



The popular holiday town of Victor Harbor on the Fleurieu Peninsula of South Australia offers a number of day walks within easy reach of Adelaide, from lazy beach strolls to hiking along the top of spectacular cliffs.

Victor Harbor is about a one-hour drive from Adelaide and is fairly quiet unless you visit in the peak holiday periods when parking can become a hassle.

Most of these walks have been completed by a family with three young children, and are perfect for a day out or weekend away.

The Bluff and Granite Island

Time it takes

Allow for 1-2 hours each + 1 hour via Encounter Bay (one way).

The track conditions

The conditions are easy as it follows formed gravel trails and paved footpaths.



The iconic Granite Island causeway.

Details of the track

The Bluff offers splendid views of Encounter Bay and the Southern Ocean, and of course, no trip to Victor Harbor would be complete without a jaunt across the causeway to Granite Island. Both attractions can be visited in a single day, either driving between them or linked together with a walk along sleepy Encounter Bay.



The view from the Bluff, overlooking Encounter Bay.

The Kaiki Walk is a popular loop around Granite Island and is accessed via the causeway in the centre of Victor Harbor township. You can also take the old horse-drawn tram one or both ways for the novelty or to shorten the trip! The loop is varied enough to be interesting, with enormous granite boulders, little birds and wildlife, and places to sit and relax or spot some almighty waves crashing onto the Southern side of the island.



Petrel Cove, Kings Beach and the Waitpinga Cliffs as seen from the Bluff.

Strolling along the esplanade at Encounter Bay is a pleasant walk in itself, and also a good way to get between Granite Island and the Bluff if you're feeling energetic (don't forget about the walk back though). The Bluff, or Rosetta Head, is a shorter but slightly more adventurous trip than Granite Island, and with no shelter from the Southern Ocean, things can get very windy on some days. There are great views of the cliffs to the west, the township of Encounter Bay to the north-east, as well as West Island, Wright Island and Seal Rock out to sea.



The Encounter Bikeway

Time it takes

It will take you 2-3 hours or more.

The track conditions

This track has paved footpaths or sand (the beach).



The Encounter Bikeway sometimes runs adjacent to the Cockle Train line.

Details of the track

The entire coast from Victor Harbor to Goolwa can be walked or cycled along the 30km Encounter Bikeway. While some sections can be a little mundane, others provide the opportunity for a relaxing day out. The Encounter Bikeway is easily accessible via road and the major townships in the area.

A good afternoon walk (~12km return) is from Victor to Port Elliot, beginning at the Hindmarsh River. Parking is available along Bridge Terrace and the trail begins by crossing the river. You have the choice of following the Bikeway along the road for a few km or taking the boardwalk to the beach. It's worth going all the way along the beach to the rocks at Knight's Beach, but if the sand becomes a bit strenuous then take one of the many wooden staircases up the cliffs, crossing the railway line to meet the Encounter Bikeway which on some sections is just the road.

Even along the road, the walking is delightful. You go past the seaside holiday homes of Hayborough, and on a fine sunny day, you can see up and down the coast and the pristine surf beach at Chiton Rocks.



The beach always provides something unusual, no matter rain or shine.

Once at Port Elliot, have a cuppa or late lunch and return to Victor Harbor via the same route. Another option is to hop aboard the iconic Cockle Train from Port Elliot Railway Station. The train runs at various times during the year, and takes around 15 minutes back to the station at Victor Harbor, followed by a 1km walk back to Bridge Terrace where you left your car.



Park with the surfers along Surfers Parade, and walk in Tokuremoar Reserve and back along the beach.

A great evening walk is Tokuremoar Reserve, located at the eastern end of Middleton, with parking available at several places along Surfers Parade. Follow the Bikeway along the road until it turns inland through the quiet coastal scrub, and at the Goolwa end take Knightly Road and Reed Place back to the beach, which is usually firm and easy to walk along to return to Surfers Parade.



Sunset at the wetland of Tokuremoar Reserve.



Waitpinga Cliffs

Time it takes

2-3 hours return to Kings Head (or overnight to Waitpinga Beach)

the track conditions

Easy walking on formed trails until Kings Head, which becomes moderately difficult with sand, rock and steep inclines in Newland Head CP.



The Heysen Trail goes right along the top of Waitpinga Cliffs.

Details of the track

Waitpinga Cliffs offer a spectacular coastal cliff walk close to Adelaide. A good day out can be had by starting at the carpark at Petrel Cove on the western side of the Bluff and following the Victor Harbor Heritage Trail which winds along the cliff and descends a few times to the beach, with some brief walking on the soft sand.

At Kings Beach Road the path becomes the Heysen Trail and crosses some small gullies that have been fenced off to keep the sheep out of the ocean, and then descends to Kings Beach.



The entrance to Newland Head Conservation Park is over a fence using a typical Heysen Trail style.

Upon rounding the point at King Head you suddenly get a grand view of the tall Waitpinga Cliffs, and a well-placed bench to sit on to appreciate the view. King Head would be a good destination for a short day walk or continue for another hour or so into Newland Head Conservation Park to the picnic table and look out back toward the Bluff.

In the Conservation Park, the trail gets into dense coastal eucalypt scrub and winds slightly inland past farmland before reaching the lookout.



Coastal Eucalypt forest along the Waitpinga Cliffs.

There is an option to turn this route into a comfortable overnight walk (~25km return), by hiking out and staying overnight at Waitpinga Beach (with campsites, toilets, shelters) before returning via the same route to Petrel Cove the next day.



After the lookout, the Heysen trail becomes rocky and passes through low coastal scrub.

Goolwa Beach and Murray Mouth

Time it takes

It will take 4 hours (approx. 12km return)



the track conditions

This track involves informal beach walking with sand and mud.



Walking along the firm sand at the western end of Goolwa Beach.

Details of the track

Goolwa Beach and the Sir Richard Peninsula are located at the northern end of the Coorong, a globally significant coastal lagoon and wetland system which begins at the Murray Mouth and runs 200km south to the Limestone Coast. A hike to the Murray Mouth along Goolwa Beach is a somewhat uncommon but rewarding experience. Most people choose to drive down, however, it's definitely still possible to get there if you don't have access to a 4WD vehicle or just prefer to walk.

From Goolwa take the road past the Goolwa Barrage to Beacon 19 Boat Ramp, with parking available at the end. Here you can follow the bank of the Murray River toward the Mouth, which could be a muddy trudge depending on the level of water in the river. A better option is to cross the dunes on the informal footpath, and then walk along the ocean beach until reaching the Mouth. Return to the car the same way, unless you bought your inflatable dingy.



These dunes continue for 200km south through the Coorong, and further.

This trip can be quite strenuous because of the soft sand and the need to keep a close eye if you have kids. Goolwa Beach is actually a gazetted road and can be very popular over summer with many vehicles travelling to and from the Mouth.

At the Mouth you can see the dunes of the Coorong stretching away into the salt-mist, and the waves of the Southern Ocean trying to hold back the flow of fresh water from the Murray. It makes a great spot to relax and have lunch.



Goolwa Beach becomes very popular on public holidays and during the summer months. The bird life is abundant with plenty of pelicans if the fishermen are out. Swimming on the riverside is cold and refreshing, and you could try doing the 'pipi twist' and catching some Goolwa cockles on the walk back. Cockles aren't just fish bait, and are actually quite tasty – a bit like calamari – if prepared correctly!

Victor Harbor is an ideal destination to get away from the bustle of Adelaide. It has plenty of options for half-day, day or even overnight walks along the beautiful southern coastline.

What's your favourite local SA hike?