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Murray River Paddlesteamers: Luxury river cruises

by Amelia Mansell



Paddlesteamers hold a treasured place in Australia's history, and this is clearly visible throughout the many towns established along the iconic Murray River. Running along the border of New South Wales and Victoria and extending down into South Australia, the mighty Murray is 2509km long, making it the longest river in Australia and the third-longest navigable river in the world. And while many other rivers in Australia have said farewell to the graceful paddlesteamers, the Murray holds strong to its heritage, and one of the best ways to experience this region and beautiful river is on board a paddlesteamer cruise.

Before trains, trucks, cars and caravans took over the role of transporting us and all the essential goods we need into regional Australia, paddlesteamers had their golden era. And now, these steady, strong and beloved vessels provide a unique way to travel along the river and experience the natural beauty of the area — and Murray River

Paddlesteamers has a range of tour options to suit all kinds of travellers.

Ranging from hour-long outings perfect for a picnic, wharf-to-winery tours with lunch included through to multi-day adventures where guests can immerse themselves in the luxury accommodation of the paddlesteamer, Murray River Paddlesteamers has it all.

A day (or more) on the water, nibbles and a refreshing drink at your side and only the sounds of the river, churning paddlewheel and bird call ... there is little that can contend with that kind of serenity.

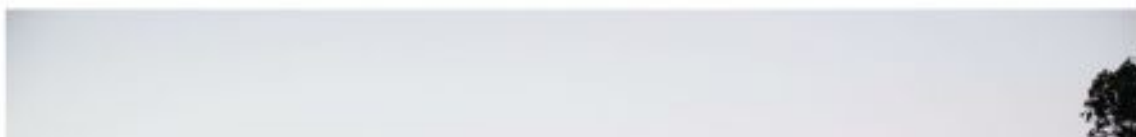
A rich history

Murray River Paddlesteamers has been offering cruises along the Murray since 1996, and over the years its fleet has expanded to include the PS *Emmylou*, which some may recognise for her starring role in the TV series *All the Rivers Run*; the 110-year old PS *Canberra*, which is the only known vessel on the Murray to have been converted back to steam; and the MV *Murray Explorer*.



The company was purchased in 2015 by Craig and Rohan Burgess with local skipper Neil Hutchinson, who have continued the company's legacy of being a prominent player in the river tourism industry. "Over the years we have expanded our fleet, enhanced our services and established ourselves as a leading provider of authentic paddlesteamer experiences along the picturesque Murray River," said Craig.

Murray River Paddlesteamers' cruises depart from Echuca, one of the twin towns on the Murray River, a 2.5-hour drive north of Melbourne. Echuca has a long, rich history and much of it is tied to the river alongside it. The Port of Echuca, which visitors can still explore, was built in 1865 and grew to be one of the largest inland ports in Australia. Riversteamers were essential to the growth and expansion of this town and many others, transporting goods, mail, livestock (on barges) and later passengers, and during its busiest era the Port of Echuca had more than 240 boats trading from its docks. And while other modes of transport did take over the role, the lure of the paddlesteamer continues.





When we asked Craig Burgess what makes the company unique, they said: "It is the combination of rich history, breathtaking landscapes and personalised service."

These features and the success of the company have been duly awarded, and Murray River Paddlesteamers has won medals at past Regional Tourism Awards and Victorian Tourism Awards (VTIC).

So, let's step aboard and explore the tours on offer.

Traverse the mighty Murray

There are a variety of tours from which to choose, ensuring there is something to suit travellers of every age and interest. And no matter which tour guests choose, they will surely disembark with a deeper understanding and appreciation of this beautiful river and the paddlesteamers that travel along it. Keen photographers should definitely take their cameras along to capture the spectacular views.

All cruises can be booked on the Murray River Paddlesteamer website, with live cruise and cabin availability. It is recommended to book tours in advance, especially during peak seasons.

Single day tours

The single day tours are a great versatile option for families, couples, history buffs and more. The hour-long cruises on the 110-year-old PS *Canberra* offer an iconic experience, and kids can get a photo taken at the helm and receive a personalised skipper certificate to mark their time as 'captain' of the paddlesteamer. The captain and crew offer fun and interesting commentary on the surrounds, the vessel and its history, which guests of all ages will enjoy. These hour-long cruises run multiple times a day, and offer bathroom facilities, an onboard kiosk with a selection of refreshments and snacks for purchase, and you are also permitted to bring aboard a small to medium size dog on a leash.

For those who want all the perks of the hour-long cruise but also want to explore some of the local flavours while in the area, the Wharf to Winery lunch cruise or the Port to Plate lunch or dinner cruise are fantastic options. These cruises will take a bit longer — approximately three hours — but you'll still have plenty of time to enjoy the ride along the river to and from either Morrisons Restaurant and Winery or Bar Lee.





Multi-day tours

Multi-day tours offer the chance to truly immerse yourself in the paddlesteamer lifestyle, and Murray River Paddlesteamers offers three, four and seven-night tours. These are currently run on the PS *Emmylou*, but from June 2025 there will be a new vessel taking over these tours — we'll delve into this a bit later.

These multi-day tours allow guests to relax and soak in the unique beauty of the Murray and create some long-lasting memories, both on board and in the surrounding region. The tour itineraries include time on shore with visits to local wineries, museums and historical sites, including Perricoota Station where *All the Rivers Run* was filmed, and a Heritage Farm Museum, ensuring all guests gain a true appreciation of the Murray region and its history.

One of the other fan-favourite perks of the multi-day tours is the Murray River Paddlesteamers signature riverside barbecue, complete with a river campfire and toasting marshmallows.



All meals, including morning and afternoon tea, are provided, and the talented on-board chef ensures everyone is well-fed, using fresh, locally sourced ingredients to create world-class cuisines.

The PS *Emmylou* offers a perfect blend of history and luxury, and in addition to its beautiful communal spaces, boasts eight beautifully styled cabins to choose from. [Full descriptions and layouts can be found on the Murray River Paddlesteamers website](#), ensuring guests can book a cabin that suits their style and needs.





This historic wood-fired paddlesteamer has been an icon in the Murray River Paddlesteamers fleet for many years, and while it remains a beloved vessel, the team is excited to announce that the multi-day cruises aboard the PS *Emmylou* are soon to be taken over by the new PS *Australian Star*.

The PS *Australian Star*

Set to launch in June 2025, the PS *Australian Star* will be the world's only wood-fired paddlesteamer performing multi-day cruises, and is currently under construction in Mildura, Vic.



Render of the PS Australian Star due to launch in June 2025

"[The PS *Australian Star*] marks a significant milestone for us, offering enhanced facilities and exciting new tour options," commented Craig. "The PS *Australian Star* will redefine river cruising, offering year-round, all-inclusive, overnight experiences with three, four and seven-night itineraries along the Murray River."

Seamlessly taking over the reins from the PS *Emmylou*, the PS *Australian Star* promises a voyage that blends tradition with opulence. "The vessel itself is a masterpiece, a floating testament to the artistry and engineering that defined an era," Craig said. "Immerse yourself in the symphony of steam from the authentic 1907 wood-fired steam engine and the rhythmic churning of the paddlewheel as we embark on a leisurely voyage along the winding waters of the Murray River."





Queen Stateroom on the PS Australian Star

Named in honour of the iconic Southern Cross constellation, this new paddlesteamer features 19 plush and modern staterooms, each opening to a deck and featuring an ensuite, air conditioning, complimentary wi-fi, luxury linen and a TV entertainment system, as well as the beautiful and ever-changing views.

The cabins and lounges exude an air of refinement and transports guests back to the golden age of river cruising. Sit and soak up the atmosphere of the Hopwood Lounge and Bar, named after Echuca's founder, Henry Hopwood, before heading over to the Randell Dining Room where you can pay homage to the pioneering journey of William Randell, who in 1853 fulfilled his dream of becoming the first man to cruise along the Murray from South Australia to Echuca.

"As the PS *Australian Star* prepares to grace the waters, it beckons you to join a voyage where tradition meets modernity, and luxury becomes an art form."



PS Australian Star's Hopwood Lounge and Bar

Book now and save

Bookings for the PS *Australian Star* are now open. Book now using the promo code 'OpeningStar' to save 10 per cent.

Alternatively, *Caravan World* readers can save 10 per cent on any 2024 cruise using the promo code 'CWORLD'.

The best time to visit

When it comes to the seasons, there's no bad time of year to experience a Murray River Paddlesteamer cruise, as the river itself is beautiful from spring through to winter.

As with many sites and experiences around Australia, if you want to avoid the crowds it's best to book outside school holidays and other peak seasons. This will also work in your favour when booking in at caravan parks.

While many of us associate water-based experiences with warmer weather, Craig assured us that winter is truly a beautiful time of year to experience a cruise along the Murray River, particularly if you opt for a multi-day tour. "Seeing the mist rise above the river as the sun rises is fabulous and the campfires are a real treat in the cooler months," Craig said. And best yet, Murray River Paddlesteamers offers 10 per cent off winter cruising.





What to do with your car and van?

As many of our readers will have a car and van setup, one thing to consider is where you'll leave your home away from home during one of the tours, especially if you opt for a multi-day cruise.

Rest assured, Murray River Paddlesteamers has you covered. The company offers a secure car parking site in the form of a locked warehouse. This secure car park is just \$50 per night for a car and caravan or \$25 per night for a car only. To find out more, simply call the Murray River Paddlesteamers services team.

Alternatively, the multi-day tours do offer complimentary return train tickets from Melbourne.





Adding to the adventure

From taking in the river views and spotting local wildlife through to visiting local wineries and sites, there's plenty on board to keep guests busy during a tour.

But while you're in the area, there are some fantastic places to explore before or after your Murray River Paddlesteamer cruise. History buffs, adventurous souls and foodies will all find something to love in and around Echuca.

Here are some to get you going:

- Port of Echuca
- Billabong Ranch Adventure Park & Trail Rides
- Cactus Country
- Murray Darling Scenic Flights
- River Country Adventours
- Echuca Chocolate Company

Once you've enjoyed a paddlesteamer cruise you may want to get even closer to the water, and the best way to do this is by hiring a kayak or stand-up paddleboard from one of the local businesses.

And don't forget to partake in the local flavours by visiting the many restaurants, cafes, wineries and breweries in the area.

Murray River Paddlesteamers offers VIP experiences at different times throughout the year, and these are always crowd-pleasers. The details and dates for VIP experiences are sent out to the Murray River Paddlesteamers member base, so join the mail list to be part of these events. To join the mail list, sign up [here](#).

A lesson in history

Every trip aboard one of Murray River Paddlesteamers is an immersion in history, but for those wanting to explore a bit further, the team at Murray River Paddlesteamers recommends starting at the [Echuca Historical Society](#) or the [Port of Echuca Discovery Centre](#).





Find out more

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