



Ballarat



Stables Gallery, Bendigo



Sovereign Hill, Ballarat

FACT FILE

There are countless ways to discover the cultural heritage of Victoria and we can tailor an itinerary to suit your interests and budget. Please contact Nikki, Michael or Patrick on 01869 276 345.



The gold medals have been dished out in Melbourne, but there are plenty of rewards still on offer up in Victoria's goldfield towns. Nikki Surtees takes you through them.

EUREKA!

As the 18th Commonwealth Games conclude in Victoria, a number of athletes will be going home with a medal made of 'fair dinkum' Australian gold, prospected from Victoria's town of Ballarat.

In the 1800s Ballarat was the new frontier, where thousands of diggers worked their claims.

However, in 1854 anger over unjust mining licence fees and the brutal administration which collected them finally erupted in a fatal brawl outside Bentley's Eureka Hotel which resulted in the death of a young Scottish digger, James Scobie. In an atmosphere of defiance the diggers burned their licences, raised their distinctive 'Southern Cross' flag, took up arms and erected barricades to form the famous Eureka Stockade, which would become a defining moment in the creation of the Australian spirit.

Although much of the sporting drama at this year's games unfolded in the heart of Melbourne, many events took place in Victoria's beautiful and historic regional surrounds. Just a couple of hours from Melbourne, the legacy of the goldrush period is still evident in the charming 19th-century verandahs, balconies, wrought ironwork and wide tree-lined streets of Ballarat. Today you can walk the Eureka Trail, from Camp Street to the Eureka Stockade Centre, taking in many Eureka sites along the way and hearing tales of the miners' struggles that culminated in the infamous riot.

But there's more to this region than mining history. A short drive through the goldfields from Ballarat is the town of Ararat - the epitome of contemporary regional character and liveliness. Annual events such as the Jailhouse Rock in March and the Ararat Chinese Racing Festival in November celebrate Ararat's fascinating history as the only town to be founded by Chinese gold miners. I took a walking tour, discovering a vibrant little community, taking in the orchid glass

houses in Alexandra Park Gardens and also Langi Morgala Museum, housed in a delightful old wool store and featuring Aboriginal artefacts amongst its extensive collections. Finally, I stepped inside the forbidding bluestone walls of J Ward, Victoria's asylum, to hear chilling stories of the murder, mayhem and madness of its former occupants.

St. Arnaud, with its stately civic buildings, made the perfect base for exploring the wineries of the Pyrenees. Try Best's for the some of the world's oldest shiraz or take a tour of Seppelts' 'drives'. These labyrinthine, cellar-like tunnels with seemingly endless shelves of dust-covered maturing bottles weave their way beneath the immaculate grounds of the winery. Hewn by hand from the rock by ex-gold miners in 1868, tendrils of moss-like black mould hanging from their curved roofs reminded me of a dungeon from a Hollywood movie. The region has just a handful of wineries, and more often than not I met the winemakers themselves.

On the eastern fringe of the Grampians Range is Pomonal, a tight-knit artistic community that I found as interesting as the arts, crafts, antiques and bric-a-brac that its residents are renowned for. This is a great place to immerse yourself in the village atmosphere, enjoy a massage at a day spa or inhale the fragrance of wildflower nurseries, lavender and herbs. Garden lovers shouldn't miss the Pomonal Native Garden Show, which takes place every October.

What's more, the nearby Grampians National Park is crammed with heathland, river wetlands, waterfalls, canyons, rocky escarpments and dozens of lakes - a winning combination of culture and natural wonders that makes the goldfields unlike any other area in Australia that I've been to.

Nikki Surtees
Australia Specialist



Old miner in Sovereign Hill, Ballarat



Vineyards near Ballarat



Country road, Goldfields