

LANDMARK POSTCODE

3380



View of the Grampians from the main street of Stawell.
Image courtesy of Tourism Victoria.

Story: Sheryl Allen

LOCATION: Stawell
2.5 hours northwest of Melbourne

POPULATION: 7,000

INDUSTRIES: Mining, tourism, manufacturing, agriculture

CLIMATE: Temperate
Summer: 12.0°C – 28.5°C
Winter: 4.2°C – 12.8°C
Rainfall: 533mm

You can't talk about the Victorian Wimmera town of Stawell without mentioning the Stawell Gift, Australia's richest and most famous foot race.

Each Easter, the gift showcases Stawell to thousands of visitors and hundreds of thousands of television viewers. With more than 125 years of history it's an iconic entry on the Australian sporting calendar.

The gift is an obvious drawcard but it's just one chapter in the story of Stawell.

Settled during the 1853 gold rush, Stawell is positioned as the Gateway to the Grampians and the heart of one of Victoria's key agricultural districts.

Sheep and cattle grazing, and dryland cereal cropping are the mainstays, according to Landmark's Bruce McIlvride.

"The farming country is looking great," Bruce confirms. "Good rains have brought water back into the main catchment, with storages returning to healthier double-digit levels. Rural dams and lakes are filling – some for the first

time in five years. There'll be plenty of yabbing and fishing this summer."

With the rain comes improved confidence in the property market.

"Our residential market had a very active start to the year due to the First Home Buyers Scheme. There's been some slowing towards the end of the financial year and now we're looking at those active spring listings that will bring stock levels back up," reports Bruce. "We're already seeing a direct impact on enquiry from prospective homeowners and holiday property investors."

"Stawell's location is central – two hours to the Murray River, two hours to the coast at Warrnambool, two and a half hours to Melbourne. Everything is within reach."

"It all just seems to tick along here," says Bruce. "There's a very strong sense of community. It's a place where the aged are very well cared for, as are younger people with special needs."

Statistics showing that the Health and Community Services sector is third only to agriculture and retail in terms of workforce numbers. A \$20 million health precinct will be completed early 2010 and \$5 million is being injected into improving educational facilities.

Manufacturing is alive and well with around 200 employed at the Frewstal Abattoirs and many others in service businesses supporting the agricultural and commercial sectors.

The historic Magdala Mine was reopened during the 1980s and is now Victoria's largest operating gold mine. It provides permanent jobs for around 200 people plus scores of sub-contractors, ensuring that the search for

gold generates considerable flow-on to Stawell's present-day economy, just as it did 150 years ago.

Tourism is the new treasure. More than a million people visit the nearby Grampians National Park each year, many of them journeying via Stawell to explore the rich colonial history and enjoy the hospitality of its fine providores, restaurateurs and accommodation operators.

Mine sub-contractors, hospitality employees, teachers, nurses and tourists drive strong rental demand. "Stawell has some 500 rental properties under management and returns are in the vicinity of seven percent," says Bruce.

While the gift may be the jewel in Stawell's crown, it is one of many gems that make this town a unique and much-loved place.

CONTACT:

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PROPERTY GUIDE:

Residential: newish three-bedroom home
\$250,000-\$270,000

Lifestyle: 8-acres with three-bedroom home
\$200,000-\$300,000

Lifestyle: unimproved 20-acre block
\$100,000-\$130,000