

SHIRAZ CENTRAL ITINERARY: STRIKING GOLD

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.

What to expect:

Surrounded by the iconic sights and sounds of country Australia, you'll experience warm hospitality and cool-climate wines. You'll sip silky, complex shiraz, looking out at rugged bushland peppered with billabongs and gum trees.

DAY ONE

8:00AM Depart Melbourne via the Tullamarine Freeway, driving north-west towards the Macedon Ranges.

9:00AM Stop off at the township of Mount Macedon for a stroll and a coffee at **MOUNT MACEDON TRADING POST**, a general store-cum-café that offers a bounty of locally sourced goods. If you skipped breakfast, pull up a pew on the porch and tuck into avocado on toast – a true Australian classic.

9:30AM Continue to the top of Mount Macedon, within the **MACEDON REGIONAL PARK**, a 10 to 15-minute drive. Look out for the stately houses and gardens you'll pass.

9:45AM At the top, stretch your legs. Breathe in the fresh mountain air. Soak up the views. Located at the southern end of Victoria's Great Dividing Range, Mount Macedon rises 1010 metres above sea level. This is the highest peak within the ranges and its views are unrivalled. The Memorial Cross at its summit is a heritage-listed war memorial.

The densely forested Macedon Regional Park is home to a wide array of native wildlife. Walk along one of the many trails and bask in the sights and sounds of the forest. The 2.5km Sanatorium Eco-Tourism Trail offers an easy introduction with a largely flat route.

11:00AM Leave Mount Macedon for **HANGING ROCK**, a 20-minute drive.

11:20AM A mystical place, Hanging Rock has long mesmerised visitors. It is a prehistoric volcanic rock formation, known for its unusual shapes. The landmark is a sacred site of the Wurundjeri people, the area's traditional custodians, and was popularised by Joan Lindsay's 1967 novel Picnic at Hanging Rock and the 1975 Australian film of the same name.

DAY ONE – CONT'D

Visit the Hanging Rock Discovery Centre. Take a walk down one of the three trails in the reserve (30 minutes to one hour). Be sure to marvel at the views of Mount Macedon from the 105-metre peak.

The reserve is home to an abundance of native fauna and flora. If it's the great Aussie kangaroo you're looking for, the cricket ground below Hanging Rock is a popular hangout for them.

NOON The first winery of the day, [HANGING ROCK WINERY](#), is less than five minutes' drive away.

12:05PM Established in 1982 by John and Ann Ellis, both born into Australian wine dynasties, this multi-award-winning winery was an early pioneer of Heathcote shiraz. There are numerous expressions of the varietal to sample. Stop a while. Savour a few. Gaze at the craggy peaks of Hanging Rock and the forested summit of Mount Macedon.

12:45PM Lunch? Kyneton is the goldfields' food capital and less than a 20-minute drive. The legacy of the gold-rush era runs deep here. Take in the historic streetscapes, lined with stately bluestone buildings. There are many cafés, antique stores, museums and restaurants to explore. If it is open head to [MUSKLANE WINES](#), an urban winery set in an old timberyard (make sure you call ahead, it's popular and has limited opening hours).

1:05PM Park just off Piper Street, the town's main drag. Visit [SOURCE DINING](#), a permanent fixture in the Good Food 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 distinct French influence. The Angus beef with bordelaise sauce and dauphinoise potatoes? It's damn good.

2:10PM Buckle up and head for [HEATHCORE WINE HUB](#), a 40-minute drive.

2:50PM Purveying the biggest collection of Heathcote's wine anywhere in the world, the Heathcote Wine Hub makes for the perfect introduction to the destination's much sought-after shiraz. There are 24 wines available to taste on any given day and some 200 different wines available for purchase from the vast majority of Heathcote's producers. Take a guided tasting tour or relax with a glass of the destination's varietal in the courtyard in summer, or by the open fireplace of the charming 1870s corner store come winter.

3:20PM If it's a weekend, or you've made a mid-week booking for a tasting, hop back in the car and onto [TELLURIAN WINES](#), a 25-minute drive.

3:45PM A family-owned winery established in 2002, the very first planting here was shiraz and it remains Tellurian's principal grape today, with 17 hectares dedicated to the varietal. Meaning 'of the earth', Tellurian was so named because of the deep respect the winery's founders and vigneronns have for the rich red Cambrian soils of the Heathcote region. Book in advance to arrange a personalised tasting and tour of the winery and sample Tellurian's expressions of shiraz at the tasting bench.

4:30PM It's a 50-minute drive to [BALGOWNIE ESTATE BENDIGO WINERY](#) Retreat and Restaurant.

DAY ONE – CONT'D

5:20PM A small vineyard that runs almost entirely off solar power, Balgownie comprises a cellar door, restaurant, café, wine museum and several different accommodation options. Enjoy a bottle of the sparkling or museum shiraz. Sit on the patio of your bell tent as dusk falls over the rolling vineyards before you. If glamping is your thing, these guys have the fluffiest robes and slippers.

6:30PM After a full day on the road, sample the fare at Balgownie Restaurant. The seasonal menu typically features rich, protein-packed dishes such as the hero duck, pork belly and wagyu beef.

If you feel like exploring, visit one-hatted **MASONS OF BENDIGO**. It pairs creative, modern Australian food with locally sourced beers and an entirely Victorian wine list.

9:00PM Not that we're trying to tell you when to go to bed... Venture back to your bell tent at Balgownie to rest up.

DAY TWO

8:00AM Breakfast at Balgownie Estate. Pack your bags. Hit the road.

9:00AM Drive into central Bendigo, 10 minutes away. Filled with heritage buildings, this regional city was the richest in the world in the 1880s due to its connection to gold mining. It's now a hub for the arts.

Take a walk around the CBD. Maybe grab a coffee at Brewhouse Café, a micro-roastery, then take the vintage **TALKING TRAM**. Alternatively, head beneath the streets and experience the gold rush for yourself. The Central Deborah Gold Mine is in the heart of the city and offers the deepest underground mine tour in Australia.

11:45AM Drive to the **WOMBAT STATE FOREST**, located between Woodend and Daylesford, a 70-minute drive.

1:00PM Covering some 70,000 hectares of bushland, this forest is home to all manner of native wildlife. For a chance to spot the local fauna, take a walk through the greenery-drenched park – they're everywhere.

1:50PM Head to lunch at Passing Clouds, a 30-minute drive.

2:20PM The wines produced at **PASSING CLOUDS** have proven so formidable that two of Australia's top restaurants, Rockpool and Attica, have bought the winery out of entire vintages.

Lunch is a rustic and hearty affair, served 'la famiglia' style. Sit out on the deck (made from recycled wood) under parasols, overlooking the lake and vineyards, as the heady scent of charcoal-fired meat fills the air.

DAY TWO – CONT'D

3:40PM Continue on to [EASTERN PEAKE VINEYARD](#), a 45-minute drive.

4:25PM A minimalist cellar door with floor-to-ceiling glass walls, Eastern Peake Vineyard puts the spotlight on the wines and vines. The winery is run by second-generation winemaker Owen Latta, who was named Australian 2018 Young Winemaker of the Year by Gourmet Traveller Wine magazine. This winery's craft 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.

5:00PM Hop back in the car and head 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 gold rush era.

6:00PM Stroll over to [MITCHELL HARRIS WINE BAR](#) for an aperitif. Here, tables spill out onto the pavement and the wine menu is liberally sprinkled with Mitchell Harris's elegant wines, which are made using fruit sourced from across the region.

7:00PM For dinner, visit the 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. Be sure to book well ahead. The tiny venue is run by Derek Boath, who's worked in the kitchens of numerous Michelin-starred restaurants across the globe.

9:30PM Head 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.

9:00AM Grab a coffee at popular [FIKA](#) Coffee Brewers, run by a former veteran of Melbourne coffee institution St Ali.

9:30AM Drive to the first winery of the day, [SEPPELT](#). From Ballarat, it takes 80 minutes to reach the registered wine subregion of Great Western.

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 are three kilometres in length, making them the longest wine cellars in the Southern Hemisphere.

DAY THREE – CONT'D

NOON Head to a 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. 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. Look out for the old red gum slab tasting room, which is housed in the original stables.

1:00PM Make your way to **THE GRAMPIANS**. One of the most ancient and biodiverse regions of Victoria, Indigenous Australians have an association with this land that dates back more than 30,000 years. Keep an eye out for wedge-tailed eagles soaring through the skies and brightly coloured lorikeets feasting on the nectar of forest plants.

1:30PM Stop for lunch at Harvest, a café and provedore in Halls Gap, the gateway to the Grampians.

2:30PM Afterwards, drive 20 minutes up Mt Difficult Road (easier than it sounds) 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 Set off for Mackenzie Falls, one of the biggest 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 Make your way towards tonight's accommodation, the **ROYAL MAIL HOTEL** at Dunkeld – a 70-minute drive.

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

7:00PM Time for dinner. with two renowned restaurants onsite, you don't have to venture far. **WICKENS** is the property's most prestigious offering, a two-hatted fine-dining affair that offers five and eight-course degustation menus paired with wines from its 28,000-bottle cellar.

Sister venue **PARKER STREET PROJECT WINE BAR** is a little more low-key, with an a la carte menu that centres around shareplates and snacks. Around 80 per cent of the food on both restaurants' 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 over breakfast at the hotel and spend some time enjoying this four-star retreat. Take a dip in the pool or try a chef-led kitchen garden tour, free for hotel guests.

10:00AM [MOUNT LANGI GHIRAN](#) is 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 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.

NOON Head to Daylesford for lunch, where a host of 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 and a menu that changes daily, you'll need to drive a further 20 minutes to [DU FERMIER](#) in Trentham.

3:30PM Get back on the road, where you are bound for [PARAMOOR WINERY](#), a 40-minute drive.

4:10PM The final stop on your four-day itinerary, Paramoor features a 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.

5:00PM Head back to Melbourne – a one-hour drive from Paramoor Winery.

6:00PM Arrive back in Melbourne and enjoy all the city has to offer.

ALWAYS BE SURE TO ENJOY VICTORIA'S WINE REGIONS SAFELY WITH A DESIGNATED DRIVER.