

PLAYING AROUND THE PENINSULA

with Andrea Thomas

Here's a subjective question... What makes a playground "the best"? According to seven year old, Sierra, it "has to be big and have loads of equipment or it has to have something a bit different to everywhere else."

Four year old Alexander wants "lots of sand" and many ways to move it! Children of varied ages all like something different in a playground. So, with that in mind, we looked for playgrounds that had something for everyone, even the grown ups. Enlisting a troupe of children aged 4-12, we went on a series of road trips around the Peninsula to seek out the top five "best" playgrounds. We took into account: variety of equipment, setting - for beauty and safety (all are off the main road), nearby amenities, visibility for those watching the kids, innovative design and just plain fun factor. We hope you will like our chosen favourites. Here are our top five picks, with pretty much equal preference. See you around the playground!

1. "I like the tube slide and it's close to the beach," remarks Patrick, 7, of the Frankston Foreshore Playground. (Mel 102 B3) You can't beat this playground for its idyllic seaside setting and its cool selection of equipment. Reminiscent of turreted medieval castles melting in the sun, the whimsical design of this playground appeals to children and grown ups alike. It is colourful, fun and full of ingenuity like the bells that play underfoot as you walk from the expansive shaded sand pit to the larger play structure. Slides to suit all levels of maturity and adventure abound.



Hidden in the larger structure are musical instruments and other surprises. This playground has a full range of swings, including one for disabled children. There are tables, benches, plenty of shade sails and BBQs within the complex. It's important to keep a keen eye

out for kids as they sometimes appear to have disappeared (usually swallowed up by the tube slide!) The playground is a stone's throw from the beach if you want a change of scenery. There are toilets and food facilities nearby. The playground intersects with a scenic boardwalk which runs roughly from the base of Oliver's Hill to the Frankston Pier. At the end of the boardwalk, you can explore the beautifully designed foreshore promenade complete with mosaic inlay by master artist, Anna Minardo. Kannanook Creek meanders up from the beach for further walking enjoyment with picnicking area adjacent. The bridge over the creek is a lovely place to stand and stare out to sea after playground exhaustion sets in.

2. "Wow! This place is so awesome!" says Nikita, 12, of Sorrento Park Playground (Mel 157 B6) This vast wooden fortress is a labyrinth of cubby holes, climbing spaces and balancing challenges. It's a virtual village of play equipment connected by bridges, climbing nets, tunnels and balance beams. There are areas to sit and watch built into the structure, but visibility once kids enter the wormholes is still a challenge so be prepared to move around. Quick slides at the top of steep and narrow climbs are a highlight as is the unique twin swing which fits two very cozily.

There are lots of swings, slides and a multiplicity of choice play equipment. All this is set on a massive verdant hilltop park overlooking white sand beaches and the rip beyond. Container ships, sailboats and ferries glide silently by in the distance. It's a serene and spectacularly scenic place for a picnic. This park has been around for a very long time as witnessed by the majestic towering cypress pines which provide shade over shapely picnic tables. Within the park are toilets, BBQs and scenic walking paths. This is a beautiful place for a day out.

3. "It's just more fun than other playgrounds," reports, Sam, 9, of the Hastings Foreshore Hillview Playground (Mel 154 K11) Set in the scenic Fred Smith Reserve with extensive grassy grounds, watery mangrove stands as far as the eye can see, historic jetty, moored sailboats and pelicans landing and taking off, this is an ideal playground environment for both adults and children. Excellent visibility with small seats set into the play areas give grown ups an opportunity to sit and relax. This compact marine themed playground is imaginative and colourful. It's got nearly every type of equipment from mini rock climbing walls to a multiple person see saw, a wave rider boat and a giant spongy crab for littlies to climb on.

This is an access for all abilities playground with a special swing for disabled children and easy access to equipment. The skate park next door is a big draw card for older kids. It is a truly well considered playground surrounded by every possible amenity including the spectacular Pelican Park Recreation complex with fantastic swimming pools, gym and a beautifully positioned restaurant overlooking the water, jetty and French Island in the distance.

4. "Heaps of variety! It's got nearly everything!" raves Kaitlyn, 10 of Ballam Park, Frankston Playgrounds (Mel 103 B4) Now this place really is a wonderland in terms of sheer diversity and volume of equipment. There are two onsite playgrounds - one for little children and one for bigger kids although you could overlap in either direction. The older kids playground has some outstanding climbing challenges. If you're training for boot camp, this is your place with a multitude of rock climbing walls, chain mesh nets and a wicked lengthy flying fox. The spinning chairs are very popular. Next to this big kids playground is a smaller enclosed little kids area. It has the most engaging sand play area we've found with a multi-level structure featuring a jug and pulley system and other intriguing ways of shifting sand. There is plenty of time for grown ups to sit on a bench in this gated corral, but the bigger playground is really problematic in terms of keeping sight of the kids. It's easy to "lose" kids here and you've got to watch carefully. This caution also applies to the littlies playground on the other side of the park which has lots of little tunnels. Other than that, this park has all the amenities for a family fun day out.



5. "I love this place!" hoots Alexander, 4, of Eco Park Mt. Martha Community Playground (Mel 150 J2) (pic above) Nestled in a woodland area, across the street from Mt. Martha Primary School, this is a very inventive all abilities playground. It's only in stage one of three planned stages so it lacks a few amenities the other playgrounds offer, such as toilets, but it definitely meets the criteria of having something a bit different to everywhere else. It was designed by RMIT landscape architecture students.

The organic wooden structures make innovative use of materials, such as, corrugated iron and borer chewed posts. The main structure with climbing walls, slides and communication tubes is artfully enhanced by a series of mosaic squares depicting the life cycle of frogs. The flying fox is super smooth! Some rather unique musical instruments are interspersed around this playground, such as, the horizontally spinning Hapi Sonic Scrolls which are metal cylinders with noisy mystery objects inside. Our favourite instrument was the Hapi Tadpole Tapper in the smaller play area. This circular cluster of musically tuned vertical pipes topped with rubber flaps is played like bongos. It's so much fun! This excellent playground is beautifully laid out and full of thoughtful touches.