www.greatotwaynationalpark.com.au

GREAT OTWAY NATIONAL PARK · UNOFFICIAL GUIDE · PLANNER V2026-08

Road-trip planner

Packing, base-town choices, waterfall days, multi-base drive rules and official verify links for Great Otway National Park and the Great Ocean Road. From **greatotwaynationalpark.com.au** — free direct download (no email gate). Print this page or save as PDF from your browser.

Verify before you go. Track status, fees, camping rules, fire restrictions and closures change. Always check Parks Victoria — Great Otway National Park, safety / conditions and coast authority pages as relevant. This planner is independent and unofficial — not Parks Victoria or GORCAPA.

Day visitor entry is generally free per publicly available Parks Victoria guidance. Camping, some facilities and commercial products (including Cape Otway Lightstation) attract separate fees. This site never sells park camping or shows live availability.

1. Before you leave home

Status & weather

☐ Parks Victoria park page / alerts checked this morning

☐ Forecast for coast *and* hinterland (not only Melbourne CBD)

☐ Hero waterfall / boardwalk status if it's a hard stop

☐ Plan B if stairs streaming or car parks full

☐ Someone knows your base towns + return window

☐ Lightstation hours/fees checked if Cape Otway is a goal

Packing (day pack)

☐ Water 1L+ per person

☐ Snacks / simple lunch

☐ Waterproof shell (rainforest drip + GOR squalls)

☐ Warm mid-layer (gorges + windy headlands)

☐ Sun hat + sunscreen (cloud still burns)

☐ Grip trail shoes (not smooth soles)

☐ Phone + offline map / alert screenshots

☐ Headlamp if dusk drive or late exit possible

☐ Basic first aid / blister kit

☐ Spare socks + small dry bag for wet gear

☐ Optional: compact binoculars (koalas / whales)

2. Pick a base (coast vs hinterland)

Lorne

- Best for Erskine Falls + eastern Great Ocean Road energy
- Strong first night out of Melbourne
- Weaker default if Cape Otway is every morning

Apollo Bay

- Best for Maits Rest + Cape Otway + western logistics
- Many Great Ocean Walk day logistics start here
- Workhorse western hub

Forrest / hinterland

- Quieter forest / Lake Elizabeth contrast
- Use after coast icons — not instead of a plan

Multi-base rule

- Sleep closer to *tomorrow's* trailheads
- Split nights when you can (Lorne → Apollo Bay is classic)
- Park camping: official Parks Victoria only

3. Decision tree — what day are you running?

Melbourne long day trip
One cluster only — usually Lorne + Erskine. Leave early; hard return buffer. Do not tour the whole park.

Lorne overnight / eastern day
Erskine hero → town reset → optional Kennett River koala scan. Skip Triplet + Cape same day.

Apollo Bay overnight / western day
Maits Rest boardwalk → Cape Otway headland (confirm lightstation). Protect dusk wildlife drive.

Two days (best first multi-base)
Day 1 coast icons · Day 2 hinterland Triplet + optional Hopetoun. One hero nature stop per half-day.

Family / low energy
Boardwalks and upper lookouts first. Stairs optional. Town food buffers protect the group.

After rain / wet stairs
Flow peaks; traction drops. Upper lookout first; turn around on streaming timber. Grip shoes non-negotiable.

4. Half-day / one-day skeletons

Lorne waterfall + coast (from a Lorne base)

- **0:00** — Fuel, water, Parks Victoria check. Valuables not visible in the car.
- **0:15–1:45** — Erskine Falls: upper lookout first; stairs only if safe and dry enough.
- **1:45–3:00** — Lorne town reset (food, toilets, layers).
- **3:00–4:00** — Optional Kennett River koala scan — quiet, legal parking only; skip if chaos.
- **Skip same day:** Triplet / Hopetoun hinterland + full Cape Otway stack.

Apollo Bay rainforest + Cape Otway

- **Morning** — Maits Rest boardwalk (easy rainforest win).

- **Midday** — Apollo Bay food / layer check.
- **Afternoon** — Cape Otway Lightstation precinct (operator hours & fees — separate from free park entry).
- **Return** — daylight buffer; wildlife at dusk is real on Otway roads.

2-day coast + hinterland

- **Day 1:** Coast icons — Maits Rest + Cape Otway *or* Lorne + Erskine (not both stacks).
- **Day 2:** Triplet Falls circuit + Hopetoun short add-on if energy remains.
- **Sleep:** closer to tomorrow's trailheads — multi-base beats one exhausted loop.

5. Full-day rule (protect the trip)

- **One** primary waterfall / walk + **one** soft secondary maximum per half-day.
- Coast strip ≠ hinterland car parks — treat drive time as part of the itinerary.
- Do *not* stack Erskine + Triplet + Hopetoun + Cape Otway on a first long day.
- If stairs are streaming: upper views still count — reverse early.
- Great Ocean Walk multi-day sections need separate honesty (fitness, navigation, official notes).

6. Order-of-stops cheat sheet

First-timer priority

1. Pick a base (Lorne *or* Apollo Bay)
2. One waterfall / boardwalk hero
3. Town reset
4. Optional wildlife or headland chapter

Skip if short / wet / tired

- Full hinterland + full cape same day from Melbourne
- Lower waterfall platforms on streaming stairs
- Chasing every lookout pin "because it's on the map"
- Late dusk wildlife drives when already exhausted

7. Parking, crowds & drive fatigue

☐ Weekend / holiday: arrive early or accept Plan B stops
☐ Never leave bags visible in cars
☐ Legal parking only — no verge improvising on tourist roads
☐ Great Ocean Road traffic is part of the day — build buffers
☐ One hero nature stop beats four half-finished pins
☐ Turn around on streaming stairs without calling the day a failure

8. Safety non-negotiables

Wet timber stairs, leaf litter and clay are common after rain. Coastal headlands bring wind and cliff exposure. Supervise children; stay behind barriers; do not invent "secret platforms".

- Cliff edges and wind — hold children and phones; secure hats.
- After storms: debris, temporary closures, muddy inland roads.

- Wildlife on roads at dusk — slow down; prioritise safe driving over one more pin.
- Kennett River: quiet viewing, no tree shaking, legal parking only.
- **Emergency: call 000.** This PDF cannot help with rescue.

9. Useful links

- **This guide:** https://www.greatotwaynationalpark.com.au/ — itineraries, trails, plan visit, stay
- Official park: **Parks Victoria — Great Otway**
- Safety / conditions: **Parks Victoria — safety in nature**
- Bookings hub (camping / park products): **bookings.parks.vic.gov.au**
- GORCAPA (coast authority context): **greatoceanroadauthority.vic.gov.au**
- Site maps & this planner: /maps/

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