

ROAD TRIP

Australia's so-called Shipwreck Coast in the South East of the country boasts spectacular beaches and fabulous swimming spots, says [Aaron Davis](#).



Take a swim in the blue waters of Australia

▶▶ With the majority of Australians living in cities and towns near its endless coastline, combined with Australia's warm climate and sandy beaches, it's not surprising that open water swimming in all its forms is a popular pastime for locals and visitors alike.

One of the most spectacular parts of the country is the Great Ocean Road or "Shipwreck Coast" region in Australia's South East – just to the west of Melbourne, Australia's second-largest city.

This string of beaches and small coastal downs is easily accessed from Melbourne's Tullamarine airport. From there it's just under 90 minutes to drive to Torquay which is a great kick-off point for your Great Ocean Road adventure.

SEEKING THE ADVICE OF LOCALS IS A GOOD WAY TO DISCOVER EXCITING RIVER SWIMS



The 243km (151-mile) road was built by returned soldiers between 1919 and 1932, and is the world's largest war memorial. Winding through the spectacular Otway Ranges, the road traverses rainforests, as well as beaches and cliffs composed of limestone and sandstone – susceptible to erosion, notable rock formations along the coast include Loch Ard Gorge, The Grotto, London Arch, and The Twelve Apostles.

Alternatively, if you make your way to Mornington Peninsula on the other side of Melbourne you should be able to hook up with one of the private charters that take groups out to experience swimming with dolphins. The dolphins seem to love racing and teasing swimmers with their speed and grace in the water.

But don't just focus on the beaches and ocean. The region also offers fabulous river and lake swimming. In the heart of the Grampian Ranges national park (three hours from Melbourne) you can swim in waters such as Lake Bellfield near Halls Gap, where night swims are a safe and a unique way to experience the sounds of the Australian bush and be overwhelmed by the vast night skies. Lake Bellfield also provides beautiful vistas, great fishing (Red Fin; Black Fish; and Trout) and canoeing.

Seeking the advice of locals is a good way to discover exciting river swims. I particularly like swimming in the final 70km of the Glenelg River. Starting from picturesque Dunkeld, you can swim through stunning limestone gorges and explore the Princess Margaret Rose Cave. Wildlife is in abundance in this part of the river – including platypus, ducks, moorhens, emus, kangaroos, wallabies, possums, koalas, wombats and kingfishers. More than 700 species of native plants bloom in the bush, including dozens of varieties of wildflowers. ●



POPULAR SWIMS

Lorne Pier to Pub – one of Australia's most famous open water swims, the Lorne Pier to Pub event is now in its 33rd year and has grown to become one of the largest open water swim in the world. The course is 1.12km from the Lorne Pier to the foreshore in front of the Lorne Surf Life Saving Club. Due to the popularity of this event, entries are managed on a ballot basis.

Shipwreck Coast Swim Series – the Shipwreck Coast Swim Series includes three events during December and January each year. The beaches of Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Port Campbell each host swims ranging from 1.2km to 1.4km.

Great Victorian Swim Series – a series of seven open water events with a range of distances including a 2.5km and a 5km swim. Locations include Flinders, Anglesea, Sorrento, Point Lonsdale, Torquay, Mount Martha and Half Moon Bay.

RIP TIDES

Although Australian beaches generally look amazing, they do hide a number of dangers that you need to be conscious of when visiting somewhere unfamiliar. While a lot of media attention focuses on the rare shark attack or crocodile sighting, the biggest danger to swimmers is rip currents. A rip current is a moving current of water – usually starting near the shoreline and flowing away from the beach – often you won't know that a rip current is occurring until you feel the pull of the water or find yourself suddenly further from the shore than you expected. Rip currents are the number one hazard on Australia's beaches and are the cause of most rescues – it's estimated that nearly 90% of coastal drowning deaths (of which there were 61 in 2011) are rip current related. To escape a rip, swim parallel to the beach rather than trying to swim back against the current. Always conserve your energy. The waves can assist you back to the beach.

Also, be alert to any guidance from Australia's surf lifesavers (see our Oct/Nov 2012 issue for more on this). The iconic surf lifesavers, in their red and yellow uniforms, play an important role in creating a safe environment on Australia's beaches and coastline – through patrols, education, public safety campaigns, and the promotion of health and fitness. In 2011 they performed 12,042 rescues.



Lorne Pier to Pub Swim

Aaron Davis is the owner and founder of Venture Events, Expeditions and Adventures (www.ventureea.com), specializing in small group active adventures and experiences, including swimming adventures. Aaron is an experienced open water swimmer, designing swimming courses and programmes in many great swimming locations around the world.