

Australia's East Coast Explorer

26 Night Self Drive Tour

Experience the very best of East Coast Australia on this unforgettable self-drive adventure.

Begin in cosmopolitan Melbourne, where vibrant laneways, café culture and artsy charm await, before setting off along the spectacular Great Ocean Road. This iconic drive offers dramatic coastlines, charming seaside towns and world-class wine regions en route to Adelaide.

Then, swap the southern scenery for the lush tropics as you fly to Palm Cove, your gateway to the Great Barrier Reef and Daintree Rainforest. From here, meander south along Queensland's sun-drenched coast, discovering beach towns, island getaways and lively cities, before ending your journey with Sydney's world-famous harbour as your final reward.

Highlights:

- Explore Melbourne's hidden laneways, coffee culture, and artsy vibe.
- Drive the world-famous Great Ocean Road with stops at the Twelve Apostles and Loch Ard Gorge.
- Soak up the charm of Adelaide's historic buildings, lively markets, and nearby wine country.
- Cruise to the Great Barrier Reef or explore the ancient Daintree Rainforest.
- Follow the sun-drenched Queensland coast through Townsville, Mission Beach, and Airlie Beach.
- Cruise to the Whitsundays, spot whales in Hervey Bay (in season), and soak up Byron Bay's beachy charm.
- Discover Brisbane's riverside lifestyle, vibrant culture, and South Bank precinct.
- Visit the Koala Hospital and beaches of Port Macquarie.
- Explore Sydney's iconic Harbour Bridge, Opera House, and coastal walks.

What's included:

- Getting there: Flights to Melbourne, return from Sydney
- Transport: car hire throughout, plus an internal flight from Adelaide to Cairns
- Accommodation: Up to 26 nights total duration (including up to 3 nights on the international flights) – 23 nights in hotels throughout
- Meals: as per accommodation booked, most hotels will only offer room only or breakfast

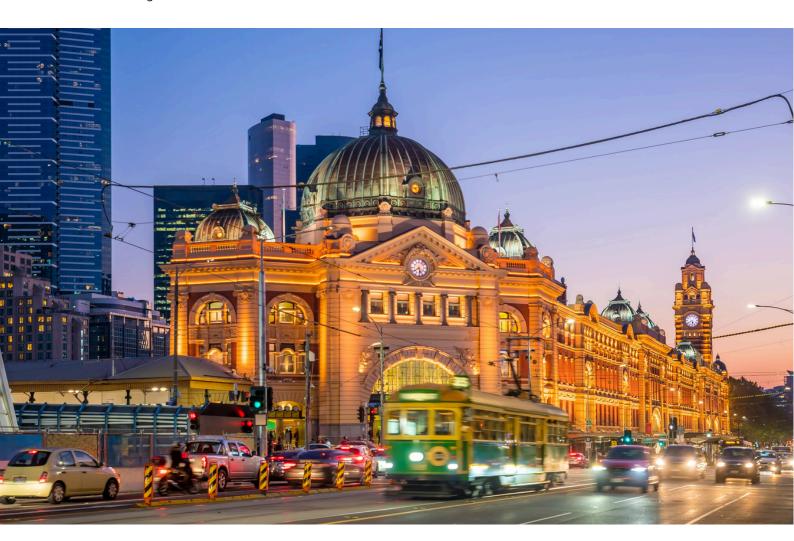
Not included:

- Any meals (other than the one mentioned in the itinerary), drinks, tips, expenses of personal nature.
- Optional excursion/tours
- Travel insurance and eTA
- Anything not mentioned in the "What's Included" column

Full Itinerary

Day 1: UK to Australia

Board your overnight flight to Melbourne; generally this flight is overnight but in some cases you will travel over two nights.



Day 2: Arrive in Melbourne

Welcome to Australia! After your long-haul flight from the UK, you'll arrive in Melbourne, a stylish and cosmopolitan city bursting with art, culture, and fantastic food. After checking into your hotel the rest of the day is yours to relax, stretch your legs, and enjoy a gentle walk along the Yarra River or sip a flat white in one of Melbourne's famous laneway cafes.

Melbourne offers the perfect balance of vibrant energy and laid-back charm. If time allows, explore the Royal Botanic Gardens - a haven for local biodiversity - or take a ride on the historic City Circle tram for a free, eco-friendly sightseeing loop. This evening, enjoy dinner at a riverside restaurant before resting up for your journey ahead.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Quincy Hotel, Melbourne or similar

Day 3: Melbourne

Enjoy a full day exploring this dynamic city. Visit Federation Square, wander through the laneways and arcades, or explore world-class museums such as the National Gallery of Victoria. If you're a sports fan, a tour of the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) is a must.

Food lovers will be in their element — Melbourne is famed for its coffee culture, wine bars, and thriving culinary scene, with many venues sourcing ingredients locally. In the evening, why not catch a performance at the Arts Centre or take a rooftop bar tour with city views?

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Quincy Hotel, Melbourne or similar





Day 4: Melbourne to Apollo Bay

Collect your hire car and set off on one of the world's most iconic drives - the Great Ocean Road. Today's drive to Apollo Bay is around three hours, but you'll want to allow extra time for scenic stops at Bells Beach, Torquay, and the charming seaside town of Lorne.

Apollo Bay is a lovely spot to spend the night, nestled between rolling green hills and a sweeping surf beach. Stretch your legs on the beach or take a short walk into the foothills of the Otway Ranges. Consider a visit to the Great Otway National Park for a low-impact nature experience supporting conservation of this unique ecosystem.

ACCOMMODATION: 3* Apollo Bay Waterfront Motor Inn or similar

DRIVING TIME: 3 hrs // 122 mi

Day 5: Apollo Bay to Warrnambool

Today's drive offers some of the most jaw-dropping scenery on the route. Head into the Great Otway National Park, where towering trees and hidden waterfalls meet the sea. Make sure to stop at the Twelve Apostles, Loch Ard Gorge, and London Bridge - all world-famous landmarks shaped by wind and water.

Continue on to Warrnambool, a regional city with maritime charm and coastal flair. Depending on the season, you might even spot whales just offshore. This evening, enjoy a relaxed meal and perhaps catch the Shipwrecked Sound and Light Show at Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Deep Blue Hotel and Hot Springs, Warrnambool or similar

DRIVING TIME: 2 hr 20 min // 100 mi



Day 6: Warrnambool to Mount Gambier

Leaving Victoria behind, you'll cross into South Australia today, heading toward the fascinating regional city of Mount Gambier. Break up the journey with a visit to Port Fairy or the coastal wetlands of Nelson for birdwatching or a riverside walk.

Mount Gambier is known for its extraordinary natural attractions, including the vivid blue waters of Blue Lake, the Umpherston Sinkhole (a sunken garden in a collapsed cave), and the volcanic landscape of Mount Schank. It's a unique and intriguing stop full of geological wonders.

ACCOMMODATION: 3* Delgattie Estate, Mount Gambier or Colhurst House or similar

DRIVING TIME: 2 hr 30 min // 129 mi





Day 7: Mount Gambier to Adelaide

Today's drive takes you through the Limestone Coast and Coonawarra wine region as you make your way north to Adelaide. If you're a wine enthusiast, consider stopping for a tasting or cellar door lunch among the vineyards of Coonawarra.

Arriving in Adelaide, you'll be greeted by wide boulevards, historic buildings, and a relaxed, sunny vibe. Check into your accommodation and enjoy a laid-back evening exploring the East End, with its lively pubs, wine bars, and open-air restaurants. You've earned it after covering one of Australia's best driving routes.

ACCOMMODATION: 3* Ibis Adelaide or similar

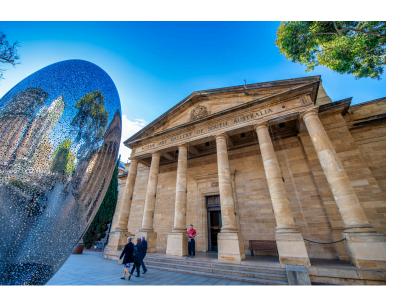
DRIVING TIME: 5 hrs // 284 mi

Day 8: Adelaide

Take today to explore South Australia's elegant capital. Start at the Central Market, one of the Southern Hemisphere's best food markets, or wander through the Adelaide Botanic Garden. Art lovers will appreciate the Art Gallery of South Australia, while history buffs can explore the nearby Migration Museum.

Alternatively, if you prefer to get out of the city, take a half-day tour to the Barossa Valley or McLaren Vale wine regions - both within easy reach. Adelaide's charm lies in its blend of culture, heritage, and easy-going appeal. It's the perfect place to end this first leg of your journey before flying north.

ACCOMMODATION: 3* Ibis Adelaide or similar





Day 9: Adelaide to Palm Cove

Today you'll swap the southern coast for the tropics, flying from Adelaide to Cairns, a warm and lively city perfectly positioned between the Great Barrier Reef and the lush Daintree Rainforest.

When you arrive, pick up your new hire car, and settle into your hotel in nearby Palm Cove, nestled between the rainforest and the Coral Sea. Lined with centuries-old paperbark trees and stylish resorts, this is a quieter and more elegant alternative to bustling Cairns. Settle into your accommodation, enjoy a stroll along the palm-fringed esplanade, and dine al fresco at one of the many relaxed yet refined restaurants.

Palm Cove offers the perfect mix of tropical charm and barefoot luxury. You'll feel instantly at ease with its slow pace, inviting beach, and spa retreats. It's an ideal place to recharge and take in the beauty of Far North Queensland.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Mantra Amphora Palm Cove or similar

Day 10: Palm Cove

Today is yours to explore the wonders of the region. Choose a full-day Great Barrier Reef cruise from nearby Cairns or Port Douglas, or head into the Daintree Rainforest for a guided walk, crocodile cruise, or Indigenous cultural tour. Many tours offer pickup directly from Palm Cove for convenience.

Alternatively, enjoy a relaxed day close to home. Start with a sunrise walk along the beach, indulge in a spa treatment, or take a dip in the resort pool. Palm Cove's boutique shops, galleries, and cafés make it a lovely place to wander without a fixed plan.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Mantra Amphora Palm Cove or similar



Day 11: Palm Cove to Townsville

Hit the road today for your first stretch of the journey - a scenic drive to Townsville. Along the way, you can stop in Babinda, Innisfail, or Mission Beach, each offering relaxed tropical vibes, rainforest walks, and uncrowded beaches. Consider taking a short rainforest boardwalk at Josephine Falls or stopping at a local farm shop to support regional producers.

Arriving in Townsville, check into your hotel and explore The Strand, a waterfront promenade with views out to Magnetic Island. You might catch a glorious sunset over the Coral Sea or visit Castle Hill Lookout for panoramic views of the coastline.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Mercure Townsville or similar

DRIVING TIME: 4 hr 30 mins // 231 mi





Day 12: Townsville

Take the day to explore more of Townsville. A highlight for many is the short ferry ride to Magnetic Island, known for its walking trails, secluded beaches, and local koalas dozing in eucalyptus trees. You can hire a little open-top "barbie car" and cruise around the island at your own pace. The island is part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and offers many eco-certified tours and wildlife-friendly experiences.

Back in Townsville, visit the excellent Museum of Tropical Queensland or wander the botanic gardens. This part of Queensland has a more local, authentic feel than its tourist-heavy neighbours, and you'll get a lovely taste of Aussie coastal life. Tonight is ideal for a beachside dinner under the stars.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Mercure Townsville or similar

Day 13: Townsville to Airlie Beach

Your journey continues with a drive south to the relaxed town of Airlie Beach, the jumping-off point for the famous Whitsunday Islands. The landscape shifts from dry savannah to lush green hills as you approach the coast, with sugar cane fields stretching for miles.

Airlie Beach welcomes you with a lively seaside atmosphere and a buzzing lagoon perfect for a refreshing swim. Spend the afternoon exploring the esplanade and marina or simply kick back with a cool drink and enjoy the tropical views.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Coral Sea Marina Resort, Airlie Beach or similar

DRIVING TIME: 3 hr // 170 mi



Day 14: Airlie Beach

Today is your chance to experience the Whitsundays, a chain of 74 paradise islands scattered through the Coral Sea. Popular options include a day cruise to Whitehaven Beach, regularly ranked among the world's best, or a sailing trip through the turquoise waters. Snorkelling tours offer coral reefs teeming with marine life.

Prefer to stay on land? Relax at Airlie Lagoon, browse local markets, or enjoy a long lunch at one of the harbourfront restaurants. This area is a favourite among both Australians and international visitors for its unbeatable combination of beauty and laid-back charm.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Coral Sea Marina Resort, Airlie Beach or similar

Day 15: Airlie Beach to Rockhampton

Today's drive is a longer stretch to the regional city of Rockhampton, often referred to as the "beef capital of Australia". Along the way, you'll pass through quiet country towns and wide-open countryside.

Once in Rockhampton, take a walk along the heritage-listed Quay Street or enjoy dinner at a classic Aussie pub. If you arrive early enough, you might explore the Botanic Gardens or take a scenic detour via Capricorn Caves before heading into town.

ACCOMMODATION: 3* Quest Rockhampton or similar

DRIVING TIME: 5 hr 10 mins // 299 mi





Day 16: Rockhampton to Hervey Bay

Get back on the road for a drive to Hervey Bay, a laid-back coastal spot known for its calm beaches and access to K'gari (Fraser Island), the world's largest sand island and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Once in Hervey Bay, stretch your legs with a stroll along the 17km coastal path or out onto the Urangan Pier at sunset. In the right season (July to November), it's also one of the best places in Australia to go whale watching, with humpbacks resting in the bay during their migration.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Mantra Hervey Bay or similar

DRIVING TIME: 4 hrs // 237 mi

Day 17: Hervey Bay to Brisbane

Depart Hervey Bay for a drive to Brisbane, Queensland's cosmopolitan riverside capital. Depending on your pace, you might stop in Noosa for a coffee and a quick beach walk, perhaps visiting Noosa National Park's scenic coastal track.

Upon arrival, check into your hotel and head down to South Bank, a riverside cultural precinct with gardens, cafes, and even a city beach. If you've still got energy, ride the Wheel of Brisbane or stroll along the Story Bridge for skyline views at dusk.

Many of Brisbane's attractions are walkable or accessible via the CityCat ferry service, making it easy to explore while reducing your carbon footprint.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Novotel Brisbane South Bank or similar

DRIVING TIME: 3 hrs // 178 mi



Day 18: Brisbane

Spend today exploring Brisbane at your own pace. Take a river cruise to see the city from the water or visit the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) and Queensland Museum. Animal lovers might enjoy a visit to Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary, where you can meet koalas and kangaroos up close.

The city has a thriving food scene, so it's also a great day to enjoy brunch, sip coffee at a local roastery, or enjoy a relaxed dinner at one of the many riverside restaurants. Brisbane blends urban culture with outdoor living in a uniquely Queensland way.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Novotel Brisbane South Bank or similar

Day 19: Brisbane to Byron Bay

Today's drive takes you across the border into New South Wales with a short and scenic journey to Byron Bay. This iconic surf town is famous for its beaches, bohemian vibe, and lighthouse walks. En route, you might stop in the Gold Coast for lunch or a beach break.

Arriving in Byron, explore the eclectic shops, artisan markets, and chilled-out cafes. The main beach is perfect for a dip before sunset, or you might head to Wategos Beach or The Pass for something quieter. Byron Bay is a place to slow down and enjoy the moment.

ACCOMMODATION: 5* Crystalbrook Byron or similar

DRIVING TIME: 1 hr 50 mins // 102 mi



Day 20: Byron Bay

Start your day with the Cape Byron Lighthouse Walk, a scenic trail leading to Australia's most easterly point. The views are stunning, especially at sunrise, and you might spot dolphins or even migrating whales offshore. Afterward, refuel with a beachside brunch and a browse through Byron's many independent boutiques.

The rest of the day is yours - join a surf lesson, explore nearby hinterland towns like Bangalow, or simply enjoy Byron's mellow rhythm. The food scene here is excellent, with everything from organic cafes to high-end dining. It's easy to see why so many fall in love with Byron.

ACCOMMODATION: 5* Crystalbrook Byron or similar

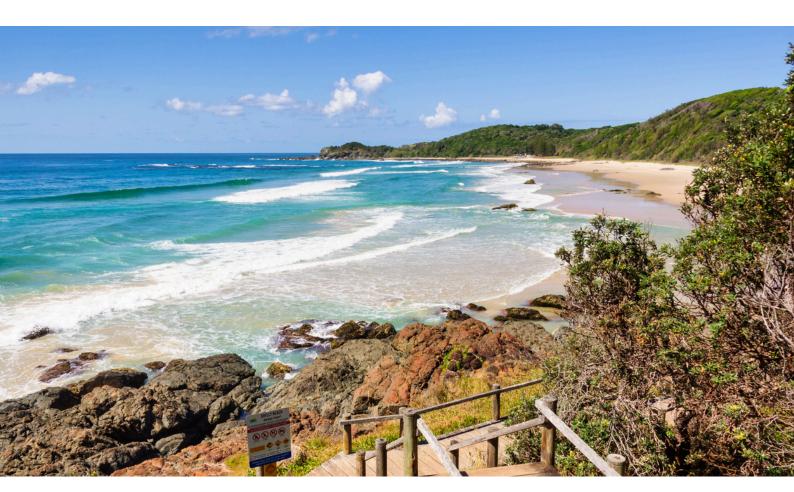
Day 21: Byron Bay to Port Macquarie

Continue south to Port Macquarie, a charming coastal town with historic roots and one of Australia's best koala hospitals. The drive can be broken up with scenic stops in Coffs Harbour or Yamba.

Once in Port Macquarie, you can enjoy a relaxing walk along the Breakwall, visit a local winery, or head to Town Beach for sunset. Don't miss the chance to visit the Koala Hospital, where rescued koalas are rehabilitated and cared for by passionate volunteers.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* Mantra The Observatory, Port Macquarie or similar

DRIVING TIME: 4 hrs // 239 mi



Day 22: Port Macquarie to Sydney

Today marks your final big drive to Sydney, Australia's most iconic city. En route, consider short breaks in Newcastle or the Hunter Valley if time allows. The road takes you from lush farmland into bustling metro life.

Arrive in Sydney by the afternoon and get your bearings with a sunset walk around Circular Quay, where the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge provide a truly memorable backdrop. After days of road tripping, arriving in the harbour city feels both exciting and rewarding.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* PARKROYAL Darling Harbour Sydney or similar DRIVING TIME: 4 hr 10 mins // 244 mi

Day 23: Sydney

Spend the day soaking up all that Sydney has to offer. Take a ferry ride to Manly Beach, walk the scenic Bondi to Coogee coastal path, or explore the historic laneways of The Rocks. Art lovers will enjoy the Art Gallery of NSW, while shoppers can head to Paddington Markets or Queen Victoria Building.

Wrap up your journey with a celebratory dinner at a waterfront restaurant - perhaps with views over the harbour.

ACCOMMODATION: 4* PARKROYAL Darling Harbour Sydney or similar



Day 24: Depart Sydney for the UK

Spend your last day in Sydney at leisure before heading to the airport to return your hire car and check in for your flight home.

From Melbourne's hidden laneways to the Great Barrier Reef and the golden beaches of New South Wales, you've just completed one of the world's most epic road trips.

Note: Depending on the flight you have booked, you will arrive back in the UK on the same day or the next day, after an overnight flight.

FAQs

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO TRAVEL?

The best time to travel is during spring (September–November) or autumn (March–May), when the weather is warm and pleasant along the east coast. These months avoid the peak summer heat and tropical wet season, making destinations like Palm Cove, the Whitsundays, and the Daintree Rainforest more enjoyable. Wildlife viewing is excellent, including humpback whales off Hervey Bay and koalas in Port Macquarie, while popular tourist spots are less crowded, allowing for a relaxed and immersive road-trip experience.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MY CAR HIRE?

Please note that to rent a car, the lead driver must have a credit card in their name; debit cards are only accepted in some cases. GPS is automatically included when available; otherwise, it can be confirmed and paid for locally. We will advise at the time of booking whether GPS is included.

An excess may apply to car rentals in Australia, and this will be confirmed when you book. You may wish to include rental car excess cover in your travel insurance policy, or speak to one of our team about an additional policy that can be added to your holiday.

A one-way fee will apply to the car rentals for this itinerary. The exact amount will be confirmed prior to booking and is payable locally.

WILL I BE PROVIDED WITH MAPS?

Your car hire will have a GPS included where possible so you can find your way; physical driving instructions are not included, to give you the flexibility to stop and change route at any time.

DO I NEED A VISA?

British passport holders require an eTA to enter Australia by air. Please visit the FCDO website for more information.

DO I NEED ANY VACCINATIONS?

Please note that there are no mandatory vaccinations required to enter Australia. However, we recommend consulting your GP or a travel health clinic before you travel to ensure your routine vaccinations are up to date and to receive any personalised health advice.

