



Snorkel Victoria Top 10 Places to Visit This Summer

(MUSIC PLAYS)

JACK BREEDON:

G'day. My name is Jack, I'm a marine biologist and underwater photographer. I'm teaming up with Coastcare Victoria to bring you this video as part of the Summer by the Sea activity program.

Before we begin, just remember, be safe in the water. Make sure you know the weather forecast before entering the water. Things can change quickly. Stay sun smart. Water washes off sunscreen, so make sure you cover up, even if it's cloudy. Consider going with a licenced tour operator or an experienced buddy, especially if it's your first time. Be respectful. Nature has a right to exist and harassing wildlife is not appropriate.

In this video we acknowledge the Traditional Owners across Australia and their unique ability to care for the land and water we enjoy today. We honour Elders past, present and emerging and recognise the wealth of knowledge they possess.

And lastly and most importantly, never swim alone.

Right now I am on the Great Barrier Reef just north of Cairns, but today I want to share with you my top ten favourite snorkel sites from in and around my hometown, Melbourne. These sites, whether you're an experienced diver or a novice diver, they'll have you jumping in again and again all summer long.

Number ten, Barwon Bluff. Kicking things off we have the Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary. This site is full of caves and swim-throughs to explore, where all kinds of fish can be found. If you're lucky, on an early morning snorkel it is a great place to find Victoria's most adorable shark, the Varied carpetshark. This site would be higher on the list, but it is usually battered by large surf, so it can be tricky to get good conditions.

Coming in at number nine is Rye Pier. Rye is our first, but definitely not our last, entry from the Mornington Peninsula. With five hundred metres of structure to explore, there's plenty of marine life to see here. But the reason Rye makes it onto this list is that it's one of the best places in Victoria to see potbelly or short-headed seahorses. At least one of these creatures can be found on almost every pylon along the pier. So look closely when you're swimming around. The dive site is directly beneath the pier in amongst the pylons. Be careful swimming out from the structure here, as it is an active boating zone.

Number eight, Popes Eye. Built in the 1880's, this semi-circular structure is a half-finished fort that was intended to defend Melbourne. Today, it makes up part of the Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park and is covered in marine life, from lush kelp to schooling fish. Getting here does require a boat, but don't worry if you don't have one. Many tour operators from Queenscliff and the



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Mornington Peninsula bring people to the site on a daily basis. Recently, Popes Eye has also become home to some Australian fur seals who are more than happy to play with some curious snorkellers.

Number seven, Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary. Have you ever, ever felt like this? Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary will be a familiar sight for many people, even if they've never been there. It is because it is directly beneath the Split Point Lighthouse that was used in the popular Aussie kids TV show 'Round The Twist'. Just like the TV show suggests, there's something magical about this place. The limestone here, battered by southern swells, has been carved into giant caves and overhangs that are brimming with marine life, normally found at great depths. But this site is not for the faint hearted, and it is recommended for experienced swimmers only. Strong currents and large waves are an everyday part of this location. On the rare occasion conditions are good it is one of the best dives in Victoria, especially for those of us that love sharks. It is also my personal favourite dive site of all time.

Number six, Bunurong Marine Park. If Eagle Rock is too challenging, but you still want to explore Victoria's open coast, then the Bunurong Marine Park and Sanctuary is perfect for you. If you enter the water at the Cape Paterson patrolled beach, or for the more adventurous at Eagle's Nest Lookout, you'll find sheltered access where you can explore. There you'll find carpets of colourful algae, stingrays by the dozen, and fish. But this spot makes it onto our list because it is the number one place to see swell sharks, a small, harmless species of shark that gather here during winter to lay their eggs.

Number five, Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary. Ricketts Point is by far Melbourne's most popular spot for snorkelling. Located in the suburb of Beaumaris, it is a convenient site for those after school swims or public holiday outings. Despite its proximity to the city, Ricketts Point is overflowing with critters like the Port Jackson sharks hiding under ledges, eagle rays lounging on the sea grass beds and schools of zebrafish in the shallows. Best dived on an easterly wind, Ricketts Point is also a great place to start night snorkelling, where you can see squid, octopus and crustaceans that you wouldn't normally see during the day. Public showers, toilets and parking make this an easy site to access and a great place to take the kids.

Number four, Blairgowrie Marina. From Melbourne's most popular snorkel site to Melbourne's most popular scuba diving site, Blairgowrie Marina is suitable for people of all ages and abilities. Because of an extensive sea wall around the pier and marina, the structure acts like a massive scoop on an incoming tide, trapping any larvae that is drifting by. The resulting biodiversity of sponges, fish, octopus, and of course, adorable baby seahorses, is the reason divers keep coming back to this incredible site. Just counting nudibranchs, a type of colourful sea slug, over one hundred and seventy species have been recorded under the pier, and more are found every year. Blairgowrie is also the site of a world-famous marine migration. Every June the place is transformed by tens of thousands of spider crabs who come here to shed their old shells while trying not to be eaten by



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giant smooth rays. This annual event is a must see... If you can brave the twelve-degree water temperature, of course.

Number three, Wilsons Promontory. At the southernmost point of the Australian mainland is Victoria's oldest and largest marine national park. Snorkelling the waters off Wilsons Promontory feels like swimming on a remote, faraway island. Fish life here is in an abundance unlike anywhere else and the convergence of East and West currents means that there are twice as many species here. You can access the water from any of the prom's beautiful beaches and swim out along the rocky peninsulas to explore extensive kelp forests and enormous granite caves. Keep an eye out for schools of Australian salmon and Port Jackson sharks sleeping lazily amongst the kelp.

Number two, Jawbone Marine Sanctuary. Coming in at our number two spot, we have our closest entry to the city. Only ten kilometres from the CBD, Jawbone Marine Sanctuary is the place to go for any western suburb snorkellers. Initially protected by being at the pointy end of a firing range and later on as a marine park, fishing has been excluded from these waters longer than anywhere else on this list. Marine life flourishes here and exploring its reefs is like stepping back into the past of Port Phillip Bay. Shallow seagrass meadows are home to harmless banjo rays, and if you look closely enough, hundreds of tiny pipefish. You might even come across a shipwreck or two. South facing, the Jawbone is ideal for those hot northerly wind days and its protected bays are a great place for kids to learn to snorkel.

Number one, Flinders Pier. Taking out the top spot on this list is Flinders Pier. The site stands out for its clear waters, easy access, public facilities and proximity to the city. But the reason it takes out the number one spot today is because it is home to the largest known population of Victoria's marine emblem, the weedy sea dragon. These graceful relatives of the seahorse can be found here by the dozen. Look out for them amongst the seagrass or hunting crustaceans on sandy patches. Sea dragons are unique to southern Australia, found nowhere else in the world, making this a very special site. In winter, Flinders Pier also becomes a hive of activity for swell sharks and is also a breeding site for giant cuttlefish. These alien-like critters are some of the most intelligent creatures on earth. If you behave calmly and don't chase them away, they will inevitably become curious and approach you, leaving you with an animal encounter you will never forget. Flinders Pier combines all the things divers love about Victoria and the incredible bioregion known as the Great Southern Reef.

So that's the list. Hope you enjoyed it and hope some of it inspired you to jump in this summer, and maybe even I'll meet you underwater.