

DESTINATIONS AUSTRALIA ✦ Regional NSW Head west to explore the bounty of Orange, Mudgee, Bathurst and Carcoar ✦ Perth Jeff Wall photography at the Art Gallery of WA ✦ Birdsville Horsing around in the Queensland outback

✦ Destinations AUSTRALIA



THE COUNTRY MILE

WORDS BRENDA CHRISTIAN PHOTOGRAPHY GEORGE FETTING

NEW SOUTH WALES CENTRAL WEST

Evanslea By The River, Mudgee (and left)



Escapes to the New South Wales Central West offer the latter-day explorer good old country comfort leavened with a little luxury.

PLUCKY PIONEERS have been lured by the clear skies and vast fertile plains of the NSW heartland for centuries. Following in the footsteps of the early European explorers, they've blazed a trail west to the star-gazing territory across the Great Divide, hell-bent on making the most of the Central West's extraordinary offerings.

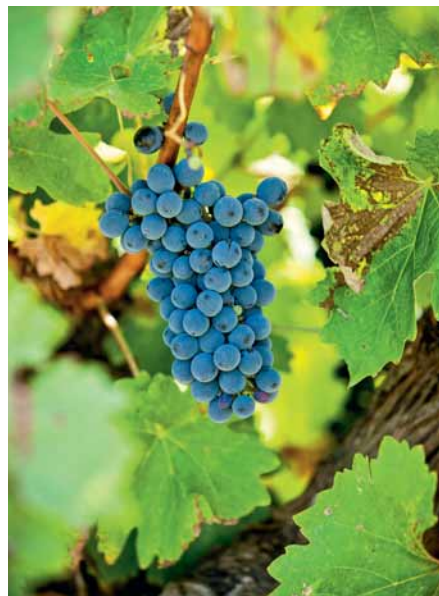
The region is famous for its produce (from hazelnuts and honey to cattle and canola), award-winning wines and cordial country towns such as Orange, Mudgee, Bathurst and Cowra, with their well-kept heritage buildings and rich histories of goldminers and bushrangers. Henry Lawson figures prominently, too. The bush balladeer grew up in the goldfields around Mudgee and his name crops up on everything from street signs to wine. There's even a Henry Lawson Festival every June long weekend in Grenfell, where he was born in 1867.

Where there's good wine, there's good food. The highlight of the foodie scene is a monthly farmers' market in each town, but there are also farm gates aplenty and many quality eateries.

And when it's time to hit the hay, charming cottages and grand hotels built during the gold rush offer old-fashioned country hospitality. Five plush properties >



Relax into the rustic at Mudgee



Wombadah Guest House, Mudgee

**While in Mudgee...**

✦ Breakfast at **The Butcher Shop Cafe** (49 Church Street, 02 6372 7373) ✦ Clink glasses at **Roth's Wine Bar**, the oldest in NSW (30 Market Street, 02 6372 1222) ✦ Sample the 2011 rose from **Mongrel Vineyard** (571 Spring Flat Road, 02 6372 2681) ✦ Do a guided farm walk the third Sunday of each month (mudgeewine.com.au) ✦ Dine on port and prune-braised pork belly in a heritage-listed pharmacy at **Sajo's** (22 Church Street, 02 6372 2722) ✦ Stock up on organic produce at **Botobolar Wine & Things Organic** (95 Market Street, 02 6373 3840) ✦ Sup a pale ale brewed on-site in the 100-year-old wool store at **Mudgee Brewing Co** (4 Church Street, 02 6372 6726) ✦ Get your daily dairy at **High Valley Wine & Cheese** (137 Ulan Road, 02 6372 1011) ✦ Take the **Mudgee Wine & Food Lovers Trail** to visit **Mudgee Honey Haven** and **Thistlehill Organic Winery** ✦ At **Gulgong** see gold-rush buildings and **The Henry Lawson Centre** (147 Mayne Street, 02 6374 2049).

in the region have banded together as Amazing Country Escapes, creating a one-stop shop for luxury lodgings. They merge the best of town and country and are sought out by those sophisticated travellers intent on a special retreat while exploring the state's Central West. (For more information visit www.amazingcountryescapes.com.au)

MUDGEE**Wombadah Guest House**

46 Tierney Lane. (02) 6373 3176. www.wombadah.com.au

Set halfway up a hill with panoramic views over Mudgee Valley, Wombadah Guest House offers all the peace and quiet you'd expect from out-of-town digs. Ray and Kaye Whitfield's luxury B&B, within easy reach of Mudgee, is a modern take on the verandah-wrapped homestead with gleaming timber floors, custom-designed furniture and floor-to-ceiling windows in the communal living and dining rooms that take full advantage of the enviable aspect. Wide balconies overlook the sun-bleached sweeping hills and sprawling olive

grove. Sleep soundly in the knowledge that all four ensuite rooms are TV and stereo-free zones. Bird calls and fossicking wombats (*wombadah* means "land of the wombats" in the Wiradjuri language) are the only interruptions to the sounds of silence. The Whitfields have created a real defrazzle destination – one of those places you go to reconnect with your significant other or the book depository on your bedside table. There are several cellar doors including Bunnamagoo, Lowe and Robert Oatley just up the road, but with a spa and saltwater pool – and library for those with intermittent bookish inclinations – it's easy to stay put. The Whitfield spread also includes Tierney House, a self-contained homestead catering for up to 15 guests on the site of the home of Henry Lawson's schoolteacher, John Tierney. From \$245.

Evanslea By The River

146 Market Street. (02) 6372 4116. www.evanslea.com

"Beware roos and dogs" says the sign on the gate, the first clue that Evanslea isn't a typical town-based B&B. It may be

in central Mudgee, but the 3.6ha property on the banks of the Cudgegong River is more of a rural retreat, with parklike gardens and ornamental ponds inhabited by a menagerie of furry and feathery creatures. With six dogs, three cats, an aviary with budgies and finches, four self-contained cottages, a pool and a tennis court to manage, hosts Andrew and Vicki Hudson should have their hands full, but remember that sign? The Hudsons are also wildlife carers, so rescued joeys are part of the extended family and a real highlight of any stay. See them lazing on the lawn in woolly jumpers from the open-plan cottages facing lapping ponds or from the loft apartment with its own deck overlooking the woodland garden.

All cottages feature spa baths, lounge areas equipped with digital TV, stereo and fire, plus thoughtful extras including complimentary wine, cheese, port, chocolates and nuts. There's a barbecue on each deck, a prime platform from which to watch birds flitting between the branches of the ancient willow tree, ducks bobbing on the pond – and those cute little roos hopping around. Evanslea is a peaceful country getaway, right in town. From \$250. ➤



Evanslea local



Bishop's Court Estate Boutique Hotel, Bathurst (and below)



BATHURST

Bishop's Court Estate Boutique Hotel

226 Seymour Street. (02) 6332 4447.

www.bishopscourtestate.com.au

It may host the Bathurst 1000 V8 Supercar race each October, but Bathurst is driven by more than high-octane thrills nowadays, with noteworthy wineries and a booming food culture also attracting crowds. Bishop's Court Estate, the gracious former home of Bathurst's first Anglican Bishop, Samuel Edward Marsden, built in 1870, is another crowd-pleaser. The two-storey Victorian beauty was bought by designer Christine Le Fevre in 2001 and transformed into a luxury B&B with seven grand rooms. One step inside and you'll be smitten by the

original features—elevated ceilings, original cedar joinery, floor-to-ceiling windows and a magnificent private chapel. The decor is a perfect mix of chic and cosy with slouch-in-me sofas, furry throw rugs, scented candles throughout the library and sitting rooms, and comfortable cane chairs and statuary on the wide balcony overlooking the garden. Le Fevre is a passionate cook – her spacious country kitchen, where guests congregate daily, is at the heart of things. She also runs cooking schools, but the culinary *coup d'état* is dinner *à deux* in the candlelit chapel. If you don't find divine inspiration after feasting on Cowra lamb with a Mulyan shiraz by the flickering glow of 100 candles, with two affectionate Burmese cats named Chocolate and Latte on your lap, you never will. From \$185. ➤

While in Bathurst...

- ❖ Fuel up at the "best breakfast cafe in Australia", **The Hub Espresso Bar & Eatery** (52 Keppel Street, 02 6332 1565) ❖ Amble around **Prime Minister Ben Chifley's** former home (10 Busby Street, 1800 681 000) ❖ Try a luscious lemon tart from **Le Gall Patisserie** (56 Keppel Street, 02 6331 5800) ❖ Sample award-winning Solitary shiraz from **Winburndale Wines** (116 St Anthony's Creek Road, Glanmire, 02 6337 3134) ❖ Grab an espresso-to-go at **Al Dente** deli/cafe (88 Keppel Street, 02 6331 0531) ❖ See Australia's only complete *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeleton at the **Australian Fossil & Mineral Museum** (224 Howick Street, 02 6331 5511) ❖ Sip the flagship local wild gin at **Stone Pine** distillery (218 Gormans Hill Road, 02 6332 1517) ❖ Eat kangaroo rump in historic **Cobblestone Lane** restaurant (173 George Street, 02 6331 2202) ❖ Cruise the racing circuit at **Mount Panorama** (bathurst-nsw.com/mtpanorama) ❖ Take a daytrip to the historic goldmining town of **Sofala** and pan for gold on the **Turon River**.



Apple orchard, Arancia



Serenity rules at Arancia, Orange (and above)

ORANGE

Arancia

69 Wrights Lane. (02) 6365 3305.

www.arancia.com.au

Arancia is a homey B&B on a 12ha parcel of apple orchards and rolling fields a short drive from Orange. Operators David Buckland and siblings Annette and Ross McKinven have put a lot of love into their spacious guestrooms. All five rooms (one with spa) have inviting king-sized beds, widescreen TVs, large desks, wi-fi access and verandahs that make the most of the magnificent view of Mount Canobolas plus sprawling orchards and gardens. It's the willingness of the hosts to go the extra mile

that sets Arancia apart – the bowl of handpicked bonza apples from the orchard and (on weekends) a bottle of Ross Hill wine in rooms on arrival, the bigger-than-Ben Hur breakfast spread with fruit stewed, poached, bottled or fresh, what must surely be the state's largest collection of cereals and yoghurts, and bacon, sausages and eggs cooked to order. Although a taxi service isn't part of the package and even though the restaurants are 5km away, in the true spirit of country hospitality, Buckland often volunteers to drive guests to and from dinner. Tempting, what with several cool-climate wineries such as Ross Hill, Brangayne and Word of Mouth nearby and award-winning restaurants in town. From \$240 (midweek, for two). ➤

While in Orange...

- ❖ Take a **Helicruz** wine-tasting tour, landing among the vines at **Phillip Shaw**, **Word Of Mouth**, **Borrodell** and **Highland Heritage Estate** (0438 272 441) ❖ Try the signature twice-baked Heidi gruyère cheese soufflé at one-hatter **Lolli Redini** (48 Sale Street, 02 6361 7748)
- ❖ Pop into **Hawkes General Store** for house and garden gear (46 Sale Street, 02 6362 5851) ❖ Sample the latest vintage of **Ross Hill's** Pinnacle Shiraz by acclaimed winemaker Phil Kerney (134 Wallace Lane, 02 6365 3223)
- ❖ Visit a providore such as **A Slice Of Orange** (200 Anson Street, 02 6369 0396) ❖ Have a glass of wine and tapas in the courtyard at **Union Bank Wine Bar** (Byng & Sale Streets, 1300 721 731) ❖ Pick berries at **Huntley Berry Farm** in summer (Huntley Road, Huntley, 02 6365 5282)
- ❖ Taste local ciders at **Small Acres Cyder** (12 Akhurst Road, Borenore, 02 6365 2286)
- ❖ Lunch amid the vines at **Racine Restaurant at La Colline** vineyard (42 Lake Canobolas Road, 02 6365 3275)
- ❖ Detour to Millthorpe to dine at Tony Worland's **Tonic Restaurant** (30 Victoria Street, 02 6366 3811).

CENTRAL WEST NEW SOUTH WALES



Rush hour, Carcoar (left); Five Frogs Guesthouse (both below)



CARCOAR

Five Frogs Guesthouse

3 Belubula Street. (02) 6367 3155. www.fivefrogs.com.au

The pint-sized town of Carcoar, halfway between Bathurst and Cowra, and 52km out of Canowindra, has a population of just 365, but at 5am you'd swear every one of them owns a rooster. Luckily, the dawn chorus doesn't last long and guests at Five Frogs Guesthouse snuggle back under crisp white duvets and doze until breakfast. Early morning call aside, there's no need for noise-cancelling headphones in this bucolic backwater on the banks of Belubula River. The historic village is a soporific little settlement with the major attraction its National Trust-classified buildings dating from the mid-1800s, including the former post office and postmaster's residence that is Five Frogs Guesthouse. Managed by Melanie Van Rhyn, the 1879 two-storey brick building still retains its high ceilings, open fireplaces and antique furniture, enhanced by some modern fixtures including double spa baths and widescreen TVs in all five guestrooms. The decor is doily-free, with a cosy nook upstairs where guests can put their feet up, and a formal dining room and breakfast room overlooking the courtyard downstairs where Van Rhyn cooks a big breakfast. From \$195. 🌐

While in Carcoar...

❖ Take a walking tour through the town, dropping in at the **Stokes Stable Museum**, **Carcoar Antiques** and **Bridge Tea Room** and the rickety 19th-century general store

❖ Tuck into tea and scones on the verandah of **Stoke House Cafe** (12 Naylor Street, 02 6367 3235)

❖ Catch up on local gossip over a beer at the poker machine-free **Royal Hotel** (6 Belubula Street, 02 6367 3009).

In Cowra...

❖ Stroll around the **Japanese Gardens and Cultural Centre** (Binni Creek Road, 02 6341 2233)

❖ Taste the Family Reserve range at **Windowrie Estate's The Mill** (6 Vaux Street, 02 6341 4141)

❖ Dine

at one-hat **Neila** restaurant (5 Kendal Street, 02 6341 2188), where talented chef Anita Wong plates up perhaps the best food in town.

And in Canowindra...

❖ Eyeball thousands of fish fossils at the fascinating **Agnes of Fishes Museum** (Gaskill & Ferguson Streets, 02 6344 1008)

❖ Sample the 2010 Reserve shiraz at **Swinging Bridge Wines** cellar door in historic **Finns Grocery Store** (Gaskill Street, 02 6344 3212)

❖ Sample local wine from 10 vineyards at **Taste Canowindra** (42 Ferguson Street, 02 6344 2332)

❖ Pop into **Bendy Street Emporium** for the latest cookbooks and kitchen paraphernalia (53 Gaskill Street, 02 6344 2471).

✈ For airfares call **Qantas on 13 13 13** or visit qantas.com
For holiday packages to NSW call **Qantas Holidays on 13 14 15.**