



# TAKE THE BAIT

A town called Fish Creek has to be ... well, if not fishy, then at least a bit different.

Story: Jane Canaway

**F**ish Creek is to Gippsland what Brunswick is to Melbourne: colourful, creative, eclectic and happy to be a bit different.

Over the past decade, a series of pioneering artisans have made the town home, many attracted by the picture-perfect landscapes of rolling hills, morning mists and breathtaking beaches.

Scattered around the town is whimsical public art: fish-mosaic benches and bus stops and a corrugated fence painted as a coral reef. Combined with many colourful shops, it feels like the town is smiling.

Arriving by road from Wonthaggi or Meeniyan, you are greeted at the town's main crossroads by two mermaids proclaiming One Fish Furnishings, and a cheerful display of ducks, wickerwork and timber goodies that demands a browse.

Drive up from Waratah Bay or the Prom and you are met by a row of giant timber sculptures standing guard outside the

Celia Rosser Gallery and Banksia Cafe. Botanic artist Celia, famed for her remarkably detailed watercolours of Australia's banksia plants painstakingly painted over 25 years for Monash University, shows much of her own work as well as complementary nature-inspired work by other local artists. She is usually on hand to talk visitors around the gallery.

Celia grew up nearby but remarks on the area's proliferation of artists: are they drawn to a creative community or does the scenery inspire art?

The town was first settled in 1886 and a railway followed in 1892, with passengers and freight, including oil from the Bass Strait wells via the Barry Beach rail line.

Dairy cattle graze the hills, but the butter factory is closed. So, too, is the rail line past Leongatha; in its place is a well-maintained bike, walking and riding trail, bringing tourists who love slow travel.

A welcoming sight for travellers is the

joyfully blue Flying Cow Cafe, which has simple, comforting fare – big breakfasts, creative cakes (including gluten-free options), hot soups and light lunches.

Local produce is also on the menu at Cafe K, and at the Fishy Pub (it's the one with the big fish on the roof); aka the Fish Creek Hotel, it also has an excellent bottle shop featuring a good range from local wineries, of which Waratah Hills, Windy Ridge and Basia Mille are notable.

While weekends and summer holidays are when Fish Creek bustles, its friendly nature shows through in the way the cafes and galleries plan days off around each other, ensuring off-peak visitors will always find something open.

There are three galleries in this town of fewer than 700 folk.

As well as Celia Rosser's, there's Ride The Wild Goat, where furniture-maker-turned-artist Andrew McPherson displays a fascinating selection of aesthetic

and functional pieces wrought from salvaged and recycled farm junk: old cars and fridges, machinery parts, barbed wire and hand-worn timber. Gecko Studio Gallery has an eclectic mix of art materials, gifts, cards, ceramics, jewellery, retro-inspired knick-knacks, and several walls displaying the latest exhibition. Owner-artists Kerry Spokes and Michael Lester also run workshops.

Next door is a bibliophile's delight, Fish Tales bookshop, taken over by city-escaping architects Bridget Crowe and Michael Chang. Slowly converting its shelves to their tastes, it has a gorgeous collection of vintage books on show, as much for their cover art as the stories, plus adventure, travel and design titles.

Two hours from Melbourne, 30 minutes from Inverloch and 10 minutes from Foster, Fish Creek is a top lunch stop en route to the Prom (40km away) or a day trip for Bass Coast holiday-makers. ■

## MORE

Fish Creek doesn't rate its own website yet – Google the places mentioned and most will appear. For regional touring information, go to [www.promcountry.com.au](http://www.promcountry.com.au).

### RACV CAN HELP

RACV shops have maps and touring guides for all parts of Victoria – see the shops list on page 90. RACV Inverloch Resort is a good base for visiting Fish Creek and the wider region. Check the great member rates at [racv.com.au/resorts](http://racv.com.au/resorts).

PHOTOS | The many facets of Fish Creek include the occasional human, such as artist Andrew McPherson.

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