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# The Great Escape



PICTURED: Relaxing in the thermal waters at Peninsula Hot Springs on the Mornington Peninsula  
OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT:  
Li'Tya spa products, available at Peninsula Hot Springs;  
Hot Springs Bathing Valley Evening at Peninsula  
Hot Springs; Cape Schanck Lighthouse at dusk

Thermal springs were first discovered simmering below the surface of Mornington Peninsula in 1979, but it was a quarter of a century before this natural wonder was channelled into Victoria's only thermal springs and day spa – just one of the treats that await you on the peninsula...

**T**he Peninsula Hot Springs story began in 1992, in the onsen (hot springs) town of Kutsatsu, Japan. Dairy exporter Charles Davidson

was spending a particularly tough day poring over Japanese textbooks when a friend lured him away to his first onsen. For Davidson the experience was a revelation.

"The sense of connection and relaxation was amazing," he says. "I couldn't work out why we didn't have anything like it at home."

The dream of Australian hot springs set amongst natural surrounds was born that day, but it wasn't until a chance conversation five years later that Davidson began to see how it might happen. In 1997 a colleague at the Australian Embassy in Tokyo asked him about his future plans. Davidson confessed to a growing obsession with bringing the onsen experience to Australia, but lamented that there were no hot springs in his home state of Victoria. His colleague told him thermal mineral springs had, in fact, been discovered on the Mornington Peninsula in 1979, but had never been developed.

Later that year Davidson, his brother and a third investor purchased 42 acres of land containing the springs and began drilling, water testing, applying for permits and building. To fund their endeavour Davidson opened a B&B called Mizu (Japanese for 'water') on site, offering accommodation and outdoor bathing in a more rustic form than the lush wonderland they were working towards.

Peninsula Hot Springs finally opened its doors in June 2005, with the Spa Dreaming Centre appearing first. It's reserved for



## SPA DREAMING


Peninsula Hot Springs draws on global bathing experiences with a strong Australian influence. Treatments at the Spa Dreaming Centre incorporate Aboriginal smoke ceremonies and a range of spa exclusive products dreamed up by Li'Tya (meaning 'of the earth'). Patrons begin their treatment with a luxurious soak in a private pool before being lavished with natural products made from wattle seed, Tasmanian kelp and wild rosella flowers. The popular Mikiri (meaning 'deep') Facial is so much more than just a facial, incorporating a double mask, scalp massage, hand/foot massage and Aboriginal pressure point facial massage over a blissful hour you'll want to hold on to. Fortunately, the centre's relaxation rooms are equipped with herbal tea and cocoon-like couches that allow you to sit back and do just that.

## HIGHLY MINERALISED WATER MORE THAN 1,000 YEARS OLD, BUBBLES UP FROM 637 METRES BELOW THE EARTH'S SURFACE

patrons over 16 and consists of dine and bathe packages, treatment rooms, private pools and a magnificent Arabian Marquee for group bookings. Next came the public baths, with bathing experiences including a sauna, Turkish 'hamam' (steam room), reflexology walk and moon viewing pool.

Highly mineralised water, estimated to be more than 1,000 years old, bubbles up from 637 metres below the Earth's surface to fill each of the pools. The water temperature starts at 50 degrees and is cooled to between 37 and 43 degrees.

The primary minerals in the water are sodium, chloride and bicarbonate, along with significant levels of magnesium, potassium, sulphur, boron and trace minerals. Potential health benefits include improvements to circulation, rheumatic and central nervous system conditions, arthritis, post-traumatic and post-operative disorders.

Peninsula Hot Springs is constantly evolving, with plans for accommodation, walking tracks and a wellness centre to give patrons a longer, more immersive experience. In the meantime Davidson is working on a Finnish bathing experience with an ice cave due to open next summer. Visit [www.peninsulahotsprings.com](http://www.peninsulahotsprings.com) 



## MORE TO DO ON THE PENINSULA...

★ Cape Schanck, on the craggy southern tip of the boot-shaped Peninsula, is a great place to begin or end your day. Arrive before dawn and head down one of many walking tracks to watch historic Cape Schanck Lighthouse materialise at first light, or settle in at the end of the day to see it silhouetted against the setting sun. Guided tours are conducted daily ([www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au))

★ If you're heading to the coastal towns of Portsea and Sorrento in the Peninsula's 'toe', be sure to stop in at Just Fine Food to sample their famous vanilla slice. It is rich enough to split with a friend, and worth stopping for! (23 Ocean Road, Sorrento, (03) 5984 4666)

★ Moonlit Sanctuary is a unique wildlife park spread across 25 acres. It is a haven to over 30 native species and has conducted successful breeding programs for rare and endangered species including Eastern Quolls and Squirrel Gliders. Drop in to experience the Australian bush on the coast (550 Tyabb Tooradin Road, Pearcedale (03) 5978 7935)

