



Melbourians have had a rough year! But, here's hoping locals can finally get that long-awaited trip happening. Taking our children camping has been one of the best ways for us to foster a connection with nature. It also allows the kids to develop essential life skills, and we have especially enjoyed camping with friends made through our kinder and school communities.

Group trips are great for families new to camping. Equipment can be shared around and everyone can check out what others use. Plus, those new to camping can start putting together a shopping list for future trips.

Whether it's over the summer holidays or during the term and leaving on a Friday arvo, I've narrowed this list down to our four favourite go-to destinations. All are within a couple of hours drive from Melbourne and each is perfect for a weekend recharge – you just have to choose between coast, or forest?



The jagged views along Nanadhong's ridgeline.

Nanadhong, Taungurung Country - Cathedral Range State Park

Commonly known as the Cathedrals, the Nanadhong range and the 25km-wide crater are what remains from a volcano that erupted some 373 million years ago! The area is part of the Great Dividing Range and Dreamtime tells the story of a young warrior named Butcha from the Baluchi tribe. His face can be seen within the rock formations and is a reminder to find courage and strength.

Getting there

The park is about 120km northeast of Melbourne via the scenic Maroondah Highway and through the towering mountain ash forests of the Black Spur. After passing Buxton, the 7km-long Cathedrals ridge rises impressively over the rural landscape reaching a height of 920m at Sugarloaf Peak. Turn right at Cathedral Lane and you'll soon see the entrance to the park on Little River Road.

Camps

The first camping area is Neds Gully, a lovely spot nestled in a grassy meadow surrounded by woodland. It is accessed via a swing bridge over the river and, therefore, is only suitable for tents. The carpark is 50m from the sites, so if you have lots of stuff be aware that you'll be making a few trips to cart it all in! Facilities include pit toilets and fireplaces.

A bit further along is the larger Cooks Mill campground. Following the banks of Little River, this was the site of an old timber mill where you can camp amongst the peppermint, Blackwood, and red stringybark gum trees. The sites are best suited to tents, with a limited area for camper trailers, campervans, and caravans. Cooks Mill has a shelter, picnic tables, pit toilets, and fireplaces.



Originating from the Wiradjuri word 'guuguubarra', it is said that Aboriginal spirits sent the Kookaburra with its laugh to wake up the sleepy people, so they would not miss the sunrise.



Important info

At both campgrounds, you need to book ahead through [Parks Victoria](#). You won't be allocated a site, rather you get to choose on arrival from what is available. BYO [water](#) and [firewood](#) as no collection is permitted, and remember to [take all rubbish home](#).

See and do

There are many [trails](#) catering for varying levels of fitness, and Parks Victoria provides thorough detail on each. The easiest ones for little legs are:

- [Friends Nature Walk](#) – a 2km loop past the old mill heritage site
- [Little River Walk](#) – a 2.7km track between the two campsites

Native orchids are on display in spring and early summer, and wildlife [sightings](#) can include wallabies, kangaroos, koalas, echidnas, and lyrebirds.



The Gums Campground offers plenty of privacy and is surrounded by bush.

Taungurung and Wurundjeri Country - Kinglake National Park

[Kinglake](#) is the largest national park near Melbourne and the traditional country of the Taungurung and Wurundjeri people. It incorporates some 23,210ha of eucalypt forests, fern gullies, and waterfalls – but no lake! A staggering 98% of the park was burnt in the horrendous Black Saturday fires of 2009. However, it is amazing to see the recovery and regeneration of the park within twelve years, especially considering the intensity of the fires!

Getting there

Situated on the southern slopes of the Great Dividing Range approximately 65km northeast of the city, the quickest route is on the Melba Highway via Yarra Glen.

Camps

There is only one small campground with eighteen sites in the northern section of the park. Whilst mostly suited to tents, [The Gums Campground](#) also has five sites for caravans up to 20ft long without an [annex](#). The sites are quite private and nestled in a lovely bush setting. The Parks Vic [booking](#) platform is great and includes images and features of each site. You'll find the campground on the Glenburn/Eucalyptus Road, 10km north of the Kinglake township. The campsites have [fire pits](#), picnic [tables](#), and there's also a free communal gas [BBQ](#).



It's important to stay on the track and appreciate Masons Falls from behind the safety barriers.



Important info

The campground is closed each year during the third Victorian school term. BYO water and firewood as no collection is permitted, and remember to take all rubbish home.

See and do

You'll also find lots of walking tracks throughout the national park, many of which link in with each other. Some offer sweeping views of the Melbourne skyline, Port Phillip, the Yarra Valley, and even the You Yangs.

- Cicada Circuit – a short walk from the campground following Island Creek through towering eucalypts and dense ferns
- Masons Falls – a family favourite with a well-equipped picnic area
- Wombelano Falls – about 1.5km one way along a mostly flat track, with an option to return the same way or a scenic alternative
- Jehosaphat Gully, Frank Thomson Reserve and Mount Sugarloaf
- Bollygum Playground in Kinglake – awesome for the kiddies and offers free BBQs, picnic areas and skate park
- Bowden Spur Mountain Bike Area – for downhill MTB lovers



The Boonwurrung are a tribe of the Kulin people whose traditional name for Point Leo is Bobbanaring.

Boonwurrung Country - Point Leo

Located on the Mornington Peninsula, Bobbanaring/Point Leo is the closest surf beach to Melbourne.

Getting there

Travel 96km via Peninsula Link. Nestled between Merricks and Shoreham on Western Port, you'll find a small rural community with a general store, lifesaving club, boat club, and of course the campground.

Camps

Point Leo Foreshore Reserve has more than 160 campsites spread over a couple of locations. The area near the general store has 45 powered sites and 11 sites right beside the beach. The unpowered sites are further along towards the lifesaving club and are not available during winter.

Sitting up on the point amongst coastal vegetation, some sites offer glimpses of the ocean. The reserve has toilet and shower amenities, two camp kitchens, and laundry facilities during the summer months. Potable water is available from shared taps spread throughout the reserve.



Calm days are perfect for kids to get in a bit of SUP action!

Important info

Most sites are available for booking year-round, except the unpowered area during winter. Reservations can only be made online and it's essential to take note of their terms and conditions. A ballot system operates in peak periods, including summer school holidays, Easter, Melbourne Cup, and Labor Day weekend. Dogs are not permitted and campfires are prohibited within the reserve.

See and do

It's all about the beach! So remember to pack gear for swimming, surfing, beach cricket, SUPing or other paddling devices for flatter days, boating, and fishing.

- Lovely beach walks and rock pools at low tide
- Surf lessons – for beginners or anyone wanting to improve their skills
- Wineries, craft breweries, distilleries, cafés, restaurants, farm gates, farmers markets, and much more – the options are endless!



Usually sheltered by the reef break, the surf at Cape Paterson can sometimes get pretty wild.

Boonwurrung Country - Cape Paterson

This lovely seaside village is located in Boonwurrung Country/South Gippsland.

Getting there

About 130km southeast of Melbourne via the South Gippsland and Bass Highways to Wonthaggi, then follow Cape Paterson Road till you hit the coast.

Camps

The Cape Paterson Caravan Park is literally at the end of this road and offers more than 100 powered sites – the teenagers will be happy that they can keep their devices charged! All the sites are scattered through a coastal bush setting with some boasting ocean views. There's a mix of open and grassy areas which are great for groups of caravans, and other sites that are nestled within the tea trees and are better suited to tents.

This spot is a terrific family-friendly getaway with all the amenities you need to make it super-easy – toilet and shower blocks, laundries, ice and gas, drinking water, camp kitchen, and BBQs.

Cabins are also available, which some may prefer over camping in the winter months.



The kids exploring rock platform at Cape Paterson.



Important info

Open year-round, you can book [online](#) or give them a call and chat to the good-natured staff about what site would best suit your tent or van. This is a [dog-friendly](#) park, however, date restrictions apply, and campfires are not permitted.

See and do

Like Point Leo, this really is a fantastic spot for a [summer holiday](#)! The campground sits above Bay Beach and access is by stairs leading directly from the park.

- Hours of rockpool explorations, including a shallow wading pool carved into the rock platform
- Snorkelling in the waters of Bunurong Marine Reserve
- Both Bay Beach and First Surf Beach a little further along are patrolled on summer weekends
- Photogenic Eagles Nest lookout – short drive [along the coast](#)
- [Inverloch](#) – we love [Screw Creek](#) for a spot of fishing and the Nature Walk trail.
- [Coal Creek Museum](#) in Korumburra or the [State Coal Mine](#) in Wonthaggi are good go-to options for bad weather days and also educational – just don't tell the kids!

There's never been a better time to explore your own backyard. Whether you live in Melbourne or elsewhere in Australia, we certainly are spoiled for choice!

What's on your 2022 camping bucket list?