

Holidays and Tourism

The Playground of Australia



The tranquil escape from the city's hustle and bustle

In the 1870s, Phillip Island began to capture the attention of Melbourne's ever-growing population as a desirable destination for leisure and relaxation, offering a tranquil escape from the city's hustle and bustle. Two outstanding hotels, the Isle of Wight and the Woods Family Hotel, graced the island, and during the 1880s, a substantial surge in guesthouse construction and private accommodations was witnessed. It was not uncommon for settlers to open up their homes on town allotments or add extra rooms to their cottages to capitalize on the increasing demand.

Travel time from Melbourne to Cowes saw a significant reduction between 1869 and 1879, thanks to the introduction of a regular coach service and a connecting steam ferry. In the late 1870s, the horse-drawn Cobb & Co. coach would depart Melbourne from the Albion Hotel on Bourke Street at 7 am, arriving in Frankston around 10 am. After a brief stop for refreshments and a change of horses, the journey continued to Hastings along a rather rough track surrounded by dense scrub. Upon reaching Hastings, passengers had the option to enjoy lunch at one of the local hotels. Post-lunch, they would board the steam ferry Eclipse, departing Hastings at 1:30 pm and arriving in Cowes an hour and a half later, completing the entire trip in just 8 hours.

In 1889, the travel time was dramatically reduced to a mere 3 hours with the extension of the steam train line from Melbourne to Stony Point, where passengers connected with the ferry ss Genista.

Throughout the 1880s, the availability of quality hotels and guest house accommodations continued to transform Phillip Island into a sought-after recreational playground for city visitors. These visitors were drawn to various leisure activities such as fishing, sailing, and sightseeing. They could hire horse-drawn carriages to explore the majestic beauty of the rugged ocean beaches, including the Nobbies and Pyramid Rock, or relax

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on the serene shores of Cowes Beach, where sea baths were offered next to the jetty, with separate bathing times for gentlemen and ladies to observe the social norms of the era. A red flag indicated the ladies' bathing time, while a blue flag signalled the gentlemen's turn.

On the southern side of the island, visitors could witness the breathtaking spectacle of shearwaters returning to their cliff-top burrows at dusk, a signature natural sight.

In the 1920s, little penguins were "discovered," and alongside the koala, they became the focal point of tourist attractions on the island, gradually overshadowing the shearwaters. In 1928, the island's association with motor sports began with car racing, attracting a new demographic of visitors. The water sport of aquaplaning, characterized by spectacular spills behind fast-moving motor launches, gained popularity by the mid-1920s, with surfing following closely by the decade's end.

Arrival in Cowes via the ferry was viewed as arriving at the front door of the island. A car ferry serviced the island leaving Stony Point for Cowes, commencing from the early 1930s. Phillip Island's back door opened in 1940 with the opening of the bridge from San Remo.

From the 1930s and 1940s, guesthouses continued to thrive, as Phillip Island offered a diverse array of recreational activities for visitors to enjoy.

