

The Octopuses Garden

By Sheree Marris, Director - Visions of Blue

Imagine being able to see majestic Pot-Bellied Seahorses hidden amongst seaweed, beautifully coloured sponge gardens, schools of fish darting in and out of pylons and octopuses with their long slender arms roaming along the sandy floor. A description of the Great Barrier Reef? Not even close. This is some of the incredible diversity of life that you are likely to see at Victoria's first underwater marine trail, 'The Octopuses Garden', at Rye Pier.

To date, the cooler waters of the southern shores have remained a well kept secret, explored only by the dedicated and enthused sport diver or the commercial diver making a living off its prized inhabitants. This summer, however, 'The Octopuses Garden' is about to change all of that.

This exciting new community project was developed by Visions of Blue and funded by Transfield Services. It will encourage people of all ages, snorkel experience or no, into taking 'the plunge' and soaking up what Port Phillip Bay has to offer. It is a great family activity in shallow, clear waters.

It is located on the Mornington Peninsula just 90 minutes drive south of Melbourne at the Rye Pier. The journey commences above the water line at the beginning of the pier where land signage shows visitors the trail layout, safety tips and a taste of just some of the life you can find under the pier. Important conservation messages are also detailed to help ensure the preservation of such an impressive and magical underwater kingdom.

Entry to the trail is an easy walk in from the beach. From here the exciting journey begins with bright and bold interpretive signs mounted on pylons to guide you through a world of light and colour, with an incredible array of creatures that dazzle and amaze.

Some of the Bay's most incredible residents are found in less than a metre of water at the beginning of the trail. Delicate Pygmy Seahorses hidden amongst the seaweed will excite the most tentative snorkeller or scuba diver as will the variety of barnacles.



Photo courtesy of Sheree Marris

A snorkeller exploring the now not so secret world below the pier

Brilliantly coloured sponges, bryozoans and ascidians saturate the pylons producing an amazing underwater rainbow that gets brighter as you descend deeper. There are large varieties of fish, including Weedfish, Leatherjackets, Cowfish and Southern Schooling Goatfish. Search for the secretive Blenny that rarely ventures from the safety of its sponge host or stare transfixed at the robust Globefish with its bulging eyes.

You can also wonder at the antics of the array of crabs from the bashful Hermit Crab and dancing Swimmer Crab to the stylish Decorator Crab that adorns its backs and legs with pieces of seaweed creating an impressive camouflaged cloak.

It's all there waiting for you to explore and it's at your front door step. So make the most of it, you are guaranteed not to be disappointed. BBQ and toilet facilities located on the beach as well as picnic tables make it a perfect day out for the entire family.



Photo courtesy of Coast Action/Coastcare

Just one of the signs at the Octopuses Garden