

9. Housing



Victoria offers a wide variety of housing types - everything from the modern family home, townhouse or apartment to the older Edwardian and Victorian homes. The older regions of Victoria, typically the inner-city area and regional centres, feature many homes that are older in construction. They are traditionally double brick or weatherboard and have often been renovated. Modern inner-city apartments have been developed throughout the city and surrounding suburbs, making this medium-density housing region a highly appealing place to live.

For those wanting to live further away from the Melbourne Central Business District, the outer suburbs of Melbourne and the regions across Victoria offer a relaxed, often picturesque lifestyle.

The most common style of housing is the single storey, detached brick veneer home. It usually includes three bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, separate kitchen, separate laundry, garage or carport and one or two bathrooms. Five-bedroom homes are harder to find, as are homes with three bathrooms. Most homes have both a front and a back garden. Carpets, drapes, light fittings, kitchen cupboards and stoves/ovens are included with the house. In some apartments, a clothes dryer will be included as well as a microwave. Some houses will also feature a dishwasher for the tenant's use. Hot-water services are often located in the laundry or on the outside of the house. Most homes will feature a shower and bathtub in the main bathroom. Older, traditional-style homes will rarely have built-in wardrobes due to the architectural style; however you will find built-in robes in the majority of the modern homes throughout Victoria.

Victoria experiences cold winters, so heating is available in most rental properties. However, air-conditioning tends only to be included with the lease of more expensive homes.

Rental housing options

Fully furnished rental properties

Fully furnished accommodation is fairly limited and can be expensive to rent. Furnished properties are mainly found within the inner-city region of Melbourne. Lease terms are usually for a minimum of three months.

'Fully furnished' typically means that the property offers all white goods - fridge, dishwasher, microwave, washing machine, dryer - as well as bedroom furniture and most other large furniture items. It is wise to ask if linen, towels, crockery and cutlery are included in the rental, as many properties do not include these items.

With some exceptions, parking facilities are normally included in the rental price when you lease one of these properties in the inner-city region.

Unfurnished rental properties

Unfurnished properties make up a substantial part of the residential rental market. Unfurnished accommodation should normally contain light fittings, floor coverings, drapes, heating, a hot water service, kitchen cupboards and benches, a stove or oven, and on occasion a dishwasher. You will be required to supply your own white goods and furniture.

How to find rental properties

There are a variety of options you can choose from when it comes to sourcing rental properties:

- The [Domain](#) section of *The Age* newspaper advertises apartments and houses available through real estate agents or private listings (available Wednesday and Saturday).
- Suburban newspapers also advertise available rental properties.
- Rental listings are available from real estate agents.

References:

Live in Victoria - <http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au> Real Estate - <http://www.realestate.com.au>
Domain - <http://www.domain.com.au/> What Price My House - <http://www.whatpricemyhouse.com/site/first-home-buyers.asp>

Viewing properties



There are three options available to view rental properties:

- Collect the key from the real estate agent, leaving a deposit and a copy of your driver's licence or other photo identification, then make your own way to the property. If there are any existing tenants, the real estate agent may have to book a convenient time. Once you have inspected the property, you will be required to return the key to the agent as soon as possible (as there may be other people waiting to view the property). Your deposit will then be returned.
- Attend an 'open for inspection', whereby a house or apartment is open for 15 to 30 minutes, as specified, so interested parties can view the property before applying for it. Open for inspections are typically held on Saturdays.
- Contact the real estate agent and make an appointment, as it can be useful to view homes between Monday and Friday.

The application process

Application forms are easily obtained from any real estate agent, and some agents now offer them online on their websites. Often there is more than one applicant for a house or unit; therefore you must be prepared for the possibility that your application may not be successful. The real estate agent will require a referee - someone who can confirm your financial and work situation, and provide a character or personal reference. Be prepared for this when viewing potential properties.

It is always good to include a positive written reference from a previous landlord in your application if possible.

Securing a property

Most properties require a bond, or security deposit, to be placed on the property when a rental application is accepted. This is usually the cost of one calendar month's rental. The security deposit is paid into the Residential Tenancy Bond Authority - a government body - and it remains in this trust account until you vacate the property. No interest is gained in this account, and access to the funds cannot take place unless you have given authority. The bond will be refunded at the end of your lease if you return the property in the same condition (excluding reasonable wear and tear) as when your tenancy began.

You will also need to pay the first calendar month's rent upfront to secure the property. These funds go to the landlord as part of his rental earnings.

As demand for good quality properties is high, it is important that you have access to the necessary funds to secure your application.

The landlord will pay any advertising costs or real estate agent commissions associated with the leasing of the property.

Lease and condition report

A standard agreement is usually written up by the real estate agent and signed by both the owner and the tenant. It is not necessary for any legal person to look over the agreement, however it is very important that you read each of the clauses in the lease agreement and ensure that you clearly understand your rights and responsibilities. Any questions should be directed to the real estate agent for clarification.

If you believe that the subject clause is in breach of the Residential Tenancy Act (refer below) but the real estate agent will not negotiate any further, you can contact [Consumer Affairs Victoria](http://www.consumeraffairs.vic.gov.au) to seek further clarification. Please keep in mind, however, that it is in the real estate agent's best interests to ensure the lease agreement drawn up by their agency is in line with the Tenancy Act. Many agents use a standard document

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Live in Victoria - <http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au> Real Estate - <http://www.realestate.com.au>
Domain - <http://www.domain.com.au/> What Price My House - <http://www.whatpricemyhouse.com/site/first-home-buyers.asp>

authorised by the Real Estate Institute of Victoria and then add special clauses where appropriate.

The agent will complete a property condition report before the lease commences. You will have a short period of time to go through the property and confirm what the agent has highlighted on this report. It is in your best interests to check the report thoroughly to ensure any already existing damages are recorded on the condition report. Once satisfied the report reflects the true condition of the property, you will need to sign the form and return it to the real estate agency. It is very important to complete the form and return it within the advised time, as a penalty charge for failing to complete the condition report may apply and you may also be held responsible for any existing damage at the conclusion of the lease. It is also a good idea to take photos of the property, including bench-tops, walls and carpets, for your records.

It is normal practice for the tenant to be responsible for arranging the connection of the utilities. Utilities include electricity, gas, water consumption and telephone. The landlord will pay water rates and council land rates.

Assistance with property maintenance

If you need assistance throughout the tenancy, you should contact the real estate agent (property manager), or the landlord if they are managing the rental arrangement. Determine together what course of action needs to be taken to rectify the situation. In some instances, if the property maintenance is considered 'non essential', the agents will contact the owner to discuss the situation and determine what, if anything, should be done. If the maintenance is of an urgent nature, contact the real estate agent's after-hours number for assistance. Only in extreme emergencies and only after you have contacted the real estate agent should you resort to fixing the problem yourself, as without the owner's or the agent's approval, you may not be reimbursed.

The Residential Tenancy Act and Estate Agents Council

The [Victorian Residential Tenancy Act](#) was established to protect the rights of both landlords and tenants. It is comprehensive legislation covering all aspects of renting and leasing properties. Your real estate agent should provide you with a booklet describing your rights and responsibilities as a tenant. It will also explain the rights and responsibilities of the landlord.

All real estate agents must comply with the rules, regulations and code of professional conduct established by the [Estate Agents Council](#). If you have any complaints about the real estate agent's conduct, you can contact the Estate Agents Licensing Authority to discuss the issue.

If you have any complaints or issues about the leasing of your property, you may contact Consumer Affairs Victoria and speak to the residential tenancy department. They will assist you with any enquiries and explain how you may be able to resolve the issue.

Buying Houses or Apartments

When looking to purchase a property in Victoria, many factors need to be considered. Buying a home is one of the largest purchases you are going to make in your lifetime, so getting it right is extremely important. This means doing your homework to make sure the property you buy is right for you in terms of price, location, value, size and lifestyle.

The [Law Institute of Victoria](#) (LIV) runs free seminars for people interested in buying their own home. These seminars cover legal, financial and other issues, such as how to spot building problems when looking at a house.

Properties for sale

References:

Live in Victoria - <http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au> Real Estate - <http://www.realestate.com.au>
Domain - <http://www.domain.com.au/> What Price My House - <http://www.whatpricemyhouse.com/site/first-home-buyers.asp>



There are two main ways of buying a home in Victoria - private sale or auction. Buying by private sale means that you buy the property at the advertised price or negotiated price with the vendor (owner). Buying at auction means that you compete with other bidders in an open forum.

In the majority of cases, a real estate agent will have been appointed by the vendor to represent them in the sale negotiation process.

The preferred method of sale depends on the area and type of property. Auctions are common in inner Melbourne and private sales are common in regional areas. Approximately 30 per cent of residential properties are auctioned in Melbourne.

Price guides

Before you buy you should look at what other buyers have paid for homes in the area. Australian Property Monitors, in conjunction with John Fairfax (publishers of *The Age* newspaper) publish *Home Price Guides*. Each guide shows you the sale price of homes in a particular postcode area for the previous 12 months. For more information visit the [Australian Property Monitors website](#).

Where to find properties for sale

There are a variety of options you can choose from when it comes to sourcing properties for sale/auction:

- The [Domain](#) section of *The Age* advertises apartments and houses available through real estate agents or private listings (available Wednesday and Saturday).
- Suburban and regional newspapers advertise properties for sale/auction.
- Real estate agents print catalogues listing all their properties for sale/auction (these are usually free).

Inspecting a property

Inspections of a property should be made at the advertised time or by appointment with the real estate agent.

If you are considering purchasing a property, it is wise to have the property inspected by a builder or architect to see if there are any defects that might affect your ultimate decision to buy. An inspection and report on the condition of the property usually costs between AUD\$350 and \$500. [ArchiCentre](#) and the [Housing Industry Association](#) (HIA), among others, can provide this service.

Valuations

If you are borrowing money to purchase a property, the lending organisation will usually have a professional valuer inspect the property prior to lending the funds. If you are uncertain of what to pay for a property, you can also arrange an independent valuation. Valuers should be members of the Australian Institute of Valuers and Land Economists (AIVLE). The cost of an independent assessment will depend on the value of the home being appraised.

It is vital that you organise finance before making an offer or bidding at auction. You need to ensure that you can cover the deposit if your bid or offer is successful, and have appropriate funds available for settlement. You will need to confirm with your financial institution about the amount of money they are willing to lend you, and your ability to meet repayments.

Making an offer

An offer is not legally binding on both parties until the buyer and seller have signed a Contract of Sale or Contract Note. Once an offer is made in writing, it is up to the vendor to accept it or give other parties the option to increase their original prices. If your offer is accepted, a cooling-off period applies unless the sale occurs three business days before or after the scheduled auction date.

Cooling-off period

References:

If you buy a residential property less than AUD\$250,000 by private sale, you are entitled to a cooling-off period of three business days. This means that you are legally entitled to withdraw from the contract if you change your mind within the three business days.

A cooling-off period does not apply if:

- The property price is more than AUD\$250,000
- The property was bought at auction, or within three business days before or after a scheduled auction
- The purchaser is an estate agent
- The purchaser has obtained independent advice before signing the contract
- The vendor and purchaser have previously entered into a Contract of Sale for the same property, or
- The property is used for industrial, commercial or farming purposes.

Legal costs and conveyancing

It is strongly recommended that you appoint a solicitor or qualified conveyancing agent to handle the paperwork associated with the purchase of your property.

Stamp duty

When you purchase a residential property in Victoria, you are required to pay stamp duty to the government. Stamp duty is based on the property value.

Temporary Accommodation

Many new migrants find it helpful to live in temporary accommodation when they first arrive in Australia. This gives them the opportunity to settle in and gives them time to explore Victoria and decide where they want to live.

A wide variety of temporary accommodation options are available in Victoria, to suit a range of budgets:

- Hotels and motels
- Serviced apartments
- Hostels
- Bed and breakfast (pension style) accommodation
- Caravan parks.

If you do choose to stay in temporary accommodation when you arrive in Victoria, you may need to put some of your belongings in storage, until you make longer term plans.

You should always book accommodation as far in advance as possible to ensure availability. There is a high level of demand for short-term accommodation, particularly during peak holiday seasons and during major international events.

Find out more about [self storage](#) options in Victoria.

Using a street directory is a helpful tool for navigating your way around Melbourne and Victoria. Melway and UBD directories are popular street directories that include detailed maps of Greater Melbourne, public transport routes, walking and bicycle tracks. Directories for country Victoria, including specific regional centres, are also available. You can purchase these directories in bookshops, convenience stores and service (petrol/gas) stations for around \$45.

There are also some online maps that can help you to find your way around Melbourne and Victoria.

Find [Victorian street maps online](#).

Find out more about [Victoria's suburbs](#) and [Melbourne's suburbs](#).

References:

Hotels and motels

Victoria's hotels and motels offer short-term accommodation options to suit a range of budgets within metropolitan and regional Victoria. Hotels and motels typically offer single or multiple room style accommodation.

Victoria's hotels also offer some services such as restaurants, room service, mini-bar, telephone, television, internet and laundry facilities. Some of the larger hotels also offer childcare and tourism services.

Motels also offer a good option for short-term accommodation. Similar to hotels, they offer some services, and are usually characterised by their accessible locations and nearby car parking facilities.

Always check with the hotel or motel before booking if you require a specific service. If you are booking accommodation at a hotel, check the establishment's website as the term 'hotel' can also refer to a pub or bar in Australia.

Find a hotel or motel in Victoria:

- [Visit Victoria](#)
- [Melbourne.com.au](#)
- [Jasons Australia Motels and Motor Lodges Guide](#)

Serviced apartments

Victoria's serviced apartments offer you a 'home away from home', with furniture, fully equipped kitchens and laundry facilities. Serviced apartments and townhouses usually range from one-to-three bedrooms in size, and generally include a cleaning service which also includes regular replacements of your linen and towels. Other services are often available including food and beverage, concierge, luggage assistance, tour bookings and catering.

Serviced apartments are a good temporary accommodation option for new migrants who want independent short-term living options, more space than a hotel or motel, service availability and flexible cancellation terms.

The rates for serviced apartments are usually more affordable than staying in a hotel in Victoria, and rates depend on the standard and location of the property. Serviced apartments are usually found in Melbourne's inner and bayside suburbs.

Find serviced apartments in Victoria:

- [Visit Victoria](#)
- [Australian Explorer](#)
- [Aussie Apartments](#)
- [Gumtree](#)
- [Serviced Apartments](#)

Hostels

Victoria's hostels offer affordable accommodation options that are ideally suited to singles and couples who are looking for a more 'communal' accommodation experience.

Victoria's hostels are a great way to meet other people, and attract a lot of young, independent travellers (although they have no age limit). They generally offer basic accommodation and you will often share a room with other guests. Some of the larger hostels offer single and double rooms.

Bathroom facilities are usually separate from the bedrooms in hostels, and shared with other guests. Most hostels also have common living areas, communal kitchens and laundry facilities.

References:

If you decide to stay in a hostel when you arrive in Melbourne, you will need to bring your own pillows, towels and bedding. You should also arrange to have your belongings stored in a short-term storage facility as space is limited in hostels, especially in shared rooms. Some hostels have a maximum length of stay which can be as short as one week. You should check this when choosing and booking your hostel.

Find a hostel in Victoria:

- [!\[\]\(a88007b249b36c75dcbde101f514cec3_img.jpg\) Youth Hostels Australia](#)
- [!\[\]\(800628c068083563f747129d8b339031_img.jpg\) Hostelling International](#)
- [!\[\]\(01f5879e654468630e790d983a473ee0_img.jpg\) Gumtree](#)

Bed and breakfast (Pension style) accommodation

Victoria's bed and breakfast accommodation offers self-contained, short-term accommodation that is most suitable for individuals and couples.

Bed and breakfast accommodation includes a room and breakfast and can be found across Victoria, including picturesque settings in regional Victoria. This style of accommodation is very popular with Victorians, who often stay in bed and breakfast accommodation for a 'weekend away'.

Make sure that the maximum stay period suits your needs and that you have made arrangements for storage of your belongings.

Find bed and breakfast accommodation in Victoria:

- [!\[\]\(2cbb40928a34ecf5ce700a63c52aa374_img.jpg\) Beds and breakfasts](#)
- [!\[\]\(ce05ba64c497267b6ad2e23c0c6ca4e1_img.jpg\) Visit Victoria](#)

Caravan parks

Traditionally established to service holiday makers and motor homes, caravan parks can be found across outer metropolitan and regional Victoria. They offer a number of affordable short-term accommodation options including caravans and self-catered, cabin-style accommodation.

Caravan park cabins are a good accommodation option for families who are looking for affordable, family-friendly accommodation. They typically provide kitchen facilities and shared laundry facilities and are close to local services such as supermarkets and restaurants. This type of accommodation is also a great way to meet other people, because of the 'communal' nature of shared space and some of the facilities.

If you are looking to stay in a caravan park when you arrive in Victoria, make sure you check its location and proximity to local services and towns (especially if you are staying in regional Victoria). You should also book in advance as there is high demand for caravan park accommodation during traditional holiday seasons.

Find a caravan park in Victoria:

- [!\[\]\(6b2ce2ef0aa0acafe24dd5ed94556dce_img.jpg\) Vicparks](#)
- [!\[\]\(2277423912c64094fa85b84c0d40e3dd_img.jpg\) Travel Victoria](#)
- [!\[\]\(5bc49c96dfa1ced4c39d784409323e1d_img.jpg\) Visit Victoria](#)
- [!\[\]\(ce2fe5b35c667dbf7a8f4151164dea90_img.jpg\) Holiday Parks Victoria.](#)

Some other useful sites for housing prices and availability are:

<http://www.realestate.com.au>

<http://www.domain.com.au/>

<http://www.whatpricemyhouse.com/site/first-home-buyers.asp>

References:

Live in Victoria - <http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au>

Real Estate - <http://www.realestate.com.au>

Domain - <http://www.domain.com.au/>

What Price My House - <http://www.whatpricemyhouse.com/site/first-home-buyers.asp>