

# Limestone Coast



Take ancient dunes and rich earth, add in a volcano or two, some cool breezes and mix with plenty of good rainfall – that’s the recipe for the hearty flavours of South Australia’s south-eastern corner. With a wild shoreline of surf beaches and fishing ports, the area is heaven for those who revel in the lush taste and texture of southern rock lobster. Inland you’ll find a huge diversity of farm goods with fertile pastures supporting an array of boutique dairies, as well as beef and lamb producers. But the star of the show is the Coonawarra’s famed terra rossa soil, which has been closely compared to the soils of Bordeaux. Sitting atop a bed of limestone, this hallowed ground has created an embarrassment of riches and ensured the Coonawarra a secure place in the pantheon of Australia’s greatest wine regions. If you love good reds, particularly cabernet sauvignon, this is the place to come.

The Coonawarra’s expanse of vines flanks the Riddoch Highway, extending north from the town of Penola. With all of the region’s wineries closing in on the slender strip of terra rossa soil (‘the cigar’), cellar doors are within a minute’s drive from each other, making touring here very flexible. You could spend four or five days visiting every cellar door, but as a starting point it’s hard to go past the iconic **Wynns Coonawarra Estate**, where canny Scot and vine pioneer John Riddoch got things rolling in 1891. For decades the reds released under the Wynns label have set varietal benchmarks for the region, and since 1982 their definitive cabernet sauvignon has been named in honour of their founder. However, lovers of elegant but full-bodied reds might find even more enjoyment with the Alex 88, a rich mixture of blackberry flavours and smooth oak tinges. The cellar door offers a smattering of back vintages, plus cheese platters and, for aficionados, hosted private tastings and ‘make your own blend’ tours (bookings essential).

**Katnook Estate** is another must-visit cellar door with a varietal to suit almost any palate. The estate riesling is a zesty mix of fruit with a hint of cinnamon, while the estate chardonnay has a sweet buttery finish. But the real excitement comes from the reds – especially if the *Odyssey* and *Prodigy*, the label’s two limited release wines, are available for tasting. The

*Opposite (top to bottom):* antipasto platter and wine at Zema Estate, Coonawarra; Davidson Cottage at Penola (see Where to stay)

## Festivals

**Cape Jaffa Seafood and Wine Festival:** King Dr; Jan; 0409 571 438; [www.capejaffafest.com.au](http://www.capejaffafest.com.au)

**Taste the Limestone Coast Festival:** Italian food and wine festival; Naracoorte Town Sq; Feb; 0437 916 683; [www.thetastefestival.com.au](http://www.thetastefestival.com.au)

**Seafari Beachport Festival:** fresh produce, wine and entertainment; Beachport; last weekend in Feb; (08) 8735 8543; [www.beachportfestival.com](http://www.beachportfestival.com)

**Zema Estate’s Great Cabernet Experience:** cabernet tasting; Zema Estate, Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; 1st weekend in Aug; (08) 8736 3219; [www.zema.com.au](http://www.zema.com.au)

**Coonawarra Cabernet Celebrations:** celebration of winemaking community; Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; Oct; (08) 8737 2392; [www.coonawarra.org](http://www.coonawarra.org)



## Where to stay

**Davidson Cottage:** quaint 1860s cottage; Petticoat La, Penola; 0488 646 446; [www.davidsoncottage.com.au](http://www.davidsoncottage.com.au)

**Merlot and Verdelho:** two luxury townhouses; 14 Arthur St, Penola; (08) 8763 7132; [www.merlotverdelho.com.au](http://www.merlotverdelho.com.au)

**Padthaway Estate Homestead:** luxury Victorian guesthouse; Riddoch Hwy, Padthaway; (08) 8765 5555; [www.padthawayestate.com](http://www.padthawayestate.com)

**The Menzies Retreat:** stunning contemporary accommodation amid vines; Yalumba Coonawarra Estate, Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8737 3603; [www.yalumba.com](http://www.yalumba.com)

**The Shore:** glittering beachfront residence; 11 Wrattontully Rd, Robe; 1300 760 629; [www.robelifestyle.com.au](http://www.robelifestyle.com.au)





Odyssey, in particular, has won many awards with its velvety plum and mocha undertones. With this wine, senior winemaker Wayne Stehbens says his aim is to 'not only capture the essence of Coonawarra cabernet sauvignon, but to define it'.

Most of Australia's biggest wine brands feature Coonawarra styles in their portfolio. For Yalumba it started with their flagship cabernet sauvignon, The Menzies. In recent years this much-acclaimed wine has been joined by several regional siblings, all of which are up for tasting at **Yalumba Coonawarra Estate**. This modern, yet earthy venue also offers very smart on-site vineyard accommodation (see Where to stay/The Menzies Retreat). The region's other big producer is **Rymill**. Make sure to take in the views from the cellar door's balcony while sipping their crisp méthode champenoise sparkling white. The rosé is a very unusual mix of strawberry and other fruits that will interest even those who normally avoid the pink stuff.

A feature of the region is the number of established farmers and families who have

gravitated into making wine. Local stalwart Doug Balnaves is a case in point. After many years guiding vineyard development for others he and his family have built up **Balnaves of Coonawarra** to be one of the most respected producers in the district. That success is due in no small measure to the consummate winemaking skills of Peter Bissell. His flair with Coonawarra fruit is legendary and on show in top-flight wines such as The Tally (unfortunately, not often available for tasting), while this label's shiraz and chardonnay are also multi-award winning.

It's a similar tale with the Lynn brothers, Tony and Brian, one-time sheep farmers who, year by year, have become more involved with their premium range of reds at **Majella Wines**. The Malleea is a stunning cabernet and shiraz blend, layered with complex fruit characters, fine, dusty tannins and spicy oak, which is ranked as outstanding (the second tier) for Langton's well-respected Classification of Australian Wine. Their shiraz is another topnotch red and a bit of fun can be had with the sparkling shiraz.

Italian influences are to the fore in the traditional, handcrafted wines at **Zema Estate**. Their merlot is a real winner for its smooth texture and The Cluny is a well-balanced blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc and malbec. Italian neighbour **DiGiorgio Family Wines** offers an impressive spread of varietal styles, including sparkling whites and reds, from its Coonawarra and Lucindale vineyards. Another winery with a good range of reasonably priced wines is **Leconfield** – the Jette's viognier under the Richard Hamilton label is bursting with apricot blossom.

Of the local winemakers, Ian Hollick has always been ready to experiment and this is reflected in the mix at **Hollick Wines**. Mingling among traditional reds, such as the magnificent Wilgha Shiraz that is only released in years of excellence, you can find new varietals such as tempranillo, barbera, and the sweet, sparkling white frizzante that is simply a party in your mouth. The pinot noir is also an enjoyable wine with less of the smelly sock after taste characteristic of most pinot noirs. That same interest

in flavour marriages is a feature of the menu at **Upstairs at Hollick**, the estate's popular restaurant with the best vineyard views in the region. Regional produce is proudly deployed with dishes such as smoked Naracoorte venison highlighted by a tempranillo jelly, and a chunky fillet of Beachport snapper partnered with goat's cheese and soft herbs. Desserts also offer a spin on the classics, such as lemon verbena-scented panna cotta, and every dish is matched with a Hollick wine.

After lunch at Hollick, it's essential that you book for dinner at **Pipers of Penola** (see feature, p. 264), undoubtedly the region's best restaurant. However, you will also enjoy a good meal at **fodder**. Owned and run by husband and wife team Melissa and John Innes, the focus of this cafe/restaurant is actually on wines rather than food. John is Rymill's former winemaker and it's worth getting him to come over to your table for advice when perusing the extensive wine list, filled with both local and international drops. Despite the wine focus, the food here is still very good. John can be seen manning the wood-fired

*Above (left to right):* Hollick Wines, Coonawarra; a classic red from Rymill, Coonawarra; minimalist decor at fodder restaurant in Coonawarra; wine tasting at Wynns Coonawarra Estate

pizza oven that turns out thin-crust pizzas with simple but delicious toppings, while Melissa takes care of dishes such as steak and chips and gnocchi with a wild mushroom sauce, along with the best coffee in town.

Gourmet stores are not forgotten in this area. A range of food products, as well as cooking equipment and cookbooks, are available at **Koonara Wines'** cellar door in the middle of Penola's main street. At **The Poplars Winery**, their cellar door precinct has a cheese bar for cheese-tasting and **The Poplars Produce Store**, which sells a wide range of local goodies and gourmet products from South Australian and western Victorian producers. There is also **Kitchen @ The Poplars**, a casual cafe for breakfast or lunch (choose from such favourites as house-made lamb shank pie, blue swimmer crab pasta or pork tagliatelle). And for local labels that don't have a cellar door, the wine cellar at **Heyward's Royal Oak Hotel** in Penola is full of surprises (look out for back vintages of Reschke that sell out in weeks). It also offers some tastings. The heritage and National Trust-listed hotel has a history dating back to 1848 and a building to 1872. Pub meals are served in the dining room, bar or in the garden, and B&B accommodation is available.

Some 100 kilometres north of Coonawarra, along the Riddoch Highway, lies the small wine region of Padthaway, its climate slightly warmer but its soils enjoying some of the same characteristics as its southern counterpart. It is a more scenic landscape than Coonawarra, its gentle rolling hills contrasting to the latter's flat expanses. The fertile limestone plain, with its famous terra rossa soil, supports a small number of well-known wineries: Padthaway

Estate, Stonehaven (Hardy Wine Company), Henry's Drive, Browns of Padthaway, Fosters Estate, Orlando Wyndham and Morambro Creek. Only the first three wineries listed have cellar doors open for tastings and sales. The dominant wine style of the region is traditionally chardonnay while the cabernet sauvignon and shiraz is frequently blended with wines from elsewhere in the state.

The cellar door for the impressive **Padthaway Estate** is housed in a picturesque old stone stable block and is open daily. Renowned particularly for its sparkling wine, the estate has won recent awards for its 2002 Eliza Late Tirage Pinot Noir Chardonnay. As well as Padthaway Estate-grown wines visitors can also taste those produced under the Browns of Padthaway label. The winery's 1882 homestead provides luxury guesthouse accommodation (see *Where to stay*), situated near the red gums and stringybarks of Padthaway Conservation Park. Dinner is by arrangement and food focuses on local regional produce. You might find whole fresh Limestone Coast trout served with orange, maple syrup and macadamia nut sauce or a chargrilled terra rossa eye fillet served with a red wine jus, Swiss brown mushrooms and potato. The dessert list has a collection of old favourites such as traditional bread and butter pudding with homemade warm custard.

**Stonehaven**, one of the largest operations in the region, produces a range of well-priced wines including the regional stalwart chardonnay. It is also well regarded for its shiraz and, more recently, viognier. It welcomes visitors to its cellar door (open daily) for tastings and sales. **Henry's Drive Vineyards** offers regional food platters at their cellar door to complement the estate-grown wines available for

tasting – try their shiraz. To purchase these labels and others produced in the region, call in to the **Padthaway General Store Bottle Shop**, open all day Monday–Saturday and Sunday morning.

Elsewhere in the Limestone Coast region, some successful vine plantings can be found at Mount Benson along the coastal strip from Kingston to Robe. Here the soothing effects of a maritime climate impart a different character to the wine styles, plus allowing other grape varieties to come to the fore. At **Wangolina Station** winemaker Anita Goode returned to the family farm to create a string of noteworthy drops, including her semillon and sauvignon blanc, both as straight varietals and blends. Even closer to the coast, the same duo is a feature of the range at **Cape Jaffa Wines**, where Derek Hooper has blazed a trail with the region's first fully certified biodynamic vineyard. Sporting eye-catching cotton cloth labels, his La Lune range includes powerful expressions of both cabernet sauvignon and shiraz.

Other coastal delights focus on gourmet food. However, before exploring the south-eastern fishing villages, head inland to Avenue Range where **Avenue Emus**, a working farm, offers a taste of emu meat products. Then return to Kingston SE where **Lacepede Seafood**, on the foreshore, is the place to go during the lobster season (October–May). You can pick up both live and cooked rock lobster straight off the boats, plus local prawns, King George whiting and flathead.

For more gastronomic pleasures it's a short drive south to the historic and picturesque fishing town of Robe. Being a busy holiday spot, there is a good choice of cafe-style venues. Commanding one of the best perches in town, **The Gallerie** caters for casual grazing on its spacious deck and more refined à la carte dining indoors. Seafood is the inevitable highlight here, with classics such as lobster thermidor and bouillabaisse often gracing the menu, while in the cooler months heartier venison, lamb and pork dishes come into their own. **The Caledonian Inn**, a historic, ivy-clad pub, has a beach cafe with familiar schnitzel, seafood and steak options, as well as a dining room that ventures into more exotic territory with European and Asian inspirations such as potted pork rillettes, tom yum prawn shooters, Korean tuna tartar and miso-marinated lamb rack. For devoted carnivores, the **Robe Butcher Shop** has multi-award-winning

smoked salami, mettwurst and bacon. Be sure to sample their stylish home-crafted sausages as well as local grain-fed beef and premium lamb cuts.

On the run down the coast call into Beachport where the grand old local pub has been reborn as **Bompas of Beachport**, a versatile accommodation and dining venue with a great foreshore location. In Millicent you can go right to the source at **Limestone Coast Trout** on a tour of its aquaculture facility and sample the home-farmed flavours in their fish and chip cones. With a herd of some 1100 wagyuu cattle, nearby Mayura Station has become one of the nation's leading suppliers of full-blood wagyuu beef (visits are by appointment only; (08) 8721 3000; [www.mayurastation.com](http://www.mayurastation.com)). Their multi-award-winning range features on top menus around the country. If you want to sample it locally, dine at **The Barn Steakhouse** on the southern side of Mount Gambier, where beef dishes take centre-stage. This landmark restaurant features a warm, elegant space and a menu with nearly a dozen different steak dishes, among them Mayura's wagyuu. For devotees of prime aged cuts seared over mallee coals this is nirvana. And the wine list is suitably expansive with a host of back vintages from the region's top labels. Luxury accommodation in self-contained spa suites is also on offer here.

A very different atmosphere prevails at **Sorrento's Cafe**, an affable all-day eatery where you can dine outdoors or in an all-weather atrium courtyard. The emphasis is on quality local ingredients and easy dining with gourmet pizza and focaccia, plus heartier stir-fry and pasta dishes. Similarly, **Sage & Muntries** in the heart of town is a bright and breezy cafe catering to all tastes. Expect a diverse selection of pasta and risotto dishes, super-sophisticated burgers and seafood dishes accented with native bush spices and flavours. Of the mains, the house specialty is a boned half-duck, cooked with a crispy skin yet meltily moist flesh and offset by a zingy plum and ginger sauce.

Among the products of local artisan producers, look out for the distinctive chocolate bars from **Sweet Business**, generally available from farmers' markets and gourmet food outlets across the region. The company has really embraced the melding of flavours with rich delights infused with everything from wattle seed and lemon myrtle to native pepperberries and locally ground coffee.

*Below (left to right):* Katnook Estate cellar door, Coonawarra; the burnt orange–red terra rossa soil is a feature of the region, including at Koonara Wines vineyard



# Fine Dining

## Pipers of Penola

Regional fine dining doesn't get more thoughtfully realised than this. Chef Simon Bowen hails from one of the region's best-known wine families (Bowen Estate), but he charted his own course, one that became a long journey home – via training in topnotch kitchens in the USA and Europe then Lake House at Daylesford in Victoria – before setting up shop in this revamped church. The premises might be modest in scale and simply dressed in timber, natural stone and white linen, but the food is exceptional. Earthy richness distinguishes Simon's confident, creative work. Thus, an eye fillet of Churchill beef is oak-smoked and teamed with duck liver parfait and duxelles (mushrooms), arriving at the table as a tower of ingredients topped off with a single potato crisp. Expect fine renditions of old classics such as a Waldorf side salad or, on the dessert list, an apple tarte tatin. But you'll find more exotic creations too, such as garlic-marinated quail served with roasted eggplant purée and labna, plus a lentil and pomegranate dressing. To complete the dining experience there's an excellent wine list, including aged Coonawarra gems with a proper quota of cellar years under their belt, and thoughtful table service coordinated by Simon's American-born wife Erika.

## Contacts for Limestone Coast

### EATERIES

**Bompas of Beachport:** 3 Railway Tce, Beachport; (08) 8735 8333; [www.bompas.com.au](http://www.bompas.com.au)

**fodder:** Memorial Dr, Coonawarra; (08) 8736 3170; [www.fodder.net.au](http://www.fodder.net.au)

**Heyward's Royal Oak Hotel:** 31 Church St, Penola; (08) 8737 2322; [www.heywardshotel.com.au](http://www.heywardshotel.com.au)

**Kitchen @ The Poplars:** see Wineries/ The Poplars Winery

**Limestone Coast Trout:** 91 Lossie Rd, Millicent; (08) 8733 1407

**Pipers of Penola:** 58 Riddoch St, Penola; (08) 8737 3999; [www.pipersofpenola.com.au](http://www.pipersofpenola.com.au)

**Sage & Muntries:** 78 Commercial St West, Mount Gambier; (08) 8724 8400

**Sorrento's Cafe:** 6 Bay Rd, Mount Gambier; (08) 8723 0900

**The Barn Steakhouse:** Punt Rd (Nelson Rd), Mount Gambier; (08) 8726 8250; [www.barn.com.au](http://www.barn.com.au)

**The Caledonian Inn:** 1 Victoria St, Robe; (08) 8768 2029; [www.caledonian.net.au](http://www.caledonian.net.au)

**The Gallerie:** 2 Victoria St, Robe; (08) 8768 2256

**Upstairs at Hollick:** Cnr Ravenswood La and Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8737 2752; [www.hollick.com](http://www.hollick.com)

### STORES

**Koonara Wines:** 44 Church St; Penola; (08) 8737 3222; [www.koonara.com](http://www.koonara.com)

**Padthaway General Store Bottle Shop:** 15 Memorial Dr, Padthaway; (08) 8765 5020

**The Poplars Produce Store:** see Wineries/ The Poplars Winery

### MARKETS

**Limestone Coast Real Food Farmers Market:** Riddoch Hwy, Penola; Sun morning; (08) 8737 3663; [www.limestonecoastfood.com.au/farmers\\_market](http://www.limestonecoastfood.com.au/farmers_market)

**Nangula Country Market:** Nangula Hall, Princes Hwy; 2nd Sun each month; (08) 8734 4375

**Naracoorte Country Market:** Naracoorte Historic Vehicle Club, McDonnell St; 2nd Sat each month, morning; (08) 8762 1363

### GOURMET PRODUCE

**Avenue Emus:** Thomas Rd, Avenue Range; (08) 8766 0085; [www.avenueemus.com.au](http://www.avenueemus.com.au)

**Lacepede Seafood:** Marine Pde, Kingston; (08) 8767 2549

**Robe Butcher Shop:** Union St, Robe; (08) 8768 2129

**Sweet Business:** PO Box 1018, Mount Gambier; (08) 8738 9291

### WINERIES

**Balnaves of Coonawarra:** Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8737 2946; [www.balnaves.com.au](http://www.balnaves.com.au)

**Cape Jaffa Wines:** Limestone Coast Rd, Cape Jaffa; (08) 8768 5053; [www.capejaffawines.com.au](http://www.capejaffawines.com.au)

**DiGiorgio Family Wines:** Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8736 3222; [www.digiorgio.com.au](http://www.digiorgio.com.au)

**Henry's Drive:** Hodgson's Rd, Padthaway; (08) 8765 5251; [www.henrysdive.com](http://www.henrysdive.com)

**Hollick Wines:** Cnr Ravenswood La and Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8737 2318; [www.hollick.com](http://www.hollick.com)

**Katnook Estate:** Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8737 0300; [www.katnookestate.com.au](http://www.katnookestate.com.au)

**Koonara Wines:** see Stores

**Leconfield:** Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8737 2326; [www.leconfieldwines.com](http://www.leconfieldwines.com)

**Majella Wines:** Lynn Rd, Coonawarra; (08) 8736 3055; [www.majellawines.com.au](http://www.majellawines.com.au)

**Padthaway Estate:** Riddoch Hwy, Padthaway; (08) 8765 5505; [www.padthawayestate.com](http://www.padthawayestate.com)

**Rymill:** Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8736 5001; [www.rymill.com.au](http://www.rymill.com.au)

**Stonehaven:** Riddoch Hwy, Padthaway; (08) 8765 6166; [www.stonehavenvineyards.com.au](http://www.stonehavenvineyards.com.au)

**The Poplars Winery:** Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8736 3065 or (08) 8736 3309 (AH); [www.thepoplarswinery.com](http://www.thepoplarswinery.com)

**Wangolina Station:** Limestone Coast Rd, Mount Benson; (08) 8768 6187; [www.wangolina.com.au](http://www.wangolina.com.au)

**Wynns Coonawarra Estate:** Memorial Dr, Coonawarra; (08) 8736 2225; [www.wynns.com.au](http://www.wynns.com.au)

**Yalumba Coonawarra Estate:** Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8737 3603; [www.yalumba.com](http://www.yalumba.com)

**Zema Estate:** Riddoch Hwy, Coonawarra; (08) 8736 3219; [www.zema.com.au](http://www.zema.com.au)