

Hiking Great Ocean Road to the 12 Apostles in Victoria

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THINKING about the Great Ocean Road walk and seeing Victoria's famed 12 Apostles really has me excited.

I'm at Melbourne airport waiting to be picked up by Gavin Ronan, owner-operator of Bothfeet Australia walking tours. It's a three-hour drive to Bothfeet Lodge, which was built about four years ago.

The first person I meet at the lodge is Ha - chef, cleaner, waiter and everything else. He's the most important person for guests to get to know.

No time to rest though. In less than an hour Gavin and I are back in the van with Ha taking us to the drop-off point for the first leg of my three days of walking - from Castle Cove to Joanna Beach then on to the lodge. It's an enjoyable 11km hike along the coastline where we pass a group of school kids on a camp eating lunch consisting of tins of baked beans and other snacks.

Luckily for me Ha has prepared a chicken rice salad and on the way we catch up with the lodge's other two guests, Debbie and Victoria, who are on the beach having their lunch.

The evening meal is something special and it's served in the lodge's main community room - fully glassed on three sides, it lets the outside inside and you feel as if you can almost touch the flora and fauna.

A few wines after dinner and some good conversation is a perfect way to end the day and an early night is needed to prepare for tomorrow's 17km walk.

On the way back to my lodge I'm struck with how quiet it is, and wonder if I will be able to sleep without the usual noise of urban living.



A king room at Bothfeet Lodge. Picture: Supplied

I shouldn't have worried.

Day two of my walking adventure starts with breakfast - poached eggs and bacon - while Debbie and Victoria have porridge and toast respectively as Gavin gives us a weather report and what to expect on the trail for the day. After a final equipment check (making sure lunch is in our backpacks) it's into the Bothfeet van so Ha can drive us to our starting point for today's walk from Moonlight Head to Princetown.

This part of the walk provides a contrast between rainforests and coastal trails with stunning views, especially from The Gables Lookout, one of Australia's highest clifftop lookouts. We pass Wreck Beach and Devil's Kitchen campsite before having prawn and fresh salmon salad for lunch.

The landscape changes from sandstone to limestone during the afternoon as we spy the 12 Apostles in the distance shimmering in the afternoon sun. We make our descent to the Gellibrand River at Princetown where our transport is waiting to take us back to the lodge for a well-deserved foot spa.

After dinner, the two girls, Gavin and myself sit down for a relaxing chat about life, and wonder if the city folk know what they're missing out on not being here.

My third and final day starts with breakfast but then it's back to my cabin to pack as once we leave for the last leg of our walk we won't be coming back to the lodge.

Today's walk starts from where we left off yesterday with our final destination being the 12 Apostles.



Towards the 12 Apostles Picture: Supplied

With every step the Apostles get closer and the anticipation makes the heartbeat quicken, walking in silence for the last couple of kilometres. It's truly inspiring. I'm lost for words.

The 12 Apostles visitor centre marks the end of our 8km walk but not the end of my adventure, a helicopter ride awaits for every person who takes the guided walk option, and I can't wait to get up there and have a bird's-eye view of the coastline I have traversed over the past three days.

The flight lasts 10 minutes and gives a whole new aspect of the erosion that has formed the Apostles and coastline, which, according to the experts, will continue to erode for another 600 years.

GO2 - 12 APOSTLES

[Bothfeet Walks](#) and 12 Apostles helicopters are highly endorsed by T-QUAL, which is the Australian Government's national symbol of tourism quality. Tour operators who display the T-QUAL tick have undergone rigorous assessment to ensure they are providing a quality experience.

Currently, about 10,000 operators around Australia are T-QUAL endorsed.

Why cashed-up tourists love Australia

Bothfeet Walks offers a choice of three, four or seven-day guided or self-guided walks.

The four-day guided walk starts from \$1995 and includes transfers from Melbourne.

[Bothfeet Lodge](#) is a three-hour drive from Melbourne via the Princes Highway and Colac or a 3½-hour drive from Melbourne via the Great Ocean Road in the valley known as Johanna.

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The Great Ocean Walk. Picture: Supplied