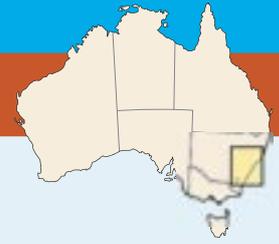


Your great Australian journey starts here

NSW SOUTH COAST AND CANBERRA



Length: 5–7 days Fly/drive option: Sydney, Canberra

This short tour has plenty of gleaming highlights, whether it's the whitewash and history of Old Parliament House or the brilliant white sands of Jervis Bay. Begin by climbing out of Sydney through the fertile Southern Highlands to Canberra, spending a couple of days among the capital's cultural treasures. Passing through Cooma, the gateway to the Snowies, the drive returns to the coast near the Victoria border and then beach-hops back to Sydney through some of the country's most memorable coastal sights.

Travel tips

Prepare to be wowed by the hinterland as much as the coast – there's surprisingly good bushwalking on Canberra's doorstep and in Morton National Park.

Summer is the peak tourist time on the South Coast and its towns can get extremely busy. Accommodation bookings are essential. Spring offers a great alternative, with comfortable coastal conditions (18–21°C daily averages), the Tulip Time festival in Bowral, and whales around Merimbula and Eden.

Websites

- www.visitnsw.com.au
- www.southcoast.net.au
- www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au
- www.canberratourism.com.au

NSW South Coast and Canberra – Travel Times		
Route	Distance	Duration
Sydney – Goulburn	225 km	3hrs
Goulburn – Canberra	81 km	1hr
Canberra – Bega	224 km	3hrs
Bega – Eden	54 km	45mins
Eden – Wollongong	398 km	5hr 30mins
Wollongong – Sydney	79 km	1hr



A The Southern Highlands

Begin by climbing out of Sydney through the fertile Southern Highlands (www.southern-highlands.com.au), which offer plenty of early distraction on this drive. Turn off the Hume Highway into Mittagong, taking the road over Mount Gibraltar to Bowral for **great views** across the Highlands.

Bowral equals Bradman, and you can journey through The Don's life and remarkable cricket achievements at the **Bradman Museum** (www.bradman.org.au). If you're in Bowral in spring, check out the **Tulip Time festival** (www.tuliptime.net.au) in the Corbett Gardens.

Nearby is Berrima, a tiny town with big ideas, as evidenced by its striking courthouse, the Surveyor General Inn (said to be Australia's oldest continuously licensed inn), and one of Australia's largest bookstores, the Berrima Book Barn (www.berkelouw.com.au), with around 300,000 second-hand books.

Take a detour south from Bowral to the impressive Fitzroy Falls, which tumble 82 m over the sandstone escarpment. Wander the **walking tracks** atop the cliffs for views of the falls.

Continue south and you'll descend into beautiful Kangaroo Valley, all but lost in the folds of the ranges. Take a break for some leisurely **canoeing** on the Kangaroo River (www.kangaroovalleycanoes.com.au), and perhaps even discover the curious mix of luxury and camping at Extravacamp (www.extravacamps.com.au), where a Decatent has all the trimmings of a five-star hotel.

Return to the Hume Highway, driving west to Goulburn (www.igoulburn.com), a town that boasts a great array of colonial architecture, from the Classical Revival courthouse to the Old Goulburn Brewery, dating to 1836. **Brewery tours** are available and you can sample the real ales still brewed here.

B Canberra and surrounds

Turn south onto the Federal Highway just beyond Goulburn, rounding Lake George, and passing the re-created Bywong Mining Town on the approach to Canberra.

Canberra (www.canberratourism.com.au) is a capital city filled with capital sights: the National Museum, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, National Library, National Botanic Gardens and federal parliament are all worth a visit. You can amble or cycle around Lake Burley Griffin or visit the 30 cool-climate **wineries** in the region (www.canberrawines.com.au).

The ACT is as natural as it is cultural, with more than half its area covered by national park and reserves. Take some time to explore **Namadgi National Park** (www.environment.act.gov.au) and **Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve** (www.environment.act.gov.au).

B to **C** Canberra to Eden

Head south on the Monaro Highway across the grasslands of the Monaro Tableland. Take a stop at the Bredbo Inn, once the haunt of bushrangers and more respectable notables such as Banjo Paterson, before driving on to Cooma (www.visitcooma.com.au).

Just before reaching the town, pay a visit to the Snowy Hydro Education and Information Centre (www.snowyhydro.com.au) for a look at one of Australia's greatest engineering marvels.

To see the best of Cooma, stroll the 4 km Lambie Town Walk. Cooma is one of the major springboards to the NSW **snowfields**, and if you're here in the colder months, there are plenty of places to hire ski, snowboard or tobogganing equipment (including snow chains) and receive advice about the region's best slopes for your level of expertise.

The descent from here towards the coast takes you through Nimmitabel, Bemboka and the forested mountain slopes to Bega. If you're up for a detour it's worth venturing to Bombala (www.bombala.com), where the Bombala River offers reliable glimpses of platypus. The platforms at the Platypus Reserve have the best vantage points.

By the time you hit Bega you may be hungry, so seek out the **tastings** at the Bega Cheese Heritage Centre



(www.begacheese.com.au), washing the fromage down with a drop from nearby Grevillea Estate Winery (www.grevilleawines.com).

Turning south, Merimbula (www.sapphirecoast.com.au) is the NSW South Coast's holiday mecca, and proud claimant to some of its finest beaches. Water is king here: visit the aquarium, take a **dolphin cruise** or a **whale-watching tour** (October and November), **surf** Merimbula Bar or Short Point, or **dive** a selection of wrecks.

Eden (www.sapphirecoast.com.au) is your final stop south, a town pinched between sections of **Ben Boyd National Park** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au). In October and November the town is ruled by the passing humpback whales; their presence is celebrated at the Eden Whale Festival (www.edenwhalefestival.com) each spring. **Whale-watching tours** (www.catbalou.com.au; www.freedomcharters.com.au) are a must at this time of year.

Continue the cetacean theme with a visit to Eden's Killer Whale Museum (www.killerwhalemuseum.com.au) for the remarkable story behind the killer whales, or orcas, that once herded other whales to their deaths in order to assist whalers (and receive the leftovers as reward). The skeleton in the museum is Old Tom's, the most famous of the orcas.

Venturing into Ben Boyd National Park, visit the relics of the Davidson Whaling Station, the longest-running shore-based whaling station in the country; and take a tour of (or spend the night at) the Green Cape Lighthouse. **Accommodation** booking forms are available from www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au.

Whale-watching



NARCOMA CHARTERS

Fur seal



SIMON CARTER/AG

C to D Eden to Narooma

Beach-hop your way back towards Bega, detouring off the main route to Tathra (www.sapphirecoast.com.au). Two of New South Wales' finest coastal national parks – Mimosa Rocks (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) and Bournda (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) – surround Tathra, each with beautiful stretches of beach. **Walk** into Wallagoot Gap inside Bournda National Park at low tide and you'll be awed by a private piece of paradise.

Further north is the **game-fishing** favourite, Bermagui (www.sapphirecoast.com.au), where the continental shelf is at its closest point to the east coast.

North from Bermagui, it's worth stopping at Umbarra Cultural Centre (www.umbarra.com.au) near Wallaga Lake, operated by the Yuin people. Here, you can **tour sacred sites** or learn indigenous arts and skills such as **ochre painting** and boomerang throwing.

At cute Central Tilba (www.naturecoast-tourism.com.au), wander through **galleries** and cafes before heading to Narooma (www.naroomaonline.com), where you can **cruise** on Wagonga Inlet or soak in the views between drives at the **Narooma Golf Club** (www.naroomagolf.com.au) – one of the most scenic courses in the country.

Offshore is Montague Island (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au), a nature reserve that's home to a large colony of **little penguins**, nesting muttonbirds (short-tailed shearwaters) and **fur seals** (August to December). **Boat tours** to the island visit the seal colony, with the chance also of sighting penguins, whales and dolphins; contact Narooma Visitor Centre (www.naturecoast-tourism.com.au) for details. For an exciting, close-up view, you can stay on the island in refurbished lighthouse-keeper's cottages and work alongside rangers on penguin-habitat restoration (www.conservationvolunteers.com.au/volunteer/montague.htm). **Diving** around the island is also exceptional.

Surrounding Narooma are the beaches and wetlands of **Eurobodalla National Park** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au).

D to E Narooma to Jervis Bay

The drive winds along the coast as you continue north from Narooma. For a quirky bush experience, visit Australia's Bush Orchestra at Moruya, where birds provide the symphony while you walk through the forest learning about some of Australia's significant spiritual leaders. Birdseed is available.

Tiny Mogo has a couple of curious attractions: the re-created Old Mogo Town (www.oldmogotown.com.au) gold-rush village and the exotic **Mogo Zoo** (www.mogozoo.com.au), complete with Bengal tigers, boa constrictors and Madagascan lemurs.

From here it's a short hop to Batemans Bay (www.naturecoast-tourism.com.au), where you can **cruise** up the Clyde River and then **dine** in the evening on Clyde River oysters. For seafood that's a little bigger, there's great **game fishing** offshore – blue marlin in excess of 200 kg have been hauled in here. Fishing charters are available from the town.

North of Bateman's Bay, side roads veer into **Murramarang National Park** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au), noted for its surf and beach-loving **eastern grey kangaroos**. The foreshore at Pebbly Beach will invariably feature grazing roos when you visit.

For an entirely different outdoor experience, veer inland to striking **Pigeon House Mountain**. The climb to the rocky summit is easier than it looks, though it does require reasonable fitness and a head for heights, with the final ascent on metal ladders. Allow 3–4 hours for the climb.

Return to the highway near Ulladulla, leaving it again for the beach treats of Jervis Bay (www.jervisbaytourism.com.au). Hyams Beach, at the southern end of the bay, was once included in Guinness World Records for having the world's whitest sand, and it can only have just edged out its neighbours. If you want to prolong the surprise of Hyams Beach, walk to it, following the bay's **White Sands Walk** from Plantation Point.

The bay's waters invite exploration and you can see them **by yacht** (www.jervisbaysailingcharters.com.au), **kayak** (www.jervisbaykayaks.com) or on a **dolphin cruise** (www.dolphinwatch.com.au).



Sea Cliff Bridge

E to F Jervis Bay to Wollongong

At Nowra, decide between culture and coast, either staying on the highway for the **galleries, cafes and restaurants** of Berry (www.berry.org.au), or leaving the highway to travel behind Seven Mile Beach. Either way, you'll come to Kiama (www.kiama.com.au) and its famous (and floodlit) blowhole, which has shot water up to 60 m into the air. For **short drives** in the Kiama area, see www.kiama.com.au.

One worthwhile detour is west to the Minnamurra Rainforest (www.kiama.com.au), which has a selection of **short walks** to explore this remnant patch of rainforest. Sate that walking-induced hunger or thirst, or stay the night at the dinkum Jamberoo Pub (www.jamberoopub.com).

From Kiama it's a short drive into Wollongong (www.tourismwollongong.com), NSW's third-largest city, crouching below the Illawarra Escarpment. South of the city you can visit the **Nan Tien Temple**, the largest Buddhist temple in the southern hemisphere. You can even sleep here, in the Pilgrim Lodge (www.tourismwollongong.com), making it easier to catch the dawn ceremonies.

Check out also the excellent **Wollongong City Gallery** (www.wollongongcitygallery.com), one of Australia's largest regional galleries, with collections of Illawarra colonial art and contemporary Aboriginal art.

Wollongong is also a good place to join the **Cockatoo Run train** (www.3801limited.com.au), which rolls out of the city into the Southern Highlands, climbing around 600 m through the Illawarra Escarpment in just 6 km.

For a selection of driving itineraries around Wollongong, visit www.tourismwollongong.com.

F to G Wollongong to Sydney

Detour north out of Wollongong through Thirroul and Austinmer to cross the recently completed Sea Cliff Bridge, all but hanging over the Pacific Ocean at the point where the Illawarra Escarpment meets the sea. You can watch for migrating whales from the pedestrian pathway across the 665 m **bridge**.

At Stanwell Park, take a hang-gliding or para-gliding flight from Bald Hill, one of the country's best launch sites, perched around 200 m above the ocean. Tandem hang-glider (www.hanggliding.com.au; www.hangglideoz.com.au) and **para-glider** (www.sydneyparagliding.com) flights are available.

Continue north through Otford and **Royal National Park** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au), Australia's first national park, where you can divert to Garie and Wattamolla beaches, set between cliffs. Return to the Princes Highway to end the drive back in Sydney. ■