

Your Tidemark Itinerary

To help you plan your stay, we have put together some ideas of things you may like to do and places to visit while visiting Shoal Bay. The places and people in this list are what we like to do, so if you find other interesting places let us know so that we can include and share them with other future visitors.

Friday

There is nothing like a great pie to remind you that you are officially on holidays! If you like pies and want to make your first meal really easy, it is worth stopping at Heatherbrae Pies at Raymond Terrace to select one of the savoury or sweet pies, in family or individual sizes.

On the road in from the highway you will probably pass a few attractions to consider for another day, including the 'Fighter World' aircraft museum at Williamstown, the Australian Shark and Ray Centre (where you can walk in the tanks with the rays), and golf driving ranges.

If you do not want to bring all your groceries with you, there is a Coles supermarket in the main street of Nelson Bay, as well as couple of bottle shops with cold wine and beer. There is also an IGA supermarket in Shoal Bay, just down the road from the Tidemark townhouses.

When you have unloaded the car you can't go past taking a walk along the beautiful sand of Shoal Bay beach. Relax and unwind with an espresso at one of the alfresco cafes such as Gilligan's at Shoal Bay village.

Saturday

Set off early, turn right onto Shoal Bay Road and walk to the top of Mt Tomaree. It is best to go early before the sun gets too hot. It is a very picturesque walk, with seats strategically placed to rest on the way up.

You can see where the gun emplacements were located in World War two, but the best place to go is up to the lookout at the top. It is just breathtaking. The view over the bay is magnificent - so take your camera. If you are really lucky you may also witness whale pods that sometimes rest over in the lee of Zenith Beach. The walk is well constructed, but does get a bit steep in some places.

If you want to get a feel for the views from on high without putting in as much effort, you can drive to the lookout which is on your right as you head about 1 km out of the township of Nelson Bay towards Newcastle.

If you do not want much effort at all and the enjoyment of a lovely cup of coffee, wend your way to the lighthouse and the Inner Light Tea rooms (open 10.00 am to 4.00 pm). Sit and unwind while enjoying one of the most delightful views of the bay, although not quite as high at only 53 metres, it is still a place well worth visiting. The historic lighthouse keeper's cottage is an amazing little museum with a wealth of interesting facts about the local history.

Regardless of which one you chose to visit, make your next stop a visit to the marine reserve at Little Beach. If you climbed Mt Tomaree, you will enjoy a refreshing swim to follow it up. Before you go to Little Beach, arm yourself with a bread roll and preferably a mask and snorkel. In just knee deep water the bread roll will give you the undivided attention of schools of quite large and colourful fish.

Sunday

You are staying very close to some of the best wineries in the world, so it would be a shame not to visit the Hunter Valley and sample some of the best the area can offer. Located at the Branxton end of the valley, the Wyndham Estate is one of the better known wineries and it is also one of the closer wineries to get to from Nelson Bay.

If you do not want to spend the entire day sampling wines - however tempting the idea may be - head to Morpeth for morning tea and to explore some of the antique shops and craft shops. There is something for everyone there. The Hunter Valley gardens are also a good place to take a break and explore the extensive, beautiful gardens.

If you want to sample some wines without going quite so far, stop at Wanganella Estate wines near the sand dunes at Bobs Farm (you are likely to have passed it on your way in to Port Stephens). They serve a great coffee at the café and lunches and the views from the restaurant are delightful. They also have some interesting items which make great gifts or are perfect for spoiling yourself, including: apple and pear preserve, a hot tomato chutney, lemon conserve and rosemary oil with balsamic reduction. Wanganella Estate is open Wednesday to Sunday from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm.

The multi-award winning Port Stephens winery is located at 3443 Nelson Bay Road, Bobs Farm. Apart from the boutique wines available there is a selection of hand crafted specialist beers from Murray's Craft beer to try. On Sundays there is usually entertainment available so match some beer or wine with a cheese platter or the local oysters with dipping sauces and make an occasion of the visit.

Be sure to bring back some wines (or beer) to sip, when the sun is over the yard arm, while sitting on the balcony at the Tidemark townhouses enjoying the leisurely vista.

Monday

Whale or dolphin watching is not only great for the soul it's also a great leveller in the bigger scheme of things. Make sure you book in advance to ensure you can get a place for a whale or dolphin watching cruise.

Ring Sharon at Tamboi Queen Cruises (P: 02 4981 1959), to book a cruise which leaves from the Nelson Bay Marina (Wharf 1, Victoria Parade).

The seasonal whale watching cruise is an ideal way to see the whales without having to go far out to sea. The whales migrate in a route that takes them just about a kilometre off the shore and the sights are quite spectacular. We think the whale watching is better than at any other location we have visited in Australia.

Later in the day, hire one of the catamarans a few meters along Shoal Bay beach and sail around the bay. It is enormous fun, great exercise and a pleasant way to spend a lazy afternoon.

Tuesday

If you are a little adventurous, book a paragliding experience. This is where you will be strapped into a parachute and towed behind a speed boat. Apart from being exhilarating, it is much safer than it appears and the views of the bay and the azure water racing below are quite amazing from the floating position.

There are a range of other activities you can do, such as camel rides on the beach or 4WD along Stockton beach - just make sure you get a permit from *Tomteland* - a kid's amusement park about five minutes north of Lavis Lane (one of two access points to the beach), or at the service station, news agency or hotel at Anna Bay, which provides the easiest access if you do decide to take your own vehicle along the beach to see the ship wreck.

For a more leisurely experience why not hire a fishing boat from the marina to go fishing on the bay or for the more adventurous and experienced angler, a deep sea fishing adventure. If the fish aren't biting you can always nip around to the fisherman's co-op at the far end of the marina and buy some fish which you can pretend you caught yourself or supplement your catch with local prawns and oysters and make dinner a real seafood feast.

Wednesday

Wednesday is a good day to go for a drive to Tanilba House, located in Tanilba Bay Lemon Tree Passage, on the northern arm of Port Stephens. One of the oldest homes in Australia, Tanilba House is an elegant, warm historic home dating back to 1837.

Tanilba House is open for inspection on Wednesdays and weekends. In winter there is usually a log fire burning to add to its charm. Tea and coffee or soft drinks are included in the entry price, and Devonshire teas or light lunches are also available.

On the way back pick up some fish and chips from the local chippie in Shoal Bay village and sit on the beach to eat. The feeling of sand between your toes and fish and chips in your hands is one of life's simple pleasures - but worth millions in terms of stress relief. It's also a fantastic spot to sit with your favourite happy-hour drink as well!

Thursday

Explore the beaches around the area. Start with a stroll along the white sands of Shoal Bay beach and have dip in the crystal clear blue water. Next walk towards the headland of Mt Tomaree, but turn off to the right and walk through to Zenith beach.

Zenith Beach can be surfed when a NE swell is coming in, but be cautious as it can quickly form rips so it is not so good for young children.

Box beach is the next one around and can be accessed by walking further down the same track, or via Box Beach road. Surfing is best with an E NE swell and once again it is not one of the best for small children - but then you cannot go past Shoal Bay beach for small children.

The very fit may wish to walk around to Fingal bay, but most people would drive. This beach has plenty of parking and kiosks near by.