

Itinerary: McLaren Vale

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE AMAZED, SOAK UP THE SUN, TASTE AWARD WINNING WINES, SAVOUR DELICIOUS LOCAL FARE, GET CLOSE TO NATURE, STAY AT A PEACEFUL RETREAT AND HAVE OFF-THE-BEATEN TRACK ADVENTURES? IT ALL AWAITS YOU IN MCLAREN VALE!

Only 45 minutes south of Adelaide in South Australia, McLaren Vale is home to world-class wines and culinary experiences, as well as pristine natural attractions and unparalleled tourism offerings including unique and beautiful accommodation choices.

DAY ONE

With no two venues more than 15 minutes' drive apart (and most 5 minutes apart), visiting all the amazing venues on offer is easy if self-driving or contact one of the many friendly tour operators in the region to escort you.

Arrive in McLaren Vale on Friday morning and make your first stop the main street. The charming, historic town of McLaren Vale has a country feel with many cosmopolitan amenities. The main street is easily walkable, largely tree lined, and features lots of open, green spaces to wander through.

Friendly locals will WELCOME you at the variety of offerings in the shopping precinct including clothing, footwear, gift shops, beauty therapies, an award-winning butcher and baker, delicious chocolate and confectionery, art galleries, regional fare and excellent coffee at a variety of cafés and restaurants.

Next stop: the iconic Cube at d'Arenberg. BE AMAZED by this architectural masterpiece – a five level multi-purpose space carefully designed to entice and excite the senses, including features such as a wine sensory room, a virtual fermenter, a 360 degree video room, and many other tactile experiences. Visitors are encouraged to explore the Alternate Realities Museum, located on the ground floor, and view the many art installations on display. End your visit on the top floor by tasting the premium wines on offer while looking at the superb landscape that unfolds before you.

SOAK UP THE SUN AND ENJOY THE SEAFOOD over lunch at the Star of Greece Restaurant. From its unrivalled cliff-top position, the Star offers a mesmerising panorama of Port Willunga Beach with a focus on fresh, regional produce accompanied by an excellent wine list. Don't be fooled by the name, which refers to a nearby shipwreck, the cuisine is modern Australian and fabulous.

In the afternoon, GET CLOSER TO NATURE at the award-winning organic and biodynamic winery, Gemtree. Hear first-hand of their amazing sustainability credentials. Enjoy a perfect combination of nature and wine with the Wine and Wander experience. Discover the flora, fauna and wildlife of Gemtree along the Gemtree Ecotrail. Learn about biodynamic grape growing and wine making at the Biodynamic Hut, then enjoy a tutored tasting of Gemtree's wines.

Before dinner, check-in at your distinctive guest house and refresh at your PEACEFUL RETREAT at The Vineyard. This is the ultimate wine country escape – stylish, private, unique, well-appointed, in a vineyard setting.

SAVOUR & SIP at the Salopian Inn – a highly regarded regional restaurant with an atmospheric, romantic setting and delightful staff. Fresh, local, modern Australian fare with an exceptional wine cellar. Start your meal with a gin from a selection of over 230 – what more could you want?!

After dinner, ENJOY THE LAID BACK VIBES at Big Easy Radio for fun times on a Friday night. A California inspired cellar door space and lush garden – a favourite local hang-out that offers wine, cocktails and great tunes to wind up your week.

With a full belly and happy heart having met many new friends throughout the day, return to The Vineyard for a beautiful night's slumber.

DAY TWO

Wake up at your leisure and enjoy a continental breakfast at the accommodation while taking in the spectacular views.

Sample the BEST PRODUCE IN THE REGION on Saturday morning at the Willunga Farmers Market which has been showcasing the region's best, fresh produce for more than 19 years. Held every Saturday from 8am to 12pm, the market contains 60-plus artisan producer stalls selling everything from alpaca pastrami to cold-pressed honey to gin-flavoured cheese. Leave room for top-notch coffee and delicious pastries.

To work off the calories, undertake a COASTAL ADVENTURE in Spring or Summer with a stand-up paddle board lesson at Port Willunga Beach. Experience the crystal clear, aquamarine ocean and take in the coastal scenery while slowing gliding across the water.

Next head to THE PLACE TO BE for lunch – Chalk Hill Collective – Chalk Hill Wines x Never Never Distilling Co. x Cucina di Strada. Premium wine meets the world's best gin meets delectable Italian street food! All under one roof with an expansive lawn to wander around and take in the 360 degree views of the town and region.

After lunch enjoy the FAMED GRENACHE made at Yangarra Estate Vineyard. McLaren Vale makes some of the best Grenache in the world. Yangarra is home to James Halliday's Wine and Winemaker of the Year. Visit the intimate cellar door set on the idyllic estate and let the friendly and knowledgeable staff host you while you sit, relax and discover the wines on offer.

Revitalise at your retreat before hitting the Main Road in McLaren Vale and the rejuvenated McLaren Vale Hotel – a GASTRO PUB run by a top chef, turning out scrumptious, gourmet pub fare every night of the week.

Given the two days you've had, retire to your lodgings to sweetly dream about moving to McLaren Vale!

DAY THREE

Have a sleep-in and enjoy breakfast at your leisure.

Then get moving with a BIKE RIDE & VINES – pick-up a push bike from the Hither & Yon cellar door and ride along the Shiraz Trail - once a busy corridor for steam trains, the seven-kilometre stretch of disused rail line between Willunga and McLaren Vale has since been repurposed as a cycle path. It offers a gloriously scenic (and welcomingly flat) route through

the vineyards. Complete your journey with a Hither & Yon wine tasting and picnic in the vineyard where the grapes are grown – a true vine to glass experience!

Next try with SOMETHING DIFFERENT at the Slowhey School of Cheese – a project founded on the goals of education and celebration of sustainable cheesemaking and a slower way of living. Laugh, learn and make mozzarella (or camembert or haloumi)!!!

Revive and recharge at your guest house before sampling the delightful, modern ITALIAN FARE at Serafino Restaurant – set in contemporary, warm and stylish surrounds, the superb dining experience lets the natural flavours of each course resonate – no over complicating the dishes here.

DAY FOUR

Start your day by taking in the LANDSCAPE & WILDLIFE with a walk or hike in the Onkaparinga River National Park. Diverse hiking trails take you to cliff tops with magnificent views, or down to permanent rock pools teeming with life. Walks range from short and easy for up to one hour to harder hikes of up to four hours. You'll see rugged ridge tops and the narrow river valley of the spectacular Onkaparinga Gorge. You'll be among native wildlife such as birds, koalas, kangaroos and possums - you may even spot an echidna.

Head to Wirra Wirra next to ENJOY THE STORIES from the friendly and fun-loving team who work there. The ironstone cellars of Wirra Wirra house a history rich in mischief, adventure and dedication to creating great wines. Partake in a behind-the-scenes tour of the cellar, taste museum wines and then enjoy a casual platter-style lunch on the lawns.

Walk across the road (literally) to THE NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK at 148 McMurtrie Road – a collaborative cellar door of three of the best boutique wine brand in the region – Lino Ramble, Sherrah and Bondar. Try the interesting wine styles and varieties, hear the winemakers stories direct, while soaking up the lovely atmosphere of the historic cottage and garden.

Next stop in at Goodieson – a family-owned craft brewery for a CLEANSING ALE where every beer is brewed to the highest quality. Set in a gorgeous tree-lined location the brewery is a relaxed space with a serene terrace that looks out past a creek, over vineyards and across a valley to the Mt Lofty Ranges, birds fill the air and you might even spot a kangaroo or two.

Return to the main street of McLaren Vale before you depart to take a stroll, grab a coffee and stock up on mementos of your trip – whether it be delicious locally made chocolate or a unique piece of art – even the most discerning buyers will find something lovely to remind them of their Vale tales.

DEPART MCLAREN VALE

McLaren Vale's collaborative and generous nature, unique combination of world-class wines and produce - both on the farm and on the plate - with a coastal lifestyle, ensures that the region truly offers a unique, welcoming experience – you will want to return, again and again...

With thanks to travel writer, Rob McFarland, for his beautiful descriptions of the time he spent at The Star of Greece, Willunga Farmers Market and on the Shiraz Trail.