

When I first thought about writing an article on how to have the best possible time on the Great Ocean Road, I wondered what on Earth I could add that isn't readily available online. But, after chatting to a few friends about their real-world experiences, I realised that beyond the usual 'see this, see that' advice, there was a lack of practical advice that could take your experience above and beyond.

And, that's the key! The Great Ocean Road is epic, but it's hardly an undiscovered secret destination. So if you're not careful, you can literally be swamped by busloads of tourists and end up feeling completely underwhelmed.

Based on my many trips there, and the thoughts of my fellow explorers here's the best advice I can offer.



If you're exploring the Great Ocean Road, here are my real-world tips.

1. The early bird gets the worm & the solitude

We all like to sleep in, but if you get up early and hit the busiest places first, you not only get awesome early morning light, you get to avoid the busloads of tourists that descend at much more civilised times. This is usually between about 10 am and 4 pm.

Wake up early, enjoy the sights in peace, then have a 'nana nap' later if you need to, when everyone else is fighting for a view. That early morning light also makes for sexier photos!



If you don't want to share the experience with lots of people, an early start is a must.

2. Sometimes the best bits aren't the best bits

You don't need me to tell you what the most loved highlights are - the Twelve Apostles, Loch Ard Gorge, the Bay of Islands, The Grotto and London Bridge (even though it's fallen down) - are all popular for good reasons.

They're all epic and beautiful and magical. But, in addition to the main viewing platforms, you'll also find a few random, unmarked turnoffs which offer an alternative, less crowded, view of some of these attractions.

You don't have to be Burke & Wills, just try a few turns offs and see what happens.




There are so many highlights to visit, but you should explore further as well.

3. The Great Ocean Road is more than a road

Because of its name, it's tempting to think of this journey as being purely a coastal drive. And, to also envision the main attractions as being along the main road.

If you're in the neighbourhood, I cannot suggest highly enough that you take enough time to explore some of the surrounding areas, especially the Otways, which is easily one of my favourite natural places in Australia. The Redwoods, the waterfalls - Hopetoun and Beauchamp are two of my favourites but there's plenty more. It's all amazing.

As a runner, I'm also quite partial to tipping my hat to the legendary 'gumboot runner' Cliff Young memorial at Beech Forest.


 *The waterfalls at the Otways are just one of the incredible places to see along the way.*

4. Take your time - because you may not have any choice

Whenever I talk about road trips, I always remind people not to be seduced by 'distances'. It's easy to see that something is 50km away and assume you can get there in half an hour doing the 100kmh speed limit. Of course, that's not always the case, and on the Great Ocean Road, it's rarely the case.

It's a popular and very winding road at times, which means you're often travelling way below the allowed speed limit. So, when you're planning your day, assume you'll be caught behind a caravan, being towed by a one-legged guy on a push bike.

Allow about 50% more time than you think it will take and enjoy the drive.

 *Allow more time to get to places, as you won't be driving at full speed the whole time.*

5. The best time to go isn't necessarily the best time to go

Most people like to go to the ocean when the weather is fine. Makes perfect sense. Who doesn't love clear blue skies, warm weather, and a bit of sunshine? It's also when the Great Ocean Road is busiest. For me, there are all kinds of beauty - including stormy skies and rough oceans. These sights are easily as beautiful as a clear summer day. Maybe even more so.

As the old saying goes, there's no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing. So, get your warm clothes, your wet weather gear, and head out in the off-season to enjoy a different and less crowded side of the Great Ocean Road.

Just drive little slower, turn the heater up a little higher, and keep your camera in a waterproof bag. Another upside of going in winter or early spring is the waterfalls are always way more impressive as well!

 *Grey skies are just as breathtaking as a warm summer's day.*

7. Are the cafes and restaurants overrated or should you cook your own meals?

I'm a fly by the seat of my pants guy, so for food, I'm just as likely to grab a bag of bread rolls and some cheese before I take off, then improvise along the way. I'd much rather sit and eat in a random, beautiful spot I've stumbled across than sit in a crowded restaurant with Instagrammers taking photos of their food because Trip Advisor says it's good.

That said, I've enjoyed plenty of good meals in the more major towns including Torquay, Lorne, Apollo Bay and Port Campbell. There's all the usual stuff you'd expect including pub meals, pizza places, Thai, and of course seafood - so you won't be short of choice.



At around 100km in distance, the Apollo Bay to Port Campbell leg is one of the longest (it's about double the distance between those other towns). So, a quick stop at The Shoppe in the small town of Lavers Hill, which is at the halfway mark, is usually on my agenda. Breaks up the drive nicely, and the food is good. And as an aside, there are also public toilets right next to it which is good to know.

If you've never used The Toilet Map before, it's well worth [checking it out](#) if you're not a 'go in the bushes' kind of traveller.



There are plenty of places to eat along the way, but bring some staples to get by. Image: Jack Rabbit Vineyard

8. The best places to stay along the Great Ocean Road

A few final comments on logistics if you're planning a trip there. The Great Ocean Road takes a total distance of 243km. So, as you can imagine, there's plenty of places to stay and eat along the way.

As far as places to stay go, there's the full range of options from [camping and caravans parks](#) to fancy places and Airbnbs - so go with what you're comfortable with. I'll usually keep it simple and sleep in the back of my car or stay in a caravan park if I want a shower, but Trip Advisor and [apps such as Wikicamps](#) are your friends here for the best options.

Just keep in mind during peak season, and especially on long weekends and school holidays, it gets super busy so availability is lower, and prices are higher.



I stayed in my vehicle, or in caravan parks - but there is a range of accommodation options. Image: Cumberland-River Holiday Park

9. Logistics and phone reception

One final tip... if your car is unreliable, or like me, you're a bit of a dill and miscalculate your fuel consumption, keep in mind that while you're unlikely to be stranded for weeks, if something goes wrong mobile coverage can be sketchy in places and mechanical help can take a while to arrive. Even in off-peak season, you probably won't have to wait long to flag someone down during the day, but I waited quite a few hours for the RACV to come and rescue me on my last trip.

So, maybe take a good book to read. For the record, I was driving a very old convertible sports car and the fuel gauge didn't work properly. I broke down literally only 2km from a fuel stop, but couldn't walk there and back because of the equipment I had in the car. So I had to wait for the RACV and he was the only person on call covering a very large area! Not ideal.



Make sure you plan for fuel and get your vehicle checked so you don't get caught out. Image: Visit Victoria

Now to start planning your trip

The [Tourism Australia](#), [Visit Victoria](#) and official [Great Ocean Road websites](#) are all great



resources that can all help you plan the specifics of your journey.

But, they won't give you these real-world tips and if you're anything like me, you'll want to avoid the crowds whenever possible, which will help you have a much better time on the Great Ocean Road.

Who's up for a trip down the Great Ocean Road?