



Reaching Johanna Beach involves threading through forest along a dirt road, then descending into a lime green valley dotted with fat cows and rambling dairy homesteads.

Settling into Johanna Seaside Cottages felt like we were tucking ourselves into the most remote recesses of the earth. Mushroom clouds of salt-mist rolled by like giant tumbleweeds, the splintering crash of waves was overwhelming. I put a pizza in the oven and, passing several big grey kangaroos, we set off for the watercolour wilderness of Johanna Beach.

Beyond Johanna, rainforests give way to bleached, wind-battered paddocks, studded with windmills and sheep. Then suddenly, ochre flats carpeted with spiky shrubs drop abruptly into the sea and we're perched precariously at the edge of Australia, encased within an echoing hush.

I decided to return to the 12 Apostles at the end of the day, when they'd be at their most moody and least crowded. At the suggestion of a local, I drove on to the stunning Bay of Islands, blessed also with jaw-dropping scenery, whilst offering the bonus of beaches where Onyx could romp.

Looking at Onyx's blissed expression, I was overly pleased that I'd opted to spend 6 days in a region too often dismissed as a day-trip.

The 12 Apostles are the result of thousands of years of frenetic badgering by waves that have gathered momentum all the way from Antarctica. As I watched the startling rock formations change colour in the golden-syrupy sunset, the earth beneath me quivered in response to the strident, unrelenting sea.

Back at Johanna Seaside, I poured a glass of Shiraz and walked to the top of the dunes, bedazzled by the moonlight and the intoxicating isolation.

ONYX'S GREAT OCEAN ROAD TOURING TIPS:

Room with a mood
Johanna Seaside Cottages. Resting lightly on 600 ocean-fringed acres, these spacious cottages offer a castaway experience combined with cosy, homely comforts. Think roaring fire and a help-yourself garden brimming with veggies, herbs and passion-fruits. W: www.johannaseaside.com.au

Surf Breaker. Close to Apollo Bay, yet delightfully far-flung in vibe, this large, modern home overlooks a beach you'll often have to yourself. T: 0400 018 211, W: <http://www.stayz.com.au/54247> or www.greataccommodation.com.au



Shearwater Cottages. You're truly tucked away here- enveloped by dense coastal scrub that invites the A-list of local birds as well as too cute koalas - and spoiled, thanks to quality chocolates, champagne and 5 star dog bedding and treats. T: 03 5237 9290 W: www.shearwatercottages.com

For a large range of farmhouses, mountain retreats, ocean front villas and beach houses, visit: 03 5237 1098, W: www.holidaygor.com.au

CHOWING DOWN

Standouts at Apollo Bay include: Georges Food Hall (excellent pizzas) and Naughtigals for organic coffee and sunshine. The quintessential dining experience here, however, is a scenic picnic -Lorne and Apollo Bay have supermarkets. Lorne bristles with cafes, ethnic eateries and delis.

KNOCKOUT WALKS

Maps indicating dog -friendly walks are available from Lorne, Apollo Bay and Port Campbell Visitor Centre's

Some special hikes:

- Lorne waterfront
- Beauchamp Falls
- Apollo Bay to Skeynes Creek
- Bay of Islands Trails and Bay of Marty's trails
- Peterborough beaches.
- Marengo beach
- Cressy Discovery Trail
- Reserve behind Princeton beach
- For heritage: Port Fairy and Camperdown

Some regional highlights include the 12 Apostles, Cape Otway Lightstation and Maits Rest walk are in National Parks. We visited in the late afternoon cool, after Onyx had had a big run and was happy to relax in the car.

URBANE PURSUITS:

www.apollobaymusicfestival.com

FURTHER INFORMATION:

www.greatoceanroad.com
www.greatoceanrd.org.au
www.visitotways.com



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