

# Travel Back IN TIME

An eventful journey across the Australian state of Victoria was both nostalgic and full of adventure

words by Henna Shah



**T**he past is the father of the present." Agatha Christie's words, spoken in my grandfather's voice, reverberated in my ears as we stepped into the charming Miss Marple's English Tearoom, nestled in the mist-veiled Dandenong Ranges of Victoria, Australia. Inspired by Christie's beloved sleuth, the Tearoom felt like a page from the very stories my grandfather once read aloud to me, with its wood-panelled interiors, floral tablecloths, and shelves lined with porcelain teapots. As I gazed through the rain-speckled panes, fingers curled

around a warm chai latte, something within me stirred. It was 19 years to the very day since my grandfather passed. But within that parlour, with its scones and clotted cream, I found a doorway back to the time spent with him.

Earlier that morning, my husband Yash and I had boarded the Puffing Billy, a vintage steam train that winds its way through the fern-draped slopes between Belgrave and Lakeside. With our legs dangling freely from the open carriage and the rhythmic chug of the engine, we felt time gently roll back to when we were kids, riding a toy train and waving at our parents who

waited on the sidelines. Mirroring that memory, there was a shared joy in the way passers-by paused to wave at the Puffing Billy and its gleeful passengers, almost like an unspoken tradition.

Getting off at Lakeside, we met our private tour guide Rob, who was waiting with an umbrella to shield us from the soft drizzle. Settling into the car, wrapped in the warmth of the heater, we began our scenic drive through the Yarra Ranges National Park, where a tapestry of late-autumn foliage painted the landscape amber. Nearing Cement Creek Redwood Forest, Rob turned to us with a smile and said,



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT**  
*The Puffing Billy Railway is one of the world's oldest surviving narrow-gauge steam railways; Visitors can enjoy a plethora of activities at Sovereign Hill; The author and her husband at Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park.*

"My daughter often calls this place the Enchanted Woods." Rising before us were towering trees, one of the rare California Redwood forests outside California, an awe-inspiring grove that felt like an extension of Enid Blyton's *Faraway Tree* series. We spread out a picnic mat and lay under the canopy of the majestic Redwoods.

**A step back in time**

With the spell of magical realms lifting, we arrived in historic Ballarat, stepping into the 1850s at Sovereign Hill, a living museum that recreated the Victorian Gold Rush era. Costumed volunteers





**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT**  
Miss Marple's English Tearoom pays homage to Agatha Christie's famous lady detective; A Pimlico Pastie; The beaches along the Great Ocean Road offer breathtaking vistas.

stayed perfectly in character—from a convict-turned-miner hiding a striped shirt under his vest to waitresses in white aprons and bonnets at the New York Bakery, serving Devonshire tea. Our guide, Gary, led us past horse-drawn carriages and a candy maker hand-rolling raspberry lollies, to a bowling alley where wooden balls clattered against pins beneath a sign that read: 'Don't mix bowling and grog'. At the river, Yash panned for gold and, to his delight, uncovered glinting flakes, his own little keepsake of the trip.

It had been a while since I visited a wildlife sanctuary, and the Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park brought back vivid memories of summer holidays spent at the zoo. Here, that sense of wonder returned as I gently stroked a sleepy koala nibbling at eucalyptus leaves and hand-fed kangaroos that rested their clawed paws on my arm. But nothing compared to what awaited us at Phillip Island right after dusk. The coastline came alive with tiny penguins emerging from the sea and waddling across the sand to their burrows after a full day of fishing. In that moment, it felt as if my favourite cartoon, *Pingu*, had stepped off the screen and into the real world.



The serenity of childhood memories gave way to a sudden surge of adrenaline at the Phillip Island Grand Prix circuit. I climbed into a go-kart for the first time since college. As the engine roared to life and the wind pressed against my helmet, for a few electrifying moments, I was 17 again.

Our time in Victoria drew to a close with a road trip along the Great Ocean Road, whose winding cliffs, crashing waves, and sun-drenched vistas had been living in my imagination ever since I watched *Salaam Namaste*. Two decades later, I stood here not just living my Bollywood dream but travelling back in time to relive the magic of childhood fantasies and rediscover a part of myself that I had long forgotten.

### STYLISH STAYS

**The StandardX, Melbourne:** Located in Fitzroy, it offers excellent proximity to eclectic dining and shopping.

**Melbourne Marriott Hotel Docklands:** Enjoy a relaxed vibe, a rooftop infinity pool, and access to the Free Tram Zone.

**1 Hotel Melbourne:** Come here for a sustainable Yarra riverside stay.



### GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Melbourne from Delhi.

