

French Island National Park

Visitor Guide



Although close to Melbourne, French Island National Park is a mystery to many people due to its isolated location in Western Port. As a result, the park features some fantastically underrated opportunities for walking and cycling among a diverse landscape of mangroves, saltmarsh, heaths and open woodlands.



Getting there

French Island National Park is accessible by ferry from Stony Point and Cowes.

Stony Point is located 80km south-east from Melbourne CBD. Take the Western Port Ferries passenger ferry from Stony Point across to French Island. The trip takes 10 to 12 minutes and delivers you to Tankerton Jetty on French Island.

Tickets are available for purchase on the ferry or online. Check www.westernportferries.com.au or phone 03 5257 4565 for the ferry timetable and weather conditions. Ferry services can be cancelled at very short notice.

The only roads in the park open to vehicles are Link Road, Clump Road and Causeway Road (south of the junction with Link Road). Seasonal road closures apply. Check online at www.parks.vic.gov.au or phone 13 1963.

Things to see and do

French Island National Park has much to offer including unspoiled natural bushland and walking along beaches where your only companions are hundreds of wading birds.

Experience wonderful walks and bike rides through a range of habitats. There are day, half day and shorter walks and rides starting at Tankerton Foreshore Reserve.

Camping

Camping is available at Fairhaven Campsite located 5km from the Tankerton Jetty on the west coast foreshore. Fairhaven Campsite offers 20 individual sites for up to 2 people per site, with the opportunity to stay in an idyllic natural setting.

Only basic toilet facilities and water supplies (purify or boil first) are provided and due to the highly combustible vegetation of the island, no open fires are permitted at any time. A portable gas stove, or similar, is essential. The General Store is approximately 7.5km away.

Campsites are free but must be booked online at www.parkstay.vic.gov.au or phone 13 1963.

Walking

Walking tracks range from whole day and half day to shorter options and start from the Tankerton Foreshore Reserve. It is advisable to wear long pants or gaiters and sturdy walking boots.



General Store – 3km, 1 hour one way

Walk east from Tankerton Jetty through the small island township, past the French Island community hall and CFA station to the

General Store. Keep an eye out for a koala or local birdlife including Purple Moorhen, Swamp Harriers or Cape Barren Geese.



Old Coast Road Track – 5km, 1.5 hours one way

Take this track to Fairhaven Campsite. Starting at Tankerton Jetty, head north on this unsealed gently undulating sandy track. Two lookouts provide views across saltmarsh and Western Port to Hastings.

Walk through heathland and messmate heathy woodland. Enjoy wildflowers in spring and look for the White-bellied Sea Eagle.



West Coast Wetlands Walking Track – 9.6km, 3.2 hours return

Starting at Fairhaven Campsite, head east along Pinnacles Track. Points of interest include The Pinnacles Lookout, wildflowers including orchids, birdlife and seasonal Deuchers, Heifer, Little Heifer, Pobblebonk and Punt Swamps.

The topography is mainly flat and gently undulating and at 60m above sea level, the Pinnacles offers expansive views of Phillip Island, Western Port and the west coast wetlands of the park.



Fairhaven Northern Beach Walk – 4km, 2 hours return

View shorebirds and migratory waders, saltmarsh and Fairhaven Beach along this walk which starts at Fairhaven Campsite.

Shorebirds nest during spring and summer and roost at high tide throughout the year. Only walk Fairhaven Beach at low tide to ensure disturbance of birds is minimised and avoid trampling on eggs.

Cycling

Due to the often sandy and wet conditions encountered, it is highly advisable that you use a mountain bike. A repair kit is also essential.



West Coast Wetlands Ride – 9.6km, 2 hours return

Starting at Fairhaven Campsite, head east along Pinnacles Track. Points of interest include The Pinnacles Lookout, wildflowers including orchids, birdlife and seasonal Deuchers, Heifer, Little Heifer, Pobblebonk and Punt Swamps. The topography is mainly flat and gently undulating and at 60m above sea level, the Pinnacles offers the visitor expansive views of Phillip Island, Western Port and the west coast wetlands of the park.



Redbill Manna Gum Woodland Ride – 8km, 2.5 hours one way

Starting at Fairhaven Campsite, ride north on Coast Road and turn left at the intersection. View koalas, saltmarsh, Redbill Creek and shorebirds.



Redbill Road, Clump Lagoon – 21km, 4 hours return

From Tankerton Jetty, ride north on Old Coast Road Track and turn right at Redbill Road. Follow the circuit turning right at Clump Road, Tankerton Road and Old Coast Road Track.

Points of interest along the ride include Pinnacles Lookout, Clump Lagoon, seasonal waterbirds and orchids.



Link Road, Mount Wellington – 27km, 5.5 hours return

From Tankerton Jetty, ride north on Old Coast Road Track and turn right at Redbill Road. Follow the circuit turning right at Clump Road, left at Link Road, right at Mt Wellington Road, right at Tankerton Road and right at Old Coast Road Track.

Points of interest include wildflowers including orchids (along Link Road), birds of prey and King Quail habitat.



Bluegums – 10km, 1.8 hours one way

From Tankerton Jetty, Bluegums can be accessed via Tankerton Road, Mount Wellington Road and Saltmine Point Road.

Bluegums is located in the south-east corner of French Island and offers expansive views to the south and east, with native grasslands surrounded by forest. Please allow a full day when visiting.



Gartsides – 24km, 4.5 hours one way

From Tankerton Jetty, Gartsides can be accessed via Tankerton Road, Mt Wellington Road, Mcleod Road and Causeway Road. Gartsides features an old farming site and an old salt works from circa 1890s. Please allow a full day when visiting.

Wildlife viewing

The vegetation at French Island National Park is rich and diverse, containing over 580 indigenous plant species, including more than 100 native orchid species, several of which are endemic to French Island.

The park's wetlands are extensive and diverse, ranging from seasonal to permanent open water and providing habitat for an array of flora and fauna.

Over 230 bird species have been recorded including rare birds such as the White-Bellied Sea-Eagle, King Quail and the Orange-Bellied Parrot, as well as 33 species of waders which forage along the coast at low tide. The island supports a large population of Long-nosed

Potaroo, as well as containing the most significant population of koalas in Victoria.

Koalas were introduced to French Island in the 1880s and by the 1920s overbrowsing was occurring and in 1923 the first koala transfers off the island took place. The population is free of the disease Chlamydia and was a major source of koalas for recolonising areas of the mainland. A sustainable koala population is now being managed using fertility control.

French Island Marine National Park

The French Island Marine National Park complements French Island National Park by protecting extensive sea grass beds, mangroves and mud flats that provide habitat for fish, waterbirds and invertebrates. For things to see and do check the French Island Marine National Park Visitor Guide.

Caring for the park

Help us look after your park by following these guidelines:

- Please take your rubbish home for recycling or disposal.
- Firearms and other weapons may not be carried or used in the national park.
- All native plants, animals, rocks and soil are protected and must not be disturbed.
- Dogs and other domestic animals are not permitted in the national park.
- No fires may be lit at anytime.
- Portable gas stoves are only permitted in the Fairhaven Campsite.

Be prepared and stay safe

French Island National Park is in the Central fire district. Bushfire safety is a personal responsibility. Anyone entering parks and forests during the bushfire season needs to stay aware of forecast weather conditions. Check the Fire Danger Rating and for days of Total Fire Ban at www.emergency.vic.gov.au, on the VicEmergency smartphone app or call the VicEmergency Hotline on 1800 226 226. No fires may be lit on Total Fire Ban days.

On Code Red Fire Danger Rating days this park will be closed for public safety. Closure signs may be erected but do not expect an official warning. Check the latest conditions at www.parks.vic.gov.au or by calling 13 1963.

For emergency assistance call Triple Zero (000). If there is a green emergency marker sign near you, read the information on the marker to the operator.

Please bring drinking water, food and insect repellent, although limited supplies are available at the French Island General Store.