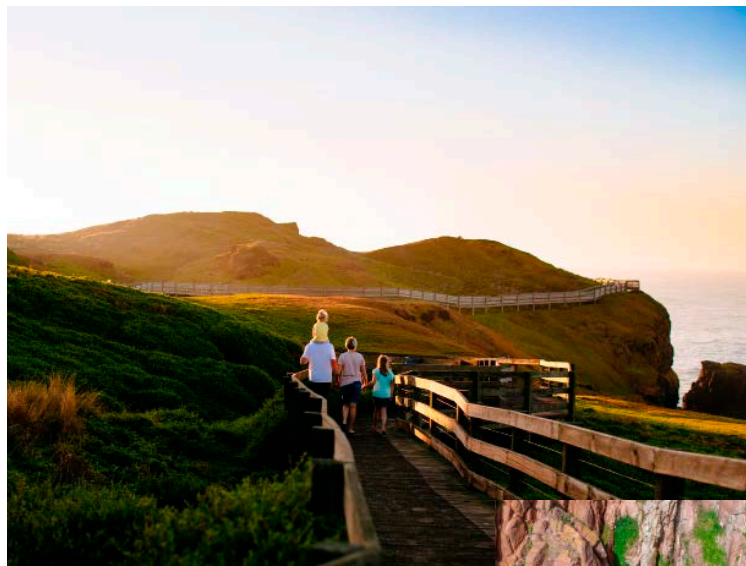




Clockwise from left: The Nobbies Walk along the clifftop boardwalk offers stunning views; penguins on parade; explore the scenery on a Cape Cruise.



Spotlight on Phillip Island

Escape to Victoria's island playground, where unique wildlife and spectacular scenery come together for a getaway the whole family will enjoy.



up-close, while tranquil Churchill Island is a treat for history buffs and animal lovers alike, with its colonial cottages, sheep-shearing and working-dog demonstrations, and plenty of farm animals to pat.

On a warm Saturday evening, the feel-good mood is magical in the island's main town

of Cowes, with a guitarist entertaining the crowd from outside Hotel Phillip Island. For a killer view (and cracking calamari) overlooking Western Port Bay, you can't go past Beach HQ on the esplanade, but takeaway pizza on a foreshore picnic table works, too. Cap off the night with an ice-cream from Isola Gelato and everyone's happy.

On the last day, on a Cape Woolamai

Cruise, we see sheer pink granite cliffs and spot a seal sunning itself, but the weekend highlight is still the Penguin Parade. The Hemsworth brothers may have grown up here, but the cutest Phillip Island natives have feathers and webbed feet. **AWW**
Words by Susan Horsburgh.

Stay and play

* Ideal for families, the Phillip Island Nature Resort has comfortable self-contained villas nestled amid bushland, with swimming pools, tennis courts, a cafe and bar, and eight kilometres of walking tracks.

* Learn to 'hang ten' at beginner-friendly Smiths Beach with local big-wave legend Sandy Ryan, who runs the surf school at Island Surfboards.

As we watch from the viewing platform, hundreds of Phillip Island's most famous residents waddle out of the waves after sunset on Summerland Beach. Flippers out and noggins down, the fairy penguins head for the dunes and the squawking starts – what I assume is alarmingly vocal avian lovemaking. I mention their “orgasmic yelps” and my 16-year-old is appalled: “I am done with you,” she declares – and so begins our blissful family weekend away.

In fact, we have a wonderful three days, thanks largely to the food and wildlife of this holiday

haven, just 90 minutes' drive from Melbourne. To fuel up for a day swimming and bushwalking, you can't beat the unforgettable breakfasts among the hens at Wild Food Farm, which specialises in native Australian herbs, fruits and berries. At San Remo Fisherman's Co-op, where seafood is served just hours off the boat, we not only have the best fried flake of our lives, we get to watch the daily noon feeding of the pelicans by the pier.

We “aww” our way around the treetop boardwalks at the Koala Conservation Reserve, marvelling at the marsupials