

## Shiraz Central Wine Route Touring Itinerary 1

### Wine and Wildlife

**Where:** Shiraz Central comprises four distinctive regions: the Grampians (Gariwerd) and Pyrenees; Bendigo, Ballarat and Heathcote; the Goulburn Valley; and the Macedon Ranges. The latter region is the closest to Melbourne, just 69km (an hour's drive) north-west of the city. At approximately 250km north-west of the Victorian capital (a three-hour drive) the Grampians (Gariwerd) is the furthest away from Melbourne.

**Best for:** Pioneering cool-climate wineries and abundant Australian wildlife in its natural habitat.

**What to expect:** Warm country hospitality, wild landscapes and enterprising wineries within rugged, mountainous bushland freckled with billabongs and gum trees.

#### The experience:

- **Taste** silky yet complex drops of world-leading, cool-spiced shiraz.
- **Hear** the cackle of kookaburras and the scratchy chirp of cockatoos.
- **See** mobs of kangaroos bounding through the pristine bush come dusk.
- **Feel** the cool, fresh waters of the Grampians' (Gariwerd) many waterfalls at your fingertips.
- **Smell** the heady aroma of eucalyptus trees filling the air, their leaves rustling in the wind.

### DAY ONE

**8am:** Depart your Melbourne hotel, driving north-west towards the Macedon Ranges.

**9am:** Stop off at the township of Mount Macedon for a stroll and a coffee at the quaint [Mount Macedon Trading Post](#): a general store-cum-café that purveys a bounty of local goods, such as jars of zucchini pickle and tomato relish. If you skipped breakfast pull up a pew on the porch for the quintessential Aussie breakfast of avocado (or 'avo') on toast.

**9:30am:** Continue on to Mount Macedon, within the [Macedon Regional Park](#), a 10-15-minute drive away. En route you'll pass stately houses and immaculate gardens.

**9:45am:** It's time to stretch your legs, breathe in fresh mountain air and soak up the views. Located at the southern end of Victoria's Great Dividing Range, Mount Macedon rises 1,010 metres above sea level, with lookout points that command views across the entire southern plain towards Port Phillip Bay. This is the highest peak within the ranges, and the memorial cross at its summit is considered the second most significant war memorial in the state. Home

to more than 150 bird species, plus kangaroos, koalas, wombats, sugar gliders, echidnas, wallabies and possums, the densely forested Macedon Regional Park is a haven for wildlife. Your best chance to see these creatures in the wild is along one of the many walking trails, many of which take an hour or less to complete. The 2.5km Sanatorium Eco-Tourism Trail offers an easy introduction, with a largely flat route.

**11am:** Leave Mount Macedon for [Hanging Rock](#), a 20-minute drive away.

**11:20am:** A mystical place of many a legend, Hanging Rock has long mesmerised visitors. This prehistoric, volcanic rock formation is known for its unusual shapes, and is considered one of the best examples of a volcanic plug, or 'mamelon', in the world. The landmark has long been a sacred site of the Wurundjeri people, the area's traditional custodians, and was popularised in Joan Lindsay's 1967 novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, and the subsequent Peter Weir film of the same name, released in 1975.

Visit the Hanging Rock Discovery Centre to learn more about the region's history and geology before taking one of the three walks available in the reserve (the Base Walk takes 30 minutes, the Creek Walk 40 minutes, and the Summit Walk almost an hour). Take in views of neighbouring Mount Macedon from the 105-metre crest of the rock. The reserve is home to nearly 100 indigenous plants, and resident fauna includes 40 species of birds, plus koalas, kangaroos and sugar gliders. If you don't spot any fauna on one of the walks, the cricket ground below Hanging Rock is also a popular hangout for 'roos.

**12:30pm:** Make a beeline for the first winery of the day, [Hanging Rock Winery](#), less than a five-minute drive away.

**12:40pm:** Established in 1982 by John and Ann Ellis, who were both born into two of Australia's biggest wine dynasties, this multi-award-winning winery was one of the pioneers of Heathcote shiraz. There are numerous expressions of the varietal to sample here from different blocks and vintages, as well as shiraz blends. Savour a few as you gaze out at the ranges you've just explored, including the craggy peaks of Hanging Rock and the forested summit of Mount Macedon.

**1:30pm:** Set off for for a well-earned lunch in the Goldfields' gastronomic capital, Kyneton, less than a 20-minute drive away. The gold rush legacy runs deep here. Take in the historic streetscapes, lined with stately bluestone buildings that are now cafés, antique stores, museums and restaurants. If you're visiting on the weekend head to [Musk Lane Wines](#), a lo-fi urban winery in an old timber yard.

**1:50pm:** Park just off Piper Street, this little town's main drag, and visit [Source Dining](#), a firm fixture in the *Good Food Guide* (the Australian equivalent of the *Michelin Guide*). Chef-owner Tim Foster's ethos is for guests to leave feeling 'well-fed and well-loved'. Local, ethical produce is king here and the menu has a French slant – think blue cheese souffle with

quince puree and walnuts, and angus beef with bordelaise sauce and dauphinoise potatoes. The restaurant's wine list has received equal praise among the critics too, garnering a 'Two Glass' rating from Australia's Wine List of the Year Awards for five consecutive years as of 2019.

**3pm:** Hop back in the car ready to hit your next winery, [Sutton Grange](#), a 35-minute drive away.

**3:35pm:** A young, biodynamic winery located at the foothills of Mount Alexander, Sutton Grange treats its fruit with the utmost care and respect: all vines are hand-pruned and hand-picked at vintage. The winery has two labels, the Estate range and Fairbank, both of which produce fine shiraz. The former is designed to showcase the complexity of the terroir, the latter offers more approachable, fruit-driven wines.

**4:15pm:** From Sutton Grange it's a 40-minute drive to [Balgownie Estate Bendigo Winery Retreat & Restaurant](#).

**5pm:** A small vineyard that runs almost entirely off solar power, Balgownie comprises a cellar door, a restaurant, a café, wine museum and several different accommodation options. Enjoy a bottle of the sparkling or museum shiraz on the patio of your bell tent as dusk falls over the rolling vineyards before you. Almost every mod con is available at this glamping retreat, from in-tent air conditioning or heating to fluffy robes and slippers.

**6:30pm:** After a full day on the road, sample the fine fare at Balgownie Restaurant. The seasonal menu typically features rich, protein-packed dishes, that hero duck, pork belly and wagyu beef. If you feel like exploring, visit one-hatted [Masons of Bendigo](#), which pairs creative, Modern Australian food with an almost entirely Australian drinks list: beers are exclusively sourced from within a 100-kilometre radius of the restaurant and the wine list is all-Victorian.

**9pm:** Venture back to your bell tent at Balgownie to rest up.

## DAY TWO

**8am:** Enjoy breakfast at Balgownie Estate and pack up your bags ready to hit the road.

**9am:** Jump in the car and drive into central Bendigo, a 10-minute drive away. An arts hub that's filled with ornate heritage buildings, this provincial city was the richest in the world in the 1880s thanks to gold mining. Take a walk around the CBD and perhaps grab a coffee at local micro-roastery Brewhouse Cafe before taking the vintage [Talking Tram](#) around Bendigo – the company is said to operate the best working collection of heritage trams in the world. Alternatively, experience some of the mines responsible for the city's wealth first-hand. The Central Deborah Gold Mine is in the heart of the city and offers the deepest

underground mine tour in Australia, with visitors descending 228 metres below Bendigo's streets.

**11:45am:** Drive onwards to the [Wombat State Forest](#), located between Woodend and Daylesford, about a 70-minute drive from Bendigo.

**1pm:** Covering some 70,000 hectares of virgin bushland, this forest is home to all manner of native wildlife, from grey kangaroos to wombats, wallabies, echidnas and koalas as well as 150 species of birds. For a chance to spot the local fauna take a walk through this mineral spring-laced park, drenched with greenery.

**1:50pm:** Head for a well-deserved lunch at Passing Clouds, a 30-minute drive away.

**2:20pm:** The wines produced at [Passing Clouds](#) have proven so formidable that two of Australia's top restaurants, Rockpool and Attica, have been known to buy the winery out of entire vintages. There's a strong focus on sustainable farming here, with only natural fertilisers used and solar panels providing much of the winery's energy. Lunch is a rustic and hearty affair, served 'la famiglia'-style. Sit out on the deck, made from recycled wood, in the shade under parasols, overlooking the lake and vineyards, as the heady scent of charcoal-licked meat fills the air.

**3:40pm:** Drive on to [Eastern Peake Vineyard](#), a 45-minute drive away.

**4:25pm:** A minimalist cellar door with floor-to-ceiling glass walls, Eastern Peake Vineyard puts the spotlight back on the wines and vines rather than any fripperies. The winery – run by second-generation winemaker Owen Latta, who was named Australian 2018 Young winemaker of the year by *Gourmet Traveller Wine* magazine – has helped put Ballarat on the map as an emerging wine region. Its pioneering Project Zero wines are organically farmed, preservative-free and made with zero sulphur.

**5pm:** It's time to hop back in the car, towards the day's final destination, Ballarat – a 25-minute drive.

**5:30pm:** Check in to [Craig's Royal Hotel](#), a lavish property that dates back to 1853 and evokes the grandeur of Ballarat's golden gold mining age.

**6pm:** Stroll over to [Mitchell Harris Wine Bar](#) for an aperitif. Here, tables spill out onto the pavement and the wine menu is sprinkled liberally with Mitchell Harris' elegant wines, which are made using fruit sourced from across the region.

**7pm:** For dinner, visit one-hatted [Underbar](#). There are just 16 seats at this experimental fine-dining restaurant, which is open only on Friday and Saturday nights for a tasting menu of locally foraged and produced ingredients. The tiny venue is run by Derek Boath, who's toiled

in the kitchens of numerous Michelin-starred restaurants across the globe over the last 20 years, and finally decided to start his own venture on home turf.

**9:30pm:** Retrace your steps back to the hotel and rest up, ready for a full day tomorrow.

### DAY THREE

**8:30am:** Enjoy breakfast under the glass roof at Gallery Restaurant, in Craig's Royal Hotel.

**9am:** Grab a coffee fix at popular Fika Coffee Brewers, run by an ex-veteran of Melbourne coffee institution St Ali.

**9:30am:** Buckle up and drive to the first winery of the day, [Seppelt](#). It takes 80 minutes to reach the registered wine sub-region of Great Western from Ballarat.

**10:50am:** A storied winery whose roots date back to the mid-1800s, Seppelt has championed elegant styles of shiraz since the early 1900s. Its flagship, St Peters Grampians Shiraz, is classed as 'Excellent' in the latest edition of the prestigious Langton's Classification of Australian Wine. The winery's multi-award winning Seppelt Show Sparkling Shiraz is also celebrated. After visiting the cellar door, tour the winery's heritage-listed cellars, referred to as 'The Drives'. Excavated in 1868, they extend for a whopping three kilometres, making them the longest wine cellars in the southern hemisphere.

**12pm:** Bid adieu to Seppelt, bound for neighbouring winery [Best's Great Western](#), just a five-minute drive away.

**12:05pm:** Full of character, and boasting some superb expressions of shiraz, Best's has been in the same family for five generations. The winery's Thomson Family Shiraz is in the coveted 'Exceptional' category in the latest edition of Langton's Classification of Australian Wine – one of only four wines in Victoria to achieve the status, and one of just 22 in the country. Best's Bin O Shiraz was also ranked as 'Outstanding' in the list. Post-tasting take a self-guided tour of the estate's 1860s cellars, which were hand-dug by miners, and the old red gum slab tasting room, which is housed in the original stables and showcases old winery equipment and maps of the area.

**1pm:** Jump in the car and make your way to the Grampians, or Gariwerd, as this national park is traditionally known. One of the most ancient and bio-diverse regions of Victoria, Aboriginal people have had an association with this land for more than 30,000 years. Keep an eye out for wedge-tailed eagles soaring through the skies, brightly coloured lorikeets feasting on the nectar of forest plants, or, at ground level, wild kangaroos and emus.

**1.30pm:** Stop for lunch at Harvest, a café and provedore in Halls Gap, the gateway to the Grampians (Gariwerd).

**2:30pm:** Afterwards, drive 20-minutes up Mt Difficult Road to Boroka Lookout. It's just a short stroll from the carpark to the viewing platform which will reward you with panoramic views over Halls Gap and the east of the Grampians.

**3:20pm:** Leave Boroka behind and set off towards Mackenzie Falls, one of the largest and most breathtaking waterfalls in Victoria. It's about a 20-minute drive.

**3:40pm:** Flowing year-round, Mackenzie Falls cascades over huge cliffs into a deep pool. There's an easy, 1.6-kilometre path to the viewing platform (wheelchair accessible, 40 minutes return), or a steep trail to the base of the falls (30 minutes one-way).

**4:30pm:** Say goodbye to Mackenzie Falls and make your way towards tonight's accommodation, the [Royal Mail Hotel](#) – a 70-minute drive.

**5:40pm:** Arrive at the Royal Mail Hotel and settle in.

**7pm:** Time for dinner. With two renowned restaurants on-site, you don't have to venture far. Wickens is the property's most prestigious offering, a two-hatted fine-diner that offers five- and eight-course degustation menus paired with wines from its 28,000-bottle strong cellar. Sister venue Parker Street Project Wine Bar is a more low-key affair, with an a la carte menu that centres around share plates and snacks. Around 80 per cent of the food on both restaurant menus is grown onsite in the enormous kitchen garden. The restaurant also raises its own beef and lamb.

**9:30pm:** Retire to your room and relax for the night.

## DAY FOUR

**8:30am:** Soak up the views of the Grampians (Gariwerd) over breakfast at the hotel and spend some time enjoying this four-star retreat. Take a dip in the pool or a chef-led kitchen garden tour, free for hotel guests.

**10am:** Grab your bags and make for [Mount Langi Ghiran](#), a 75-minute drive away.

**11:15am:** Located next to the eponymous state park, Mount Langi Ghiran boasts unobstructed views over its granite peaks and sloping woodlands. The winery regularly rotates the bottles on its tasting bench, with at least five wines always available. Shiraz forms 80 per cent of the winery's plantings, so there are numerous different expressions of the varietal on offer. The one constant characteristic for which Mount Langi Ghiran's shiraz has become renowned is its spicy pepper notes. The winery's Langi Shiraz was rated 'Excellent' in the latest edition of Langton's Classification of Australian Wine.

**12:00pm:** Onwards to Daylesford for lunch, where a host of lunch options await. It's an 80-minute drive.

**1:20pm:** For Japanese flavours with a pan-Asian twist visit smart-casual diner [Sakana](#); for fine-dining in beautiful surrounds try the [Lake House](#); and for French farmhouse-style cooking with a menu that changes daily you'll need to drive a further 20 minutes to [Du Fermier](#), in Trentham.

**3:30pm:** It's time to get back on the road, bound for [Paramoor Winery](#), a 40-minute drive away.

**4:10pm:** The final stop on your four-day itinerary, Paramoor features an impossibly cosy and relaxed cellar door, housed within the property's old barn. Curl up in one of the armchairs and savour a glass of the boutique winery's numerous shiraz labels.

**5pm:** Time to head back to Melbourne – a one-hour drive from Paramoor Winery.

**6pm:** Arrive back in Melbourne and enjoy all the city has to offer.

### **Find out more**

Located in the heart of Victoria, Australia's most compact mainland state, the start of the Shiraz Central wine route is just a short drive from Melbourne. Victoria's wild and mountainous Central Highlands experience cool nights and endlessly sunny days, which aid the region's pioneering winemakers in producing a distinct style of cool-spiced shiraz. Here visitors will also experience an Australian bush experience, complete with native wildlife and outstanding national parks. For more information about Shiraz Central, visit:

[visitvictoria.com/shirazcentral](http://visitvictoria.com/shirazcentral)

- *Always be sure to enjoy Victoria's wine regions safely with a designated driver.*