

SATURDAY AGE

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# TRAVELLER

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 12, 2022



## RUSH HOUR

Bearing witness to one of nature's greatest spectacles

IN ALL CONSCIENCE | The one question to ask yourself before travel  
SUITE DREAMS | How to bring a hotel home with you



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NATAGE E001



In the zone at Alba Hot Springs; outdoor spa jets and the spa lounge.

SHOWCASE

# Springs fever

Australia's biggest spa and hot springs retreat has opened on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, sharing a postcode with, and bringing competition to the firmly established Peninsula Hot Springs, which is a mere three minutes' drive down the road.

With 31 pools – no two alike – across a 15-hectare property, at Alba, you can bask in the heat, plunge in the cold, paddle in a pool built for one or two, or relax with your pals in a larger concern.

The beautifully designed and landscaped property also features 22 spa treatment rooms and an extensive treatment menu as well as Thyme, a 120-seat restaurant by celebrity chef, Karen Martini.

NATAGE E004

Unlike the Peninsula Hot Springs which puts the glam into glamping with its permanent tented accommodation and which is developing three further eco pod-style lodgings, you can't stay at Alba – yet. Its accommodation is expected to be ready in 2023 or 2024.

But the property has an affiliation with luxury hotel Jackalope in Merricks North, 30 minutes' drive away (though still on the Peninsula). The "Jackalope x Alba: Take Me There" package offers two nights at the hotel and access to Alba's pools with transfers.

Most of Australia's mineral springs are in Victoria and concentrated in and around the Central Highland towns of Daylesford and Hepburn, now

synonymous with soaking in benefits of these remarkably therapeutic waters – benefits of which the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples knew long before Europeans began bathing there.

But the Victorian coastline's geothermal water supply is extensive, thanks to the Otway Basin, which stretches for more than half the state's coastline including the Mornington Peninsula and Gippsland. The latter is where the people behind Peninsula Hot Springs are set to open the COVID-delayed, much anticipated Metung Hot Springs on November 18. See [albaternalsprings.com.au](http://albaternalsprings.com.au)

Julietta Jameson



## FLIGHT PATH AER LINGUS

**THE ROUTE** Aer Lingus flight EI154, Dublin to London Heathrow.

**THE AIRCRAFT** While most on this route are the Airbus A320 (the backbone of the short-haul fleet), I'm in luck and flying in the Airbus A321neo LR, the newest, most fuel-efficient Aer Lingus aircraft which also travels trans-Atlantic routes. This means roomy seats, large in-seat screens, international power points and a 50 per cent reduction in engine noise.

**THE LOYALTY SCHEME** Aer Lingus club is AerClub. They've also curated their own group of code share partners including Etihad, British Airways and United Airlines. Status is recognised and I unexpectedly receive fast track perks thanks to my Etihad status.

**CLASS** Economy, looking pristine with a fresh charcoal and blue palette.

**DURATION** One hour 25 minutes, on time.

**CARBON EMISSIONS** Aer Lingus is part of the International Airlines Group which has committed to achieving net zero by 2050.

**FREQUENCY** This is the bread and butter milk run route, with 17 daily flights to London.

**HEALTH** The aircraft are fitted with hospital-grade filtration technology; cabin air is replaced every three minutes. Masks optional.

**CHECKING IN** Pre-8am flyers can check in from 4pm-7:45pm the night before. My biggest concern, matched by check-in agent James, is my bounty of Cork jams from local markets that mightn't clear security. "We can't have that," he quips as he checks in my (slightly overweight) carry-on bag with no charge.

**THE SEAT** Business class has lie-flat seats. In economy, I'm in a middle seat, but don't mind due to a sense of space. It's a standard 18-inch width, but less padding makes it feel larger.

**BAGGAGE** A 10kg carry-on bag up to 10kg is included free and a 20kg bag costs €20 (\$30). Even with a last-minute booking, this fare was only slightly more expensive than low-cost, abominable Ryanair on the same route.

**FOOD** Food suspended at the time of flying due to COVID health measures.

**ENTERTAINMENT** The range is far superior to a recent long-haul flight. There are TV box sets, blockbusters and documentaries.

**SERVICE** Efficient, relaxed, friendly.

**ONE MORE THING** The airport is only 15 minutes from the city so a weekend visit is easy.

**VERDICT** The interior, great entertainment, competitive price and friendly staff makes this revamped carrier one of the best in Europe.

### OUR RATING OUT OF FIVE



Flip Byrnes

The writer travelled as a guest of Tourism Ireland.