



MURRAY MAGIC

Consider your next food and wine getaway in Victoria's Mildura, on the banks of the Murray River. This historic regional town will make you want to stay a while.

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WITH A TOUCH of nostalgia and dash of innovation, Mildura will charm you with its laidback vibe and warm welcome. Fly or drive to Victoria's northwestern border with New South Wales, settle into life on the banks of the Murray River, and get ready to meet some locals. The abundance of vineyards, orchards and market gardens provides unlimited opportunities to sample the local fare. If you're after something more active, the walking paths along the river are a great way to work up to the next foodie delight, and there are plenty of water sports if you prefer to dive right in. The European settlement of Mildura grew up around a project to bring irrigation to the region in the late 19th century. Together with the Chaffey brothers of Canada, the Victorian government formed the Mildura Irrigation Company, which, when combined with the area's Mediterranean climate, created a foundation for much of the region's industry. Today, Mildura contributes substantially to the nation's wine production, in addition to other crops including citrus, dried and table grapes, almonds and olives, to name a few. A quick stroll around Mildura leaves you in no doubt as to the importance of this industry, with street names such as Lemon, Lime, Avocado and Olive.

Start a day of exploring Mildura with breakfast on Tenth Street at Nash Lane Coffee Co. before a short drive to Orange World, which celebrates the citrus fruit, and the chance to be entertained by Mario Mammone, his wife Maria and their team. Mario always has a joke or anecdote and that impressive skill of never forgetting a name. His enthusiasm for citrus fruits and avocados is infectious, and the tour, trundling over red earth in a little tractor-train, concludes with a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice – the ideal kick-starter for the day's activities. From here, drive south down Sturt Highway to Trentham Estate for a wine tasting and lunch on the banks of the Murray River. Its owners, the Murphy family, have been involved in the local



Trentham Estate enjoys a picture-perfect spot on the Murray River.

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industry since the early 1900s, and Trentham Estate is a picture-perfect spot. A generous wine tasting is on offer, including the Cellar Reserve collection. You can book lunch inside but, if weather permits, find a place outside at the water's edge, order a platter and a bottle of your favourite wine from the cellar door, and watch the river float by.

The Murray River, Mildura's aqueous heart, is the source of myriad water activities. For adrenaline junkies, it's worth checking out the Mildura 100 in April, the world's fastest water-skiing race and one of many events pulling crowds here each year. If a more relaxed state is preferred, a river cruise may be more your speed. Time stands still as you glide through the water and soak up the surrounding classic Australian landscape.

It's possible to delve into the region's deep connection with art and history at the Mildura Arts Centre. Take advantage of the riverfront walkways before heading to the stunning heritage building on Cureton Avenue. This landmark also includes a modern theatre, an impressive permanent art collection, the beautifully restored Rio Vista House and a regularly updated schedule of visiting artists and performers. If you're keen to reflect further on the region's history, drive over to Chateau Mildura to truly step back in time.

The site of the region's first vineyard, Chateau Mildura was established in 1888 by the founding fathers of Mildura, the Chaffey brothers. Lance Milne is caretaker and a font of knowledge when it comes to the estate. Let the decades roll back and take in the remarkable collection of memorabilia on display, including old leather bottles, plus glasses, decanters and books, as well as original presses, and the old sherry (as it was then called) vats that were in constant use during the early 20th century to satisfy Australia's thirst for fortified wines. In perfect counterpoint to the historical context of the winery, Lance also produces wines from some of the newer arrivals to Australian shores, including carmenere and saperavi. He is more than happy to pour them for you, too.

If alternative grape varieties pique your interest, schedule your visit with the Australian Alternative Varieties Wine Show. Held each November over four days, guests are invited to taste the entries and enjoy culinary delights paired with standout submissions, all culminating with the Awards Long Lunch.

To explore the wider region's styles, stop in at Sunraysia Cellar Door, which offers wines from more than 20 local producers all under the one roof, including Deakin Estate and Andrew Peace. A different thirst-quencher at award-winning Fossey's Ginporium & Distillery is also highly recommended, with the gin distilled onsite. Look out for Master Ginventor Steve Timmis, with his trademark bowler hat and a still named Stanly. As you might expect in citrus country, the gins at Fossey's often possess a citric signature, so expect to find bergamot, tangelo and kaffir lime making an appearance. Order a tasting paddle and sink into the leather couches to enjoy these dangerously drinkable gins.

Following a tasting, wander towards the river for dinner. Here, if you're after tasty pub grub and a cleansing ale, the Mildura Brewery has you covered. Next door is the iconic Stefano's restaurant, serving some of the best food for miles from renowned chef Stefano de Pieri. The trick here is to plan ahead and book in advance because this is the place to be. You won't want to miss out. ●



Top to bottom: Historic paddle steamer on the Murray River; Mildura markets; aerial view of the Mildura riverfront; Mildura Arts Centre; al fresco dining on the banks of the Murray at Trentham Estate.