

# The Octopuses Garden

## VISIONS OF BLUE

Although the waters of Port Phillip Bay may not be as warm as the illustrious reefs found in tropical North Queensland, the colour and variety of marine life found in the Bay are sure to astound even the harshest of critics. Until recently, there's never been an easier way to discover it.

To date the cooler waters of the southern shores have remained a tight kept secret, explored only by the dedicated and enthused sport diver or the commercial diver making a living off it's prized inhabitants. This summer, however, introduces Victoria's first underwater marine trail, 'The Octopuses Garden'.

Funded by Transfield Services, the trail is located at Rye Pier on the Mornington Peninsula just 90 minutes drive south of Melbourne the trail is the first in what is anticipated to be a series of trails located throughout Victoria's waters.

Already a local favourite among local divers, the addition of the marine trail expects to now encourage people of all ages, dive experience or no, into taking "the plunge" and soaking up what Port Phillip Bay has to offer. A great family activity; shallow, clear waters, make this underwater adventure a great introduction into snorkelling and scuba diving.

The journey commences above the water line at the beginning of Rye 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 easy, a simple 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 amazing array of creatures that dazzle and amaze.

Some of the Bays most incredible residents are found in less than a meter of water at the beginning of the trail. Delicate pygmy seahorses hidden amongst the seaweed will excite the most tentative snorkelled or scuba diver. These incredible tiny animals are found in large numbers amongst the seaweeds, while sessile marine animals such as barnacles, and mussels form dense mats on the pylons.

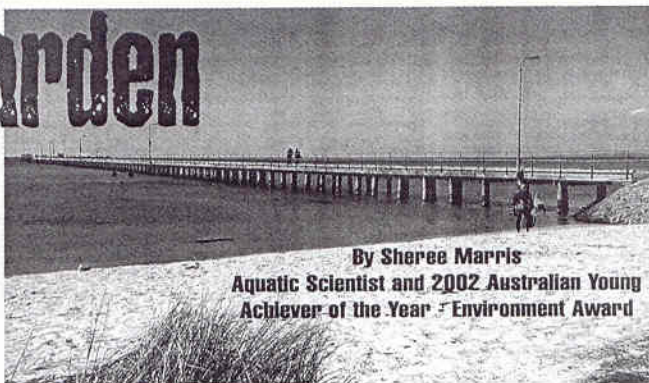
Brilliantly coloured sponges, bryozoans and ascidians saturate the pylons producing an amazing underwater rainbow that gets brighter as you descend deeper. There are a large variety of fish including, weedfish, leatherjackets, cowfish and schooling goatfish. Search for the secretive blenny that rarely ventures from the safety of

their sponge host amongst the pylons or stare transfixed at the robust globefish with its bulging eyes.

Explore the sediments as you make your way along the pier and marvel at brightly coloured sea slugs and sea stars. You may even glimpse the odd pair of eyes peering from you from beneath the sand before a large ray tears away at full speed in search of a new place to rest. Wonder at the antics of the array of crabs from the bashful hermit crab, dancing swimmer crab to the stylish decorator crab that adorns its backs and legs with pieces of seaweed creating an impressive camouflaged cloak.

At night the real 'Octopuses Garden' comes to life and the trail undergoes an incredible transformation. Amongst the most intriguing creatures found are the experts of escape, the octopus and squid. You may be lucky enough to encounter the slender southern sand octopus roaming the sandy sediments in search of a meal. This clever little octopus can quickly bury itself in an instant. It's a case of now you see me now you don't.

Delightful southern dumpling squids are a favourite for many divers. These clever critters have enrolled the help of some handy luminous bacteria to fuel a light organ within the squid's body. This partnership helps cancels out their silhouette on the sea floor, ensuring they aren't detected when swimming above by hungry bottom dwelling animals such as flathead.



Above: Rye Pier

By Sheree Marris  
Aquatic Scientist and 2002 Australian Young  
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Above: Magical dumpling squid can be regularly seen at night when they come out to hunt and mate.

Both octopuses and squid are capable of forming many partnerships with bacteria. The most dangerous animal you likely to encounter along your journey is the tiny blue-ringed octopus. It has a paralyzing toxin produced by bacteria, which they inject into prey with their bird like beak. Fortunately, blue ringed octopus are non aggressive and their iridescent blue rings only appear when threatened. If left alone, these little creatures will carry on their merry way and they'll add to many wonderful encounters you're sure to experience.

At night, Rye Pier also turns on a spectacular seahorse circus, beautiful pipefish float and dart amongst the pylons, and schools of calamari that resemble a flock of birds glide through the water. Whether you choose to dive during the day or night, the colourful and diverse life that call Rye Pier home, are guaranteed to supply you with an immeasurably wonderful underwater experience. BBQ and toilet facilities located on the beach as well as picnic tables, Rye Pier provides a perfect door step into the home of the Bay's extraordinary inhabitants to be enjoyed for you and the family time and time again.



Mystical seahorses thrive under the pier.



Diver investigating one of the many tubeworms and their feathery feeding crowns.



Harmless bottom dwelling animals such as the Banjo Shark can be found resting on the sea floor.



Diver with pylon saturated with brilliantly coloured sponges.