

TRAVEL / WILLIAMSTOWN

**FIVE FUN THINGS TO DO:** 1. Hire a bike and go for a ride. 2. Enjoy fish and chips on the foreshore. 3. Check out the yachts and boats. 4. Go shopping along Ferguson Street. 5. Catch the ferry.



ABOVE: The Royal Yacht Club of Victoria was founded in May, 1853 and is one of Australia's oldest.

Travel notes

STAY:

- Captains Retreat, 2 Ferguson Street, Williamstown. Phone (03) 9397 0352, visit [captainsretreat.com.au](http://captainsretreat.com.au)
- Cost From \$165 a night which includes full cooked breakfast and help yourself to coffee, tea and cake.

GETTING THERE

- Williamstown is about 11km south-west of Melbourne's CBD and about 20 minutes by train from Flinders Street Station.



When it comes to rich maritime history – and a lively cafe scene – you can't go past one of Melbourne's oldest and prettiest precincts, writes **SUE WALLACE**.

**T**HERE'S something quite grand about Williamstown, known as "Willy" for short by the locals. The quaint seaside suburb is just a stone's throw away from the city of Melbourne, just over the Westgate Bridge or by ferry from St Kilda or Southgate.

As well as a rich maritime history and many historic buildings, in the past decade Williamstown has enjoyed a revival and has become a trendy short break getaway destination – even for Melbournians.

These days Williamstown is known for its bustling cafes, fine restaurants and coffee bars offering footpath dining and waterfront views. You will find everything from Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Italian, Mediterranean and pub bistro cuisine to cheap eats or just grab some fish and chips and head to the waterfront.

Boats, yachts and dinghies decorate the shoreline and ships sail through the estuary en route to the port of Melbourne.

There is a strong maritime feel to Williamstown, created by both the presence of the Williamstown Light-house and the many yachts floating on Hobsons Bay.

The Williamstown Sailing Club, Royal Yacht Club of Victoria, Hobson's Bay Yacht Club, and Royal Victorian Motor Yacht Club are all located on Nelson Place.

Williamstown has always been considered a suburb with the greatest hotels and churches and it has been declared a heritage area, preserving the beautiful buildings and the memories.

It seems fitting to stay the night at the historic Captains Retreat, steeped in maritime history and full of charm.

The stately two-storey weatherboard was built as a single four-room cottage in 1862, then extended in 1880 for tugboat captain, James Dean and his family.

The beautifully refurbished Victorian home has had a chequered past and in a former life has been a brothel, nunnery, divided into flats and offices and the address of a wine merchant.

Today it is an impressive 4 1/2-star bed and breakfast, located one door from the water.

The exterior of the heritage-listed Captains Retreat, belies its size, it's a huge house with seven bedrooms, eight bathrooms, two kitchens and three living rooms.

It now offers six guest bedrooms with en suites, three with spas and two rooms with private lounges.

You soon discover that nothing is quite square in the entire house which is part of its charm with many rooms featuring odd angles and various nooks.

Upstairs our spacious Captains Spa suite, predominantly decorated in white with lots of natural light, has a comfortable lounge area, small balcony overlooking Ferguson Street and a bay window reading nook.

The room was once the home of Australian novelist, playwright, poet and short-story writer Harold (Hal) Porter, whose first stories were published in 1942.

In his memoirs *The Paper Chase* he talks of his rented room, voicing his concern that new owners had offered him tea in a red plastic cup and to his horror, spoke of modernising the lodgings. Porter left the following week despite his love of the "brine saturated wind of the sea".

He also mentions his favourite painting, a copy of *Island of the Dead* by Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin, which he liked to look at the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning.

In a nod to Porter, the present owner Melissa Meek had the painting copied on the wall so guests can admire it from the comfortable queen size bed with an impressive antique mahogany bedhead.

A historic portrait of one of the early founders of Williamstown looks down from the wall in the lounge area, which has an antique leather-top desk, gas fire, comfortable couch and large mirror.

The new bathroom is large with a double shower, deep spa bath and slate tiles and as a tribute to the nautical history, there's a port hole window as well as stained glass cathedral-style windows.

From the balcony you can see lots of yachts moored



ABOVE: The garden, with circular paving made from recycled clinker bricks, includes cumquat, lemon and orange trees.

LEFT: One of the six spacious suites overlooks Williamstown's main hub, Ferguson Street.

BELOW: The stately Captains Retreat was built as a single four-room cottage in 1862 and is a stone's throw from the water.

# WILLING & ABLE

at the nearby Royal Yacht Club of Victoria, which was founded in May 1853 and is one of Australia's oldest yacht clubs.

In need of a coffee fix we head to the guest lounge room, which has a unique ceiling – it's the timber roof from an old Melbourne tram, that somehow seems quite at home in the north-facing room.

As a bonus we enjoy a slice of "Auntie Marie's banana cake" as we sink into comfortable chairs and flip through books as varied as *On The Road Again* that features classic cars and *Women Who Changed the World*.

A history of Williamstown reveals that its main street was originally intended to be the main street of Melbourne, hence all the historic buildings, but was then rethought.

The lounge opens onto a sunny patio filled with bright perfumed flowers where breakfast is often served. The downstairs garden is inviting with circular paving made from recycled clinker bricks, flowering trees and plants and cumquat, lemon and orange trees. Their fruit often ends up on the breakfast table.

I sink into a steamer chair and continue reading enjoying the sea breeze, watching the bird life – doves, black birds and finches – drop by the bird bath for a dip.

Next morning we head out for a brisk walk along the foreshore, watching dinghies, yachts and boats ride the waves, while serious joggers overtake us.

Keen cyclists are out in full force taking advantage of the last days of summer and there are a few dedicated anglers trying their luck.

We return to the Captains Retreat for our own hearty breakfast on the sunny patio. It's impossible to go past the Captain's Special – a cross between scrambled eggs

and an omelet with spring onions, spinach, tomato and bacon served on sourdough bread and the finishing touch – Auntie Marie's homemade relish. Appropriately my coffee arrives in a china mug with First Mate emblazoned on it.

Williamstown is definitely full of delightful surprises with its historic architecture and seaport charm. It is one of Melbourne's best kept secrets – but not for long.



SHORT STAYS

BRISBANE

## Easter treats

HOP into Brisbane for the four-day Easter break and the autumn school holidays with a range of deals at three of Accor's Brisbane properties, Novotel, Mercure and Ibis.

Novotel Brisbane has Easter rates from April 1 to 30 from \$199 including two children up to 16 years staying free in their parent's room and breakfast for two. A minimum two-night stay applies.

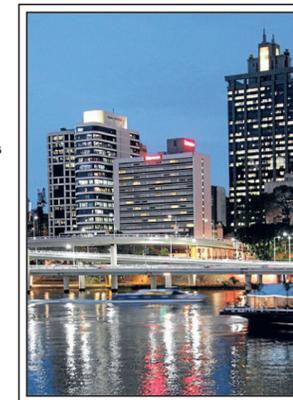
Over the Easter long weekend, Novotel Brisbane will be adding complimentary hot cross buns and Easter eggs to their breakfast buffet and will be serving a special Easter Sunday breakfast priced from \$28 per person including hot cross buns, Easter eggs and a sparkling wine buffet.

Mercure Brisbane Easter rates starting from \$174 including breakfast for two available from April 1 to 30. Minimum two-night stay applies. Ibis Brisbane is offering added value for those who choose to stay between April 15 and June 30. Guests can choose an extra service such as breakfast, car parking, or Wifi internet access from just \$1. Available from Good Friday until Easter Sunday, guests will receive complimentary hot cross buns and Easter eggs with their daily breakfast.

Novotel Brisbane: phone (07) 3309 3364, email H1749-Fb01@accor.com

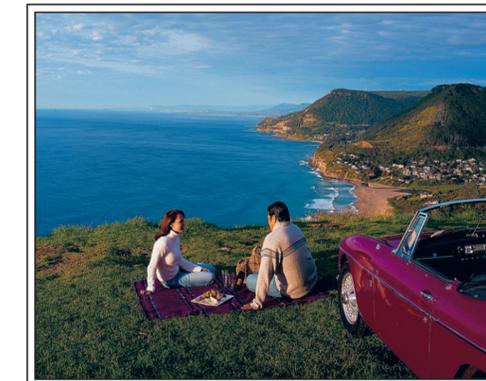
Mercure Brisbane: phone (07) 3237 2499, email: H1750-Fb01@accor.com

Ibis Brisbane: phone (07) 3237 2488 or email H1750-fb03@accor.com



Enjoy what's on offer at the Mercure Brisbane during the Easter break.

WOLLONGONG



Escape to Wollongong for some Easter fun for all the family.

## Family time

SPEND five fun-filled days in Wollongong over the extended Easter break this year and combine spectacular escarpment adventure with great wildlife, arts, fun parks and eating experiences.

Located 90 minutes from Sydney, the city's popular and centrally located Best Western Wollongong Hotel is offering an amazing family package.

Costing \$899 for two adults and two children and valid April 22 to 26, the three-day Easter package is loaded with value, including free breakfasts, undercover parking, DVD hire, ten pin bowling pass, Jamberoo Action Park pass, Illawarra Fly Family Pass, giant Easter egg and push toy for each child plus a dozen medium Easter eggs per person, red and white wine pack for mum and dad and \$50 pizza voucher.

For more details or to book the Best Western Hotel Easter Package phone (02) 4222 4000 or visit [bestwesternwollongong.com.au](http://bestwesternwollongong.com.au)