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OFFICIAL MAGAZINES FROM THE PGA OF AUSTRALIA

Mornington Glory

By Richard Asher

VICTORIA'S MORNINGTON PENINSULA SATISFIES GOLF CRAVINGS LIKE FEW OTHER PLACES IN AUSTRALIA. THE WINE, HOT BATHS AND MAZES ONLY ADD TO THE CHARM.



Escaping the bunker at Sorrento Golf Club

As is so often the case, my alarm clock showed no remorse in the face of this (censored) verbal affront. It wasn't the slightest bit put off by my rude retorts. Impassive as ever, it continued to insist I got out of bed. Like a magpie in springtime, it was all shrill noises and unprovoked aggression. The fact that it was completely dark outside, and colder than a Tiger Woods glare, seemed to concern it much less than it concerned me.

Lesson number one for travel writers visiting the depths of southern Victoria in

July: be ready for some early starts. The days are short at this time of year, and the Mornington Peninsula gets pitch dark after sunset. Winter days here can quite easily be sunny and delightful, but you need to grab every daylight hour you can.

SEEING THE LIGHT

I may not have been thinking quite such rational thoughts as I staggered to the car and plunged onto the dark country roads in the pre-dawn grey. There was a great deal to be done before my 11:30 tee-off time. First stop, the light-house at Cape Schanck.

It's an atmospheric place at the break of day, as you (and a posse of early-rising kangaroos) watch the glow spread over the moody Southern Ocean. The short walking paths around the lighthouse looked tempting, but they'd have to wait until the next visit. Time was already against me: I had a hot spring to visit!

Now, if the hilltop bath at the Peninsula Hot Springs doesn't get you in the mood for a day's golfing, there's simply no hope for you. From this remarkable hot pool you can see three of the Mornington's 15 courses – not to mention some gorgeous land crying out to host the 16th! Few



Cape Schanck Resort
is a joy to play



A view of the
clubhouse at Sorrento

places (except perhaps the nearby lookout at Arthur's Seat) can show you such a good lay of the land, and it's hard to think of a better way to enjoy a sunny winter's morning without the chill factor – until you get out, that is! The only problem is this: the lower you sink to get under the water, the more of the view you lose. Vexing stuff indeed.

And so to the golf. When you haven't swung your shank-happy swing in six months, playing at a course called Cape Schanck hardly puts the mind at ease.

Surprisingly shanking was almost non-existent on the day, despite it being a stinker of a round. There was some inevitability, though, about the fact that

my only true shank came right in front of the clubhouse at the ninth. I suppose a small part of me really wanted to shank it in style at Cape Schanck.

BETTER BY DESIGN

Shanks aside – the name has nothing to do with golf, and everything to do with Royal Navy admiral John Schanck – the course was a pleasure to play. In some ways, Robert Trent Jones Jr was kind to the casual amateur when he designed this layout. It's noticeable that although

the course is very much built on a hillside, Jones routed plenty of downhill holes without making you take on any scary uphills. If, like me, you tend to swing much better without an Everest in your face, that's a good thing.

Then there are the greens. Take number six. Not two tiers. Not three tiers. *Four* tiers, ladies and gents! It's a narrow target, but so long from back to front that you could be looking at a four-club difference depending on pin placement. It's a fantastic place for a putting contest if there's nobody behind you.

Enormous putting surfaces full of massive slopes abound throughout the course, as do some impressively vast bunkers. If all this makes it sound difficult, though, remember that it's not long. Hitting driver is rarely essential, and at least the big greens mean there's a lot of room for error on approaches. And if you do find yourself facing a long putt, it's likely to be a fun one!

'Take the sixth green. Not two tiers. Not three tiers. *Four* tiers, ladies and gents!'



**THREE
not to miss!**

1. Polperro Dolphin Swimming – take to the water with bottlenose dolphins. polperro.com.au
2. Royal Botanic Gardens – the gardens in Cranbourne contain 170,000 plants! rbg.vic.gov.au
3. Portsea Back Beach – great surfing waves, but not good for swimming, as Harold Holt discovered

‘If the hilltop bath at the Peninsula Hot Springs doesn’t get you in the mood for a day’s golfing, there’s simply no hope for you’

RACV Cape Schanck is right next door to the multi-course, aristocratic golf utopia that is The National, but it’s much easier to get a game and the place welcomes visitors. Not only that, but this being a resort as well as a golf course, there’s also some great accommodation.

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

I stayed in one of the Premium Ocean View rooms and my only regret is that I spent almost no time in it. The interior was nearly as vast as one of those Trent Jones greens; it delivered way more than its ordinary external look promised. The views over The National, the Bass Strait and the peninsula are unforgettable, and I can imagine spending a lot of time on the cosy balcony on a summer stay. I found the trick concave mirror in the bathroom a compelling feature, though I’m not sure if every room offers distorted upside-down reflections. Whatever, it certainly made toothbrushing more fun!

A day later I was up early again, this time to drive down the pointy end of the peninsula for a morning tee time at Sorrento Golf Club. Like its namesake in Italy, Sorrento is a fashionable tourist haunt – you can tell that much just by the shops in the main street. The view may be more Port Phillip Bay than Med, but this

whole area is very much a weekend hangout for the wealthy of Melbourne. No wonder, then, that Sorrento Golf Club is an upmarket and relatively old-school experience.

While some clubs in the area may be struggling due to the exceptional density of courses in these parts, Sorrento is busy with a big-money upgrade to a clubhouse that’s reminiscent of the Augusta style. This should be completed in about a year’s time, hopefully with the tasteful exterior styling still in place.

Sorrento is the last-but-one course on the Mornington (only Portsea lies closer to Point Nepean). Considering that the ocean is so desperately close on both sides, it’s remarkable that there’s no sea view throughout the 18 holes. But such is the lie of the land – there’s still every reason to like this course.

The fairways are generous in comparison to Cape Schanck, and probably most courses in Australia – never a bad thing for the travelling amateur. However, the trade-off is that you need a bit more length than you do at the RACV, and if the wind gets up then you’re really up against it. That’s particularly true on the par 3s, most of which play reasonably long even at the best of times.

GETTING MORE FROM THE MORNINGTON

■ The **Peninsula Hot Springs** offers a Bath and Golf special in conjunction with Moonah Links, with **\$110** covering 18 holes and a soaking session. A visit to the baths is also substantially cheaper before 10am and after 7pm. Regular bath passes are also sold at **RACV Cape Schanck**.

■ **RACV Cape Schanck** offers discounts and great golf deals to Royal Automobile Club of Victoria members. For more, visit racv.com.au/capeschanck

■ The **Mornington Peninsula Golf Tourism** Association runs an annual 54-hole tournament in May. It’s a great way to play three courses (the lineup changes each year) for good rates and enjoy some competition and fellowship. Visit golfmorningtonpeninsula.com for details.

■ For a friendly, down-to-earth experience, try **Rosebud Country Club**. We didn’t get a chance to try the club’s 36 holes, but the food in the dining room was absolutely excellent – the battered flake went down a treat!



TRY THESE
Wineries

1. Port Phillip Estate, 261 Red Hill Road, Red Hill, 03 5989 4444 – This is the Peninsula's showpiece

2. Stonier, 2 Thompsons Lane, Merricks, 03 5989 8300 – One of the area's most prolific producers

3. Red Hill Estate, 53 Shoreham Road, Red Hill, 03 5989 2838 – Great views, stunning wines



Relax at Peninsula Hot Springs and Day Spa



There's no shortage of cosy restaurants



The 18th at Cape Schanck Resort

FINISHING'S A BLOW

If the prevailing westerly wind picks up, as it did on our back nine, you can at least look forward to a generous finish! While 10 through 16 seemed to be an endless slog into the gale, we did get a breeze at our backs for the final two holes. Always a nice touch.

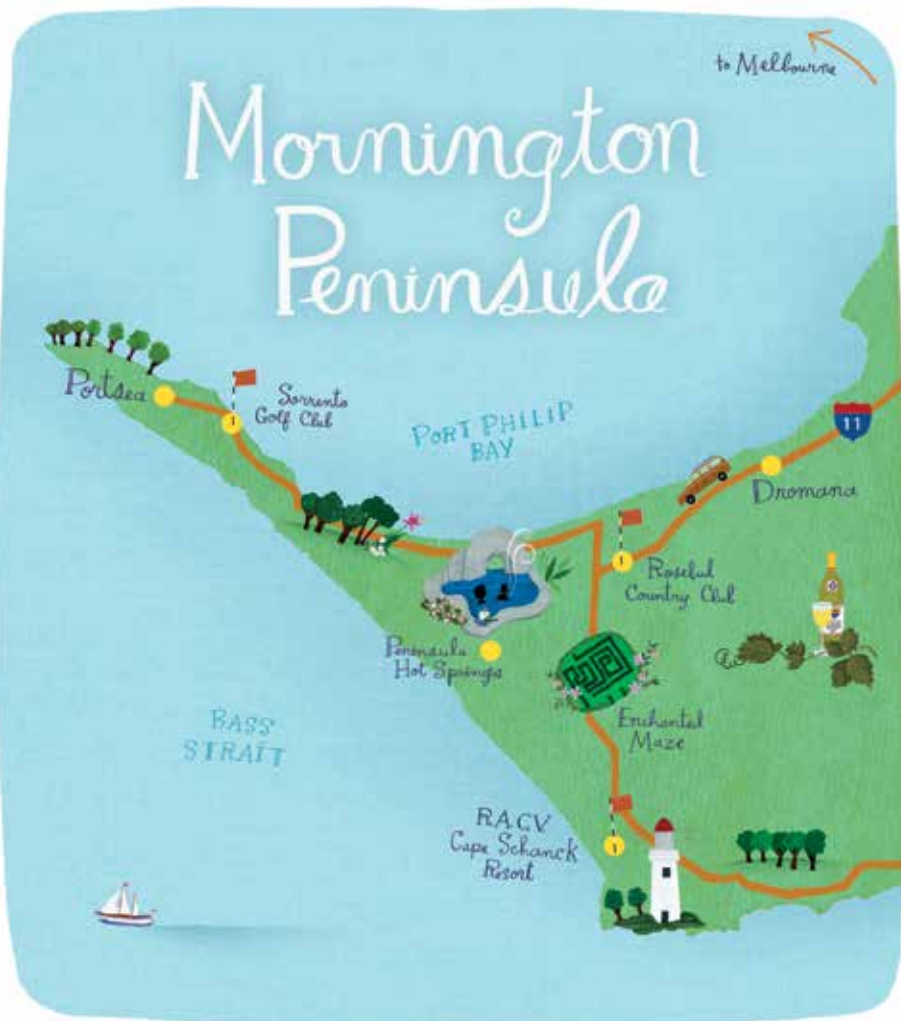
Sorrento has its fair share of blind shots, so if it's your first visit then pick up a course guide from the Pro shop. The pointers will come in handy. Reflecting on the weekend on my way back to Tullamarine Airport (further than you'd want, especially

if you find driving in Melbourne as confusing as I do), I concluded that flying away was not a good idea. I'd barely scratched the surface of golf on the Mornington Peninsula – 13 courses left unplayed! – and I didn't get to try the local maze or vineyards (probably more fun in reverse order, come to think of it). So although the Mornington makes a great weekend out of Melbourne, it's better to come here for a week or more.

And if you do try to squeeze it into a weekend, make sure you're on speaking terms with the alarm clock!



The approach to hole nine at Sorrento



ALL YOUR TRAVEL DETAILS

WHO, WHAT, HOW, WHERE. YOU JUST DECIDE WHEN!

WHERE TO STAY MAX'S RETREAT AT

RED HILL ESTATE
A private four-bedroom cottage at a winery, with restaurant and beautiful sea views.
9 Station Road, Red Hill South
Rooms from \$300 a night
03 5989 2838

redhillestate.com.au

LAKESIDE VILLAS
Splendid dam-side villas - spacious, right on the water and adjacent to vineyards.
25 Harrisons Road, Dromana
Villas from \$250 a night
03 5981 9555

stillwateratcrittenden.com.au

FOOD AND RESTAURANTS

SALIX RESTAURANT & BISTRO
Vineyard views and assured contemporary cooking make this a great spot for dinner.
166 Balnarring Road, Merricks North
03 5989 7640

willow-creek.com.au

MERRICKS GENERAL WINE STORE
Melburnians make day-trips just to take in lunch or dinner here.
3460 Frankston-Flinders Road, Merricks
03 5989 8088
mgwinestore.com.au

WHERE TO PLAY MORNINGTON GOLF CLUB

Established in 1904, the view across the bay to the city is breathtaking. Fairways are lush Santa Ana Couch grass, offering near perfect lies.
Fees: \$45 at the weekend
Tallis Drive Mornington VIC 3931
03 5975 2866
morningtongolf.com.au

SORRENTO GOLF CLUB

One of Australia's premier private courses. Visiting Club golfers are welcome with prior arrangements.
Fees: \$120 at set times
Langford Rd, Sorrento VIC 3943
03 5984 2226
sorrentogolf.com.au

CAPE SCHANCK RESORT

The Robert Trent Jones-designed course is ranked one of the top 100 courses in Australia. The scenic views are just as impressive. Open to the general public. RACV members receive discounted rates.
Trent Jones Drive (via Boneo Road), Cape Schanck VIC 3939
03 5950 8000
racv.com.au/Cape.Schanck.Resort

If you really enjoy the vineyards, call: Peninsula Taxis 03 5981 2233.