



JUST HOW GREAT ARE OUR GREATEST?

There is no shortage of superlatives in Australian place names, writes Ben Groundwater.

Australians: we're very good at many things, but naming our landmarks might not be one of them. The Snowy Mountains? The Sunshine Coast? Coral Bay? We're talking the bare minimum of creativity here.

And there's also our propensity to claim greatness in the place we're naming, purely by inserting the word into its title. Because it's not just the Barrier Reef – it's the Great Barrier Reef. And it's not just the Ocean Road, it's the Great Ocean Road.

According to the Geographical Names Board and the VicNames register, there are 67 places or landmarks in NSW and Victoria alone that have the word "great" in their titles. So yes, we love a superlative. The question is, do these places actually live up to their grand monikers? Just how "great" is Australia?

THE PLACE THE GREAT BARRIER REEF, QLD

What's so great Just the world's largest coral reef system, a 2300-kilometre series of islands and coral beds that can be seen from space, and the world's single biggest structure made by living organisms.

What's not so great Aside from the seasickness you may occasionally encounter while accessing the reef, and a coral-bleaching event this past March, very little.

Must see and do Snorkel or scuba dive at Heron Island, Lady Elliot Island, Ribbons Reefs, Stanley Reef and more. Sail the Whitsundays. Stay on an island resort. Relax on Whitehaven Beach.

Essentials The reef is accessible year-round (check for latest restrictions) via various cities in Queensland. See queensland.com

THE PLACE THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT, SA

What's so great There's no doubt this is a large open bay – draw a line from Cape Pasley in Western Australia to Cape Carnot in South Australia and everything north of that is the Great Australian Bight. That's a lot of ocean, and a lot of coast.

What's not so great It's a large body of water, yes, but it's also a little on the chilly side, with an average water temperature of about 14 degrees.

Must see and do This is one of Australia's most important fisheries, a great place to catch tuna in particular. Along the coast you have soaring cliffs where the Nullarbor meets the ocean, plus beaches, oyster farms and whale watching opportunities.

Essentials You can visit the Bight and its coastline year-round, though check on restrictions first. See southaustralia.com

THE PLACE GREAT SANDY DESERT, WA/NT

What's so great This is almost 285,000 square kilometres of desert. The Great Sandy is home to many Indigenous communities, as well as a rich variety of flora and fauna.

What's not so great The name, to begin with. We might as well have called the Pacific, the Great Watery Ocean. A desert is also not everyone's cup of sightseeing tea.

Must see and do The most accessible section of the Great Sandy Desert runs along the West Australian coast from Port Headland to Broome, where the scenery is wild and beautiful; the desert is also home to the Canning Stock Route.

Essentials Be prepared: carry plenty of water and extra fuel. Winter or shoulder seasons are the best time to visit. See westernaustralia.com

THE PLACE GREAT OCEAN ROAD, VIC

What's so great This famous roadway skirts some of southern Australia's most spectacular scenery, including the Twelve Apostles, Loch Ard Gorge and London Arch, as well as rainforests, beaches and cliffs.

What's not so great It's only 243km long, so hardly a road-tripping marathon; also, the Twelve Apostles is only seven visible rock formations. Just saying.

Must see and do Photograph those Twelve Apostles, of course. They're incredible. Go surfing at Bells Beach, walk through Great Otway National Park, check out Mount Noorat, Australia's largest dry volcanic crater, go mountain-biking, canoeing, or play golf.

Essentials This is a great drive year-round, though winter is freezing if you

plan to swim. See visitvictoria.com

THE PLACE GREAT MACKEREL BEACH, NSW

What's so great The term "paradise" gets thrown around a lot; however, if you're one of the 36 people who get to call this incredibly beautiful beach on the shores of Pittwater, in the Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park, home, then you are indeed living in it.

What's not so great Mackerel's greatness – its seclusion and exclusivity – is also its weakness, given you need a boat, and probably a few million spare dollars, to get in here.

Must see and do For non-residents there's little to do. With no public facilities and nowhere to legally tie up your boat, it's almost as if locals don't want visitors.

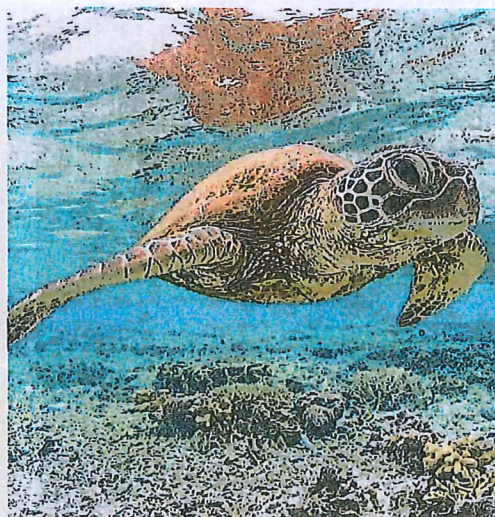
Essentials Access Great Mackerel Beach via water taxi from Palm Beach, or via your personal property portfolio. See visitnsw.com

THE PLACE GREAT DIVIDING RANGE, QLD, NSW, VIC

What's so great Here's a stat for you: the Great Dividing Range is the fifth-longest land-based range in the world. These mountains stretch more than 3500km from Cape York Peninsula in Queensland to the Grampians in Victoria, and include three World Heritage areas.

What's so great "These are huge mountains," said no one, ever.

Must see and do Begin in the tropical rainforests of the Atherton Tablelands; work your way down to the McPherson Ranges and the Scenic Rim, the Gondwana Rainforests, Barrington Tops, the Blue Mountains, the Canberra wine region, the



Clockwise from main: Breadon Hills in the Great Sandy Desert; the Twelve Apostles on the Great Ocean Road; the Great Barrier Reef; the Blue Mountains in the Great Dividing Range; the Great Wall of China. Photos: iStock

Snowy Mountains, Mt Kosciuszko and the Victorian Alps.
Essentials You'll find an area suitable to visit year-round - these are some of the world's most accessible mountains. See australia.com

THE PLACE GREAT KEPPEL ISLAND, QLD

What's so great This island off the coast of Yeppoon in Central Queensland forms part of the Great Barrier Reef and has 17 beaches as well as budget-friendly accommodation.

What's not so great An island the size of a hobby farm doesn't really deserve such a grand title; also, its history as a seedy backpacker resort ("Get Wrecked on Great Keppel") is a hard legacy to shake.

Must see and do Hit the water and take in the reef and the island's impressive fish diversity; go for a hike and spot blue-tongued lizards, possums and lorikeets; go jet-skiing or boating.

Essentials Great Keppel is perfect from October to April. See queensland.com

THE PLACE GREAT OYSTER BAY, TAS

What's so great Few parts of Australia are as beautiful as this body of water hemmed in by the Freycinet peninsula and Schouten Island, with the pink-granite peaks of the Hazards mountain range usually visible.

What's not so great It's a little cold, but nothing the right clothes won't fix.

Must see and do It's no surprise to find Great Oyster Bay is used to farm some excellent seafood, including Pacific and Angasi oysters; it's also a prime fishery and visitors can often spot dolphins, seals and whales. Sea-kayaking is also popular.

Essentials Though the bay is accessible year-round via an easy drive from Hobart, it's at its best in the warmer months. See discovertasmania.com.au

THE PLACE GREAT PALM ISLAND, QLD

What's so great As is tradition, the largest island in the Palm group, off northern Queensland, has been dubbed "great". This outcrop was originally inhabited by the Manbarra people and retains strong Indigenous links.

What's not so great The modern history of Great Palm is a shameful one for Australia: the island was used as a penal settlement in the 20th century, where Aboriginal people were sent for minimal "crimes". Residents successfully filed a class action against the Queensland government in 2016.

Must see and do Though occasional open days are held on the island, there's little opportunity for tourism on Great Palm.

Essentials In non-COVID times, some companies offer day trips from Townsville, including snorkelling or scuba-diving, plus island visits with guided tours and art classes. See adrenalindive.com.au

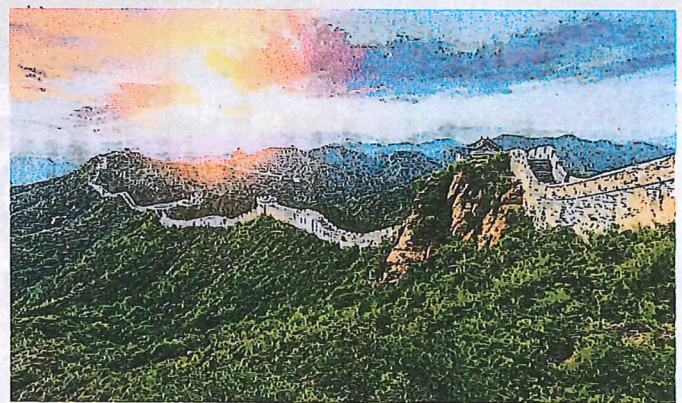
THE PLACE GREAT VICTORIA DESERT, WA/SA

What's so great Australia's largest desert is about twice the size of the United Kingdom, a huge swathe of sandhills, grasslands and salt lakes that straddles Western and South Australia.

What's not so great Though the Nullarbor Plain, to the south, is a recognised tourist draw, there isn't a lot for visitors to do in the Great Victoria itself.

Must see and do Pack up the 4WD, fill the jerry cans, charge the sat phone and head out for an adventure: a camping trip through the Great Victoria, following the corrugated dirt of the Anne Beadell Highway, is an amazing way to view a UNESCO World Biosphere.

Essentials If you're heading to the desert, winter is best. See diamantina-tour.com.au



FIVE 'GREAT' INTERNATIONAL DESTINATIONS

GREAT RIFT VALLEY, KENYA

There's no doubting this 6000 kilometre valley's "great" credentials: the Great Rift runs from Lebanon to Mozambique, though it's at its deepest and most spectacular in Kenya. Picture scenery from the *Lion King* - you're there. See magicalkenya.com

early as the 7th century BC, and now measures as long as 21,000 kilometres in its entirety. A phenomenal achievement. See discoverchina.com

GREAT LAKES, US

This is the largest group of freshwater lakes on Earth, by area, and in the Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario you have some of the United States and Canada's most beautiful aquatic scenery. See visittheusa.com.au

GREAT ZIGURAT OF UR, IRAQ

If you ever make it to southern Iraq, this will be the most impressive ziggurat you've ever seen - and, if we can be so presumptuous, the only one. A ziggurat is a Neo-Sumerian temple, and Ur's was first constructed in the Bronze Age.

GREAT WALL OF CHINA

Hard to argue with this one, pictured above. The Great Wall is a series of fortifications that began appearing as

GREAT BRITAIN

Here's an indicator of the origin of Australians' love for the "great" superlative: Great Britain, an entire country that was so bold as to proclaim its significance to the world. Whether it still lives up to the moniker is your call. See visitbritain.com

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