



DIVE INTO THE ACTION IN OZ

With the British & Irish Lions touring Australia and the Ashes cricket, this is *the* year to head Down Under. For some action off the pitch, why not take to Australia's coastline to see a different side to these five cities?



BRISBANE

Windsurf in Moreton Bay

Once the colonial settlement town of Queensland, Moreton Bay's seaside resort Redcliffe has since flourished into a popular weekend bolthole for Brisbanites seeking sun without the attractions and painstaking commute of the Gold Coast.

A leisurely 25-minute drive north of the capital, Moreton Bay teems with seaside towns, bay views and above-water action. Start your adventure on-land at Surf Connect's Wind and Kitesurfing Centre where individual or two-to-share windsurfing, kitesurfing or stand up paddling lessons will introduce you to the bay's windswept waters.

Breeze across the bay toward the Redcliffe peninsula to see the red-coloured hues the town was named after, then settle into one of its seafood shanties for a taste of the famous Moreton Bay bug.

Despite its nickname, this local delicacy is actually a lobster found across the northern coast of Australia and is fundamental to seafood fare in Brisbane.

Back on dry land...

Brisbane is one of Australia's most laidback, outdoors-y cities, with adventure the name of the game. Climb the iconic Story Bridge, soak in the views from Mount Coot-tha, Brisbane's tallest mountaintop or try your hand at rock climbing and abseiling at Kangaroo Point.

MELBOURNE

Snorkel with weedy seadragons

You'll struggle to find a weirder-looking creature than the weedy seadragon. These colourful, craggy little things, which look like beautiful, ethereal aliens, exist only along Australia's south coast, and a colony of them lives just off the Mornington Peninsula on the eastern side of Port Phillip Bay, around 90 minutes' drive from downtown Melbourne. Bayplay takes groups of snorkellers out to see them from the seaside resort of Portsea.

The two-hour snorkel tours are designed for beginners and wetsuits are mercifully provided – the bay can get chilly. Port Phillip Bay might not be the Great Barrier Reef, but there's a surprising amount to see once you've got your mask in the water. The coral against which the weedy seadragons try to camouflage themselves is vivid, with hermit crabs and puffer fish scuttling around its nooks and crannies.

Back on dry land...

Charming, cosmopolitan Melbourne is home to some of Australia's best eating, drinking, culture and sport. From watching Aussie Rules football at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground to cycling the riverside Yarra Trail, eating fresh seafood on the beachfront at St Kilda or exploring the funky boutiques of Fitzroy in North Melbourne, there's plenty to discover in Australia's second city.

Thomas Cook Sport will be acting as agents ATS to offer excursions to our customers. Visit www.thomascooksport.com, see your travel agent or call 0844 800 9900



SYDNEY

Race a yacht on Sydney Harbour

The idea of letting landlubbers race yachts around Sydney Harbour is either brilliant or foolhardy, but it's a risk Sydney By Sail is prepared to take. Its Social Racing outings take place on the third Saturday of every month, and are a fun combination of sightseeing, learning and a sprinkling of friendly competition.

If you want to just sit back and enjoy the cruise, you can. If not, throw yourself into raising the sails, have a go behind the wheel and assist the skipper as he tacks across the busy waterway. And if you get bitten by the sailing bug, why not try a two-day introductory sailing course? You'll learn the basics such as rope work, sailing into the wind, de-rigging, how to tack and gybe, how to read the wind and rudimentary navigation techniques – all from a fully qualified instructor.

Back on dry land...

Whether it's climbing the Harbour Bridge, catching a show at the iconic Sydney Opera House or seeing the spectacular harbour views from Taronga Zoo, Sydney is a treat for all travellers. You can take the ferry to Manly Beach to find beach walks galore, or check out the harbourside Rose Bay, where seaplanes land to drop diners off at the stunning Catalina Restaurant, which serves up fresh line-caught fish, and sushi from Wednesday to Sunday.



ADELAIDE

Kayak through shipwrecks

It might sound ironic – or perhaps life-threatening even – kayaking through a ships' graveyard, but rest assured that the abandoned wrecks in Port Adelaide didn't find their untimely ends in these waters. Touted as one of the world's most diverse ship graveyards, everything from windjammers to steamships and schooners have been scuttled to the Port River's safe backwaters, enabling visitors to view these archaeological treasures by foot or by water with little to no fear for their lives. Adventure Kayak SA makes the most of the journey and also showcases the port's captivating marine life, namely its charming bottlenose dolphins. These marine mammals hug the coastline like clockwork and are far from shy about making themselves known to passing vessels.

For an even more extensive maritime adventure, Sealink tours regularly depart from the city centre to the nearby Kangaroo Island. Walk the coastline for close encounters with fur seals, wild Australian sea lions and southern right whales (from May to October) amongst the picturesque rock formations of Admiral's Arch and Remarkable Rocks.

Back on dry land

Adelaide prides itself on its green open spaces and is surrounded by a ring of State heritage-listed parklands. Stroll or cycle through its 29 parks, including the famous Adelaide Botanic Garden, or spend the day at Adelaide Zoo or evening on a ghost tour of Adelaide Gaol (Thursdays to Saturdays).

PERTH

Sun, surf and sandboarding

Life's a beach just 15 minutes north of Perth city centre at the iconic Cottesloe Beach. Boasting powder-white sands and crystal clear waters, Cottesloe attracts swimmers, body boarders, surfers, snorkelers and beach bums from all walks of life. The day wouldn't be complete without a beer at one of the seaside bars. Sit back and relax as the sun goes down.

Thrill seekers and water babies wanting more can head further north to the fishing town of Lancelin, where coastal conditions are idyllic for keen windsurfers. Bordered on one side by a reef and on the other, massive sand dunes, snorkelling and diving for treasure are also not unheard of here. And neither are sandboarding and dune buggy riding along the inviting 45-degree angle dunes.

Cover both dune adventures with an Adrenalin's Extreme Buggy Thrill Ride and remember to keep your eyes open as you fly over the crests for breathtaking views of Lancelin and its coastline – best enjoyed during dawn or dusk.

Back on dry land...

On the map, it might look as though Perth is worlds away from Australia's populated east coast, but it's rapidly developing into a cultural mecca. Its burgeoning bar scene is only rivalled by its arts culture, with a wealth of gallery and museum exhibitions, markets and festivals taking place all year round.

[WORDS] DAVID WHITLEY AND STEPHANIE YIP