

VICTOR HARBOR'S TOURISM STORY

Victor Harbor's settlement history began with the arrival of Reverend Ridgeway Newland and 34 settlers at Yilki in July 1839. Yilki (Aboriginal for 'a place by the sea') was the centre of activity for many years. The land between the Hindmarsh and Inman Rivers was virtually unoccupied until 1863 when the present town of Victor Harbor was established.

The Fountain Inn, at Yilki (Encounter Bay area) was built in 1847, one of the first inns in South Australia. This is now "Yelki by the Sea" accommodation.

The first public railway in Australia - from Goolwa to Port Elliot, built in 1854 -was extended to Victor Harbor in 1864.

The Crown Hotel was built 1865.

Seaside holidays were fashionable by the 1870s, and the splendid scenery and fresh breezes of Encounter Bay appealed to Adelaide's well-off citizens. In 1873 merchant and MP Alexander Hay and his second wife Agnes made the long trip to Victor Harbour for a holiday. Mrs Hay was so taken with it, that she persuaded her husband to build a house there. The stately home 'Mount Breckan', designed by South Australian architect McMinn, was used by the Hays as a holiday home from 1881. It was burnt in 1909 but was rebuilt as an exclusive guest home and is now open to the public on weekends. Other wealthy South Australians followed the Hay's lead and more great mansions were built such as 'Adare' that is now a conference centre run by the Uniting Church.

This fashion set by such leaders of colonial society was mimicked by those less wealthy. Some built their own holiday homes, but the majority of tourists flocked to the hotels and guesthouses that developed in response to their demands. The new tourist industry was to be of immense importance to Victor Harbor, at a time when old hopes for the district had been revived but were slowly fading again with the decline of port activity.

Victor Harbor began to develop as a tourist resort during the 1890s. The closeness to Adelaide, Granite Island, the causeway with visiting ships, and the cool summer breezes were popular attractions. The horse drawn tram, commencing in 1894 increased the popularity.

In 1897 The Grosvenor Hotel opened with 70 guest rooms. Various coffee houses were also in operation.

An Improvements Committee was set up by after a meeting of ratepayers in 1897 – "to consider the improvement of Port Victor and its surrounds". Funds were raised for improvements and events such as a fancy dress cricket match and a grand fete were held to raise the funds for the Town Hall in 1904. The Town Hall brought music, dance, films and the Literary Society, which also raised funds for other facilities and groups.

Bathing facilities – a shed built at Encounter Bay in 1874 was eventually replaced by "bathing houses" on the beach each side of the town jetty. This led to "The Baths" being built, enclosing part of the sea off the jetty, for more serious swimmers. By 1905 The Baths were so popular that more accommodation was added, with dressing rooms, charging three pence for admission. A kiosk opened on Granite island in 1910. The Baths were demolished in 1955 after storm damage.

By the beginning of the twentieth century Victor Harbor was known as the chief holiday resort of South Australia. During the 1910s and 1920s picnic trains ran to Victor Harbor three times a day in the summer high season, carrying up to 2,000 passengers. The established hotels and guesthouses were booked solid throughout the summer season.

In the 1920s The Rumbelow family let rooms in their houses, and offered other services to visitors. Ruby Rumbelow ran the Yilki post office from a room in her house, sold homemade ice creams and lollies, and later opened a small kiosk on Rosetta Cove. Eric Rumbelow supervised the Baths. The Rumbelow family was also still involved in boating and fishing. Fresh crayfish and other seafood featured in the holiday diet of visitors to Yilki, together with milk, vegetables, honey, butter and eggs from the nearby farms. Twice a week, butcher's and baker's carts from Victor Harbor visited to serve the holiday makers.

Granite Island's improvements began in 1888 when the council began planting trees on it. The horse tram passenger service to the Island ran from 1894 to 1954. The service was reintroduced in 1986 and is still a favourite with holidaymakers. In 1910 the Railways took control of the Island

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and cleaned it up. They constructed a pathway around the island, planted additional trees, erected seats and swings and a ramp to the top of the cliff at the island's eastern end. (Tolley 1965).

A Victor Harbor Amusements Committee was set up to fundraise in order to develop and improve tennis courts, croquet lawns, bowling greens, and cricket club. Football was also popular. A regular New Year's Day Water Sports and Regatta was held. A newspaper report on 20 December 1912 announced that all hotel and boarding house accommodation was booked, and then proceeded to list the more notable visitors in attendance

1922 -Encounter Bay Racing Club commenced

1923 – Picture theatre built

As a country town Victor Harbor developed its own amusements, as country folk do. With the added advantage of its close proximity and popularity to the residents of Adelaide, the growth in tourism was a natural extension of this.

In 1926 the population of Victor Harbor was 2,500. Visitor numbers in 1927 were 60,000.

1928 – Adelaide to Victor road was sealed

1938 The Bluff and surroundings declared a recreation reserve.

By 1936 Victor Harbor had the following facilities for residents and visitors:

- Three hotels
- 36 guest houses
- Bowling greens
- Croquet lawns
- Tennis courts
- Golf Club – commenced 1911
- Boat hire on the Hindmarsh River and the sea.
- Dance Palais.
- Picture Theatre.
- Public Baths.
- Rifle range.

Trains at that time were running daily to Victor Harbor from Adelaide.

On 26 December 1936 the Australian Grand Prix was held at Victor Harbor. (Thus the Grand Prix of the 1990's in Adelaide was not the first for SA). Twenty seven entrants, including at least one woman, registered to compete for The Advertiser Gold Trophy, the Aubrey Hall Trophy, and the sum of £200 (\$400).The circuit of 12kms was partly bitumen but mainly dirt. An estimated 70,000 people attended to watch the 32 laps. 12 contestants completed the race, won by a 1000cc MG sportscar.

The popularity of Victor Harbor and Encounter Bay as holiday areas helped to cushion the town from the worst effects of the Great Depression of the 1940s.

1969 – Granite Island declared a Fauna Sanctuary

1989 – Tourist Information Centre opened in the old school house.. This was moved to railway Terrace in 1994, and to its present site by the causeway in 1998.

1991 – Around 125,000 people visited the south coast to see whales.

1996 – Café and Penguin Centre opened on Granite Island.

Controversial Developments

Over the decades there has often been controversy over proposed new developments in Victor Harbor. The early Improvements Committee was not always in agreement with the plans of the councillors, and also ratepayers often wanted more roads, car parking, better water, etc, before other developments should be approved.

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One example was in 1973, when an Adelaide business consortium proposed to build a casino at Encounter Bay.

“An angry meeting of 400 ratepayers voted overwhelmingly against the idea, and 1050 local people signed an anti-casino petition to the State parliament”
writes Michael Page (“Victor Harbor – From Pioneer Port to Seaside Resort”, 1984).

The project was later presented again, along with a wildlife sanctuary, picnic area, golf course and adventure park, and an airstrip. The community was divided on the proposal, with much letter writing to the local newspaper, and public meetings which became unruly. The idea eventually was not developed.

In recent years other projects have ensured much discussion and community input. Some have gone ahead and others have not. These include – upgrading of boat launching facilities, community swimming pool, new library, shopping centres. Proposed redevelopments of existing buildings, eg Crown Hotel, bring about debate re the issue of high rise development. Infrastructure to accommodate change is always a challenge for local government bodies.

Tourism today

In the past 50 years quite a number of new attractions and accommodation venues have opened. Sadly most of the original guesthouses have closed and several have been demolished. Others are now being used for other purposes. Over the years the trend for different styles of holiday accommodation has emerged such as Bed & Breakfast and self-contained apartments, cabins in Caravan Parks and Caravan sites for people with their own vans.

The train no longer runs to Victor Harbor from Adelaide as the rail gauge (size of track) was changed from Adelaide to Mt Barker. A train called The Southern Encounter runs once a month from Mt Barker to Victor Harbor from June to November. The Cockle Train operates between Goolwa & Victor Harbor every Sunday and South Australian school holidays.

Premier Stateliner offer a daily coach service to and from Adelaide to Victor Harbor.
The majority of people visiting Victor Harbor come via their own cars.
Tour buses bring larger groups of interstate and overseas tourists (eg backpackers).

Indigenous Influences

Victor Harbor values and respects all of its cultural background, with the Indigenous Aboriginal culture playing an important role in the tourism attractions within the city. Specific monuments, such as the Encounter Sculpture Kondoli Lookout effectively details the city’s cultural background and historic past. Kondoli recognises the contribution that the Ngarrindjeri, Ramindjeri, and Pitjantjatjara peoples have made in shaping the South Coast communities of SA. (refer to brochure – Kondoli – Our Local Symbol of Reconciliation).

The Encounter Coast Discovery Centre provides an interpretive display of the history of local aboriginal peoples .

A sculpture entitled “On Occupied Territory” near the foreshore and visitor centre commemorates the encounter in 1802 of Matthew Flinders and Nicolas Baudin in Ramindjeri Ngarrindjeri Waters, now called Encounter Bay. This was officially opened in 2003.

Granite Island Nature Park conduct tours which Incorporate Aboriginal History. Contact Granite Island for more details on (08) 8552 7555 or visit Granite Island Nature Park website on www.graniteisland.com.au
The SA Whale Centre www.sawhalecentre.com.au also has exhibits with historical information on the Aboriginal people of this area.

Current Attractions

Granite Island Horsedrawn Tram
Urimbirra Wildlife Park.

Tourism in Victor Harbor – history 14/08/2008

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Greenhills Adventure Park.
Wild Rose Miniature Village.
Encounter Coast Discovery Centre
SA Whale Centre, whale viewing June to October
Granite Island Nature Park – Penguin Tours, Whale Cruises.
Fishing Charters -seasonal.
Dunes Mini Golf Park
Camel rides on beach.
Scotts Victor Harbor Winery & Sawtooth Ridge Winery.
Cockle Train.- Goolwa to Victor Harbor
Weekend markets
Four Art Galleries
Annual Rotary Art Show (largest outdoor art show in Australia) - January
Nangawooka Flora Park
Newland Head Conservation Park – Heysen Trail.
Kleinig's Hill Lookout and Kondoli Sculpture

Current Sporting & Recreation Facilities

Tennis courts.
Petanque courts.
Two first class golf courses and one par 3 golf course
Youth playground – opened 2004.
Numerous children's playgrounds and youth park
Two bowling clubs.
Two football clubs.
Water sports – surfing, sailing, boating, canoeing/kayaking, fishing, diving - Encounter Lakes and the sea.
Bicycle track – Encounter Bay to Goolwa

Accommodation in 2006

Three hotels.
Two resort style accommodation properties with conference facilities.
Twelve Bed & Breakfast properties.
Three Caravan Parks.
Nine Motels.
Many holiday homes, self-contained units and apartments for rent.
Three camp/group venues.
Three nursing homes.
Four retirement villages.

Community Services

District hospital.
Two Medial Centres
Two primary schools.
High School.
TAFE campus.

Retail shopping and Food outlets.

Woolworths Supermarket
Coles Supermarket.
Target Home
McDonalds, Subway, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Wendy's outlets.
Specialty shops – gifts, homewares, sporting goods, collectables, antiques, souvenirs

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Fashion stores

Numerous computer outlets

Gourmet cafes and formal dining

Refer to sources listed under “Websites and contacts” and to other subjects on this webpage for further information