Podcast 158 – A Ferry Ride on Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack
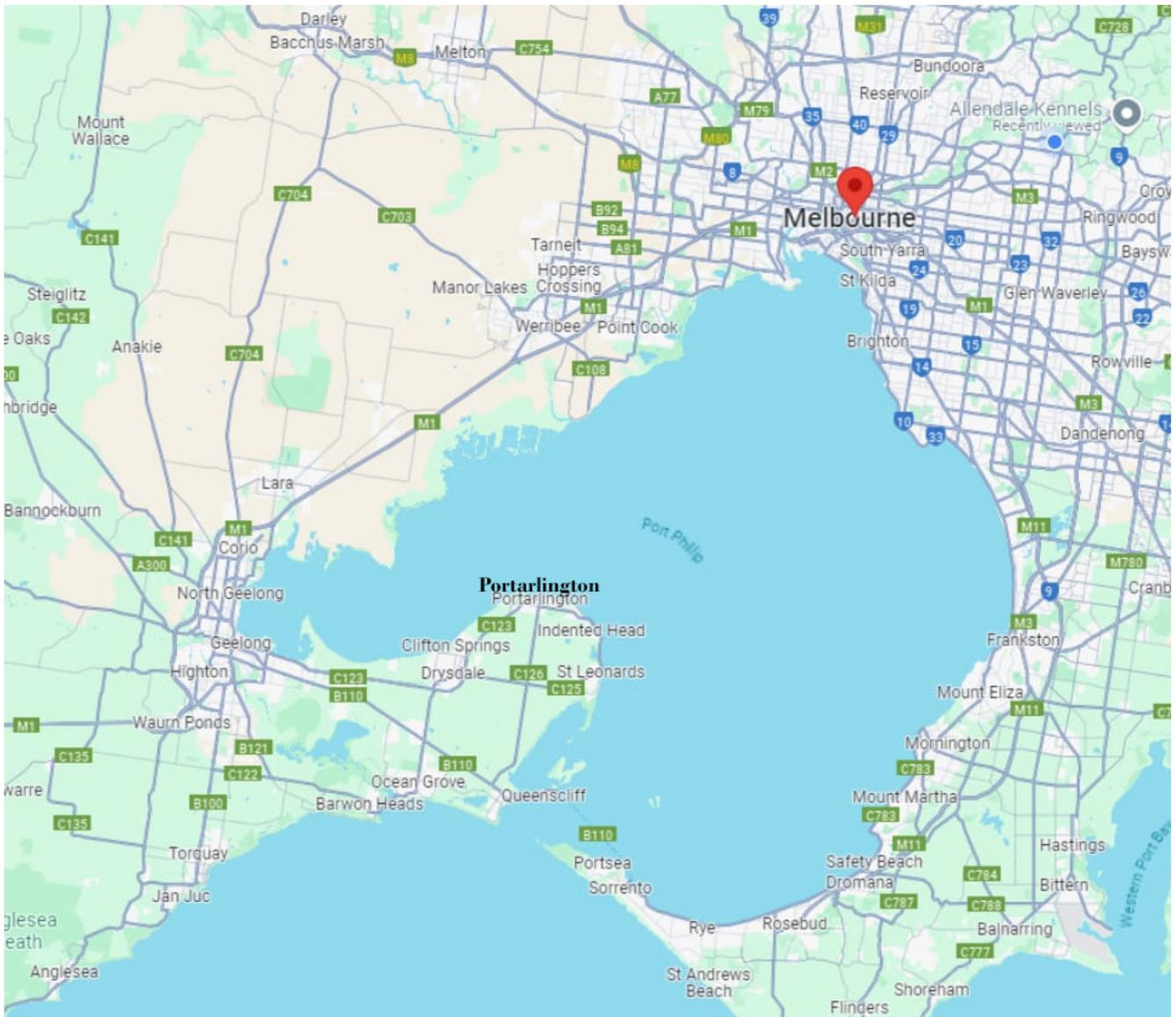
Podcast Number 158 – A Ferry Ride Across Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay

https://traffic.libsyn.com/secure/slowenglish/podcast158.mp3

(This podcast is 13 minutes long.)

Hi,

Melbourne is my home town and is located on the shores of Port Phillip Bay. The bay is quite large and is an important commercial and recreational resource for the city of Melbourne. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about the bay and a recent ferry ride which I and my wife took across the bay to a small town called Portarlington.

A map showing Portarlington, across the bay from Melbourne's centre. Made using Google Maps.

On a map, you can see that Port Phillip Bay is shaped like a horse head and covers around 1930 square kilometres. It is 58 km long from north to south and 41 km wide from east to west. Its shore line is around 264 kilometres long. It is connected to the ocean by a channel which is only 3.5 km wide. Port Phillip Bay is separated from the ocean waters of Bass Strait by the Mornington Peninsula in the southeast and by the Bellarine Peninsula in the southwest. Portarlington lies on the Bellarine Peninsula. The centre of Melbourne lies on the north side of the bay, and Portarlington lies on the south side of the bay. The ferry ride from the centre of Melbourne to Portarlington is 45 kms long, which takes around 70

minutes.

Port Phillip Bay offers many recreational and sporting opportunities for Melburnians. For example, sailing is very popular and there are 36 yacht clubs around the bay. Fishing is also a popular pastime, either from small boats or from one of the many jetties around the bay. Swimming is of course also popular as there are many beaches around the bay, some with their own surf lifesaving club to help keep people safe (see [Podcast 32](#)). Scuba diving is also very popular. In the past, my wife and I have enjoyed owning a small sailing boat which we sailed on the bay. However, nowadays we like to travel on the bay using one of the ferries.

The ferry we took was the 9.30 am Docklands to Portarlington ferry, which is operated by Port Phillip Ferries (see https://www.portphillipferries.com.au/). Docklands is the harbour district of Melbourne and is close to the city centre, just a short walk from Southern Cross Railway Station which is one of Melbourne's main railway stations. The ferry is quite new and travels at a maximum speed of around 50kph for most of the trip.

Our ferry to Portarlington — "The Bellarine Express".
Photo by Silvia McCormack.

This trip was a day outing for us. We chose a weekday instead
of the weekend, as it would mean fewer people and therefore a
more relaxed trip. We caught the bus from our home to Southern
Cross Station in the city centre. From there we walked for
about 7 minutes and arrived at the Docklands ferry terminal.
 This area of the city is quite picturesque, with many
restaurants and cafes close to the water. We arrived early at
the ferry ticket office, which is near the ferry berth. In
the front of the ticket office was a nice café serving drinks
and snacks. As we had around 30 minutes until we could board
the ferry, we ordered two coffees and some raisin toast and
sat down to enjoy them. In the meantime, the ferry arrived
from Portarlington with commuters who had left Portarlington
on the 7.15am ferry to Docklands. We were amazed at how many
people got off the ferry. These are people who obviously live

in Portarlington or nearby and travel each day to their jobs
in the centre of Melbourne. They would all be catching the
5.40pm ferry to get back home that evening. I can't think of
a more relaxing way to get to and from work each day.

With 20 minutes until departure, we boarded the ferry. As
expected, it was not crowded at all. We had the choice
between sitting inside with a good view through the large
windows, or outside and enjoying the fresh air. As the ferry
left the harbour, we were able to view the waterfront
buildings and the city skyline. I must admit I was surprised
how impressive the city looks from the water. We took some
great photos as the ferry made its way through the harbour.

Rob poses on the stern deck as we leave the Docklands wharf.
Photo by Silvia McCormack.

The Bolte Bridge over the harbour in Melbourne. Named after one of Victoria's past Premiers.
Photo by Silvia McCormack.

For the first 2 kilometres or so, the ferry travelled at a modest pace. We passed the large wharves where large container ships and other cargo ships were having their cargo off-loaded or on-loaded. The Port of Melbourne is Australia's largest port for transport of cargo. It was interesting to see the high number of large cranes and other specialized loading equipment. While I am no expert, it seemed to me that this equipment was quite new and highly automated.

Some of the loading equipment at the Port of Melbourne.
Photo by Silvia McCormack.

Once we got past all the shipping wharves, the ferry soon
increased speed to around 50 kph. It was fascinating to stand
on the rear deck and watch the city buildings slowly get
smaller and smaller as we sped across the bay to
Portarlington. The weather was perfect for such an outing.
There were some clouds and the temperature was a comfortable
23 degrees Celsius.

I enjoyed watching the ferry's white wake as we sped away from Docklands and towards Portarlington.

One of the things I like about being on a ferry is watching the boat's wake and looking at the bird life on the water. As the bay is quite protected from the ocean winds, the trip was quite smooth. On board there was also a kiosk where you could buy drinks and snacks, although on this occasion we were too busy enjoying the view and the fresh air.

With the Melbourne city skyline almost disappearing below the horizon, we finally arrived at our destination at Portarlington and disembarked. The wharf there was quite small, with a jetty and two seawalls giving it some protection from the weather. On the seawalls we could see many people strolling or fishing. We thought, yes, we must walk along both of these seawalls before we leave.

Portarlington is quite small, so we were able to walk around

it, check out the shops (including the Portarlington Grand Hotel), take in the views out over the bay and take some more photos. Some of the passengers chose to take a winery tour to vineyards around the area, but we will do that another time.

The view across the bay from Portarlington.

At around midday we returned to the hotel and ordered two servings of the local specialty – mussels.

The Portarlington Grand Hotel.
Photo by Silvia McCormack

At the Portarlington Grand Hotel, about to enjoy our meal of
Mussels.
Photo by Silvia McCormack.

They were delicious, although as the waitress had warned us, we did get our hands a little messy getting all the delicious meat out of the shells. That was all part of enjoying the experience. Having left the hotel, we bought ourselves 2 ice cream cones from the ice cream shop next door.

Rob enjoying his ice cream cone after our lunch of Portarlington mussels.
Photo by Silvia McCormack.

All that remained for us was to walk back down to the jetty
and along each of the seawalls. It was great to see the
locals out there with their fishing rods and lines trying to
catch the local fish. I was impressed with their equipment
and seating which they had. Many had small trolleys to carry
it all. They were obviously serious about catching fish,
while at the same time being comfortable and ready for a few
hours fishing. Who doesn't feel relaxed fishing on a quiet
seawall?

Strollers and fishermen and women on the seawall in
Portarlington.
Photo by Silvia McCormack

At 20 minutes to 4 o'clock, we were able to board the ferry. The return journey to Docklands in the city was very relaxing indeed. We sat on the front deck this time, with the wind gently tugging at our caps as the city skyline slowly came into view. I can't think of a more relaxing activity than sitting in a comfortable chair on the deck of ferry, enjoying the smell of seawater, watching the waves and feeling like I had no worries in the world. In 70 minutes, we arrived back at Docklands, ready to catch the bus back home.

If you visit Melbourne, I think a ferry trip on Port Phillip Bay is a worthwhile activity.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 158 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

 Play automated = when a machine doesn't need people to work it, it runs by itself

☐ Play berth = where a boat or ship stops next to a wharf

☐ Play board = (here) to go onto a boat or ship or plane

☐ Play caps = (here) a small hat

☐ Play cargo = the things which a ship carries from one place to another

☐ Play channel = a narrow place where water can flow

☐ Play commercial = to do with a business, to do with money

☐ Play commuters = people who are travelling to or from work

☐ Play connected = to be joined with

☐ Play container = (here) a large metal box used to carry cargo on a ship

☐ Play cranes = large machines which can lift heavy loads (e.g. from a ship to land)

☐ Play delicious = tastes very good

☐ Play departure = when you leave (on a train, a boat, bus or plane)

☐ Play destination = the place where you are going to

☐ Play disembarked = to get off a ship or plane

☐ Play equipment = machines to help you do a job

☐ Play expert = someone who knows a lot about a subject or topic

☐ Play fascinating = very, very interesting

☐ Play ferry = a small ship which carries people

☐ Play harbour district = that area of a town or city next to the harbour (where ships go)

Play horizon = where the land meets the ocean in the distance

 Play impressive = very, very good

 Play jetties = a walkway built from the land out onto the water

 Play kiosk = a very small shop where you can buy things

 Play located = where something is

 Play messy = not very clean, not well organised

 Play modest = when something is good, but not very good

 Play mussels = a type of shell fish like an oyster, black in colour, grows on rocks

 Play occasion = an event, when something happens

 Play operated = managed, looked after, controlled

 Play opportunities = when you have the chance to do something not normally possible

 Play ordered = to ask for something in a shop (to buy)

 Play outing = a trip to somewhere, normally for fun or pleasure

 Play pastime = a hobby, something you do for fun in your spare time

 Play peninsula = a piece of land which is like an island, but still connected to the mainland

 Play picturesque = is pleasant to look at

 Play recreational = for pleasure, for fun

 Play relaxed = when you are not worried about anything

Play resource = something you can use

 Play Scuba = a device to allow you to breath underwater

 Play seawalls = a wall of stone or rock built out into the water, where you can walk

 Play separated = kept apart, not together

 Play shores = where the water meets the land

 Play skyline = the shape which city buildings make when seen from a distance

 Play smooth = not rough

 Play snacks = a very small meal, normally eaten between meals

 Play specialized loading equipment = machines which do a very difficult job

 Play strolling = walking slowly

 Play take in the views = to look at the views

 Play terminal = the place where a ferry or bus service finishes or starts

 Play trolleys = a small vehicle on wheels which can help you carry things

 Play tugging = pulling

 Play wake = (here) the white water left behind a ship as it sails along

 Play waterfront = that part of a town or city which is next to the harbour

 Play wharves = where ships stop, found in a harbour

⬜ Play yacht = a boat with sails