



Time well spent in **Camperdown**

It's just before 10 am on a cool Friday morning in Camperdown when Grandma's familiar little hatchback rolls in from Bendigo, perfectly timed with the Melbourne train. I spot her first, standing on the platform waving like she's greeting a rockstar home from tour. In a way, she is. After my long overseas adventure kept us apart, this weekend feels like a celebration: three days, two nights, and an itinerary packed with everything we love - history, vintage treasure hunting, and as much local food as we can manage.

Our first stop is DJ's Café. Over coffee we fall into deep, effortless catching up: stories, laughter, and gentle debate over who's changed most. Grandma insists it's me, - "You've seen the world!" - while I counter with her new obsession with online Pilates - "You're practically an influencer now". The café hums around us, but we're sealed in our own pocket of familiarity.

By late morning we're wandering toward The Courthouse Camperdown - Grandma's pace unmistakably quicker once heritage buildings appear. The restored 1886 courthouse feels like stepping backwards in time, polished timber and soft creaks holding generations of stories. We linger over displays, then follow the Camperdown Heritage Signs Trail before a tour of the Clocktower.

Climbing the 35.5 m tower, Grandma announces, "You can tell everyone I did this without stopping." She does stop - mainly for photos. Inside, the clock mechanism ticks steadily, and from the balcony Camperdown stretches out below us: elm-lined streets, Mount Leura rising gently in the distance. Grandma squeezes my arm. "I'm so glad we're doing this."

Lunch at Excuse Me Katie's rewards the climb. We share plates, sample freely, and debate espresso like seasoned café explorers, happily fuelled by an exquisite St Ali Blend and house-made treats.

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After checking into The Camperdown Mill - Grandma audibly impressed by the renovated flour mill charm - we head to the Camperdown Golf Club. Golf has always been her domain; she moves between shots with playful confidence. I provide entertainment, losing balls against a backdrop of rolling hills and the sapphire depths of Lake Gnotuk.

As golden hour settles over the Botanic Gardens, light pools across crater lakes and distant peaks. Photos don't do it justice. Dinner at Farmhouse 153 is warm and rustic, with Grandma declaring dessert "worth driving across the state for." We fall asleep back at The Mill in matching heaps of contentment.



Main photo: Camperdown Botanic Gardens & Arboretum
Opposite page clockwise from top: Camperdown Clocktower, a meal at Excuse Me Katie's, retail therapy at the Courthouse Camperdown, walking along the Avenue, The Camperdown Mill.

Day Two starts earlier than expected. Grandma wakes me for a sunrise run at Mount Leura and Sugarloaf. "Run" may be generous, but we climb, breathe in crisp air, and watch sunlight spread over ancient volcanic plains. Breakfast at Loaf & Lounge follows, and their pastries don't stand a chance against us.

Then comes the highlight Grandma's been anticipating all week: the Vintage Road Trip. Camperdown, Cobden, Terang - the region unfolds like a treasure map. At Vintage Gnotuk, Grandma finds a perfect vase, I buy accessories galore that I absolutely do not need. At Oakbrook Collectables, I narrowly avoid adopting an enormous, framed print. By the time we reach Cobden's op shops, we're juggling bags, laughing like kids, and very much in our element.

Lunch at Keayang Maar Vineyard is leisurely and indulgent: pizza, cheese boards, and sweeping views that quietly declare, you've arrived. We detour through Terang for street art, then hike Mount Noorat, where the volcano's rim opens dramatically beneath us. A nearby soon to open winery cellar door sits nestled among vines, hinting at what's to come.

Golden hour draws us back to Mount Leura - familiar but never repetitive. Dinner at the Commercial Hotel seals the evening with hearty food and country warmth, and back at The Mill we fall asleep mid-conversation.

Sunday moves slower, heavier with meaning. With coffee in hand, we walk through Wombeetch Puyuun Reconciliation Park. The stillness invites reflection as Grandma reads every plaque, absorbing the stories of the Traditional Owners with quiet reverence. The nearby memorial at the Camperdown Cemetery adds another layer - grounding, important.

A short drive takes us to South Beach at Lake Bullen Merri, where water meets dark volcanic sand in calm balance, then brunch at Lake Edge Café at Lake Purrumbete. We watch birds skim the water and fishermen cast a line. We linger over coffee, and share lemon meringue pie. Pombo Mart vintage market follows - an eclectic maze where Grandma inevitably finds *"just one more thing."*

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Our final drive follows the Dry Stone Walls Trail, winding past the enduring handiwork of early settlers.

At the station, we say our farewells and Grandma pulls me into one of her unmistakable hugs - the kind that feels like home.

"Next time," she says, "we're bringing bigger bags."
And honestly, she's right.

