5257 3163 starhaven.com.au
- Pick up your mussels at Advance Mussel Supply, 230 Portarlington-Queenscliff Road, Bellarine. Phone (03) 5259 1377 advancemussel.com.au
- For more details visit geelongbellarine.com.au.

Today it is a popular fishing and holiday destination to be enjoyed in all seasons.

A great base is the impressive Starhaven Retreat, which may look familiar to fans of the television series *Grand Designs*.

It featured on the first series made in Australia in 2010 and opened as a luxury guesthouse in 2013. It's a great place to catch your breath and enjoy the stunning surroundings and touch of glamour.

Ranked by TripAdvisor as the number one B&B of the Geelong and Bellarine region since February 2014, owners Ian McDonald and Robert Wilhelm offer luxury suite accommodation with views of Port Phillip Bay across to the Melbourne skyline.

It doesn't take long to feel at home in this stylish retreat and there's plenty to do. The beach is just across the road and perfect for long walks or you can sit by the fire with a glass of wine, enjoy a cocktail at the bar or watch movies in the retreat's cosy 15-seat gold class cinema.

All suites have private en suites, tea and coffee making facilities and 3D LED flatscreen TVs with a choice of on-demand movies.

A gourmet breakfast is served daily and dinner packages are available with a three-course menu featuring the best of local produce and wine.

From Starhaven you can do a winery hop to the many wineries including Jack Rabbit, Terindah Estate, Scotchmans Hill and Bellerine Estate.

But chances are you will want to put your feet up and enjoy those wonderful sea views.

And if you missed that episode of *Grand Designs* featuring Starhaven you can always watch it in comfort in the gold class cinema — complete with popcorn and ice-cream.

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