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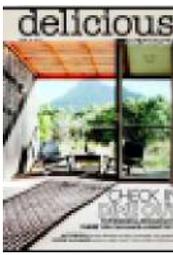
ON SUNDAY



## CHECK IN, DINE OUT

TOP REGIONAL RESTAURANTS  
WHERE YOU CAN MAKE A NIGHT OF IT

**MATT PRESTON** ON WHY SKIPPING A MEAL CAN MAKE YOU 'HANGRY'  
**GEORGE CALOMBARIS** MAKES A GREEK FEAST FOR EASTER ENTERTAINING



delicious. ON SUNDAY

# STAYING POWER

Regional restaurants are proving that great dining experiences aren't restricted to the nation's capitals. For city-siders, the best way to enjoy them is to stay over and happily some of the best cater to making a night of it.

## NEW SOUTH WALES

### THE ARGYLE INN, TARALGA

The Argyle Inn, recently restored to its Victorian glory, is now home to the skilful and considered cooking of chef and providore Hugh Wennerbom, and it's attracting food-loving visitors to the village. Wennerbom's Holmbrae chickens, served in many of Sydney's top restaurants, appear on the menu, usually roasted and served with sautéed corn and leek, along with other local produce. Their eggs, meanwhile, enrich the hand-cut pasta that's served with a ragù of duck, perhaps, or kangaroo tail. Public house hospitality at its finest.

**Stay** The inn has eight plush Victorian-themed guest rooms, starting at \$220 a night including breakfast.

**Getting there** The drive from Sydney takes around two hours and 45 minutes.

### BIOTA DINING, BOWRAL

James Viles' seasonally focused dishes come in five- and seven-course tasting menus. Barbecued beef rib may be served with creamed potato and crayfish butter, or Coorong clams with agretti and onion sauce. A more casual carte offers the likes of house-made haloumi salad and octopus with XO to enjoy on the terrace or in the bar.

**Stay** Biota's adjoining converted motel has 12 rooms, starting at \$119.

**Getting there** A roughly 80-minute drive south from the Sydney CBD.

### JONAH'S, PALM BEACH

From Laurence Olivier to Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, the rich and famous have long frequented this retreat where the terrace hovers over the beach. Italian-born chef Matteo Zamboni, lured here in 2017, is a great catch, with Michelin-starred restaurants on his CV, and a raft of experience at seaside stalwarts such as Quay and Ormeaggio at The Spit. His imaginative dishes include the likes of mortadella ravioli and mirror dory with miso caramel. The highly awarded wine list runs to 82 pages of covetable vinos: a staggering 1600 at last count.

**Stay** The 11 luxe rooms have 180-degree sea views. Midweek from \$398 per person, with breakfast; dinner, bed and breakfast packages on weekends.

**Getting there** There are two ways: a 60-minute drive from Sydney or the more glamorous seaplane from Rose Bay.

## VICTORIA

### BRAE, BIRREGURRA

A magnet for food lovers the world over, Brae came in at number 58 on the long list for the World's 50 Best Restaurants last year. Chef Dan Hunter delves into the land and sea surrounding the restaurant for dining that's elevated but never froufrou. The dining room is a joy to spend time in but lets the food speak for itself. And what fine voice it's in. The signatures are here - the intriguing iced oyster, the fried parsnip dessert - but there's always new moves to explore, perhaps barbecued beetroot, roe and a wedge, cut at the table, of ridiculously good honey from the farm hive.

**Stay** The finely wrought six guest suites have views of The Otways. From \$615 for two including breakfast.

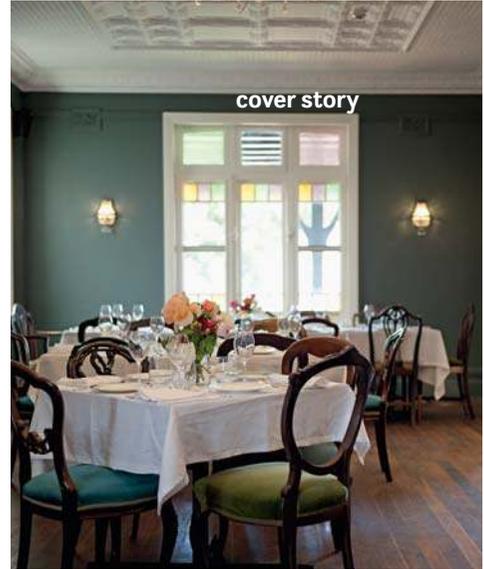
**Getting there** A one-and-a-half-hour drive from Melbourne.

### LAKE HOUSE, DAYLESFORD

On the shores of Lake Daylesford, the Lake House remains the quintessential country manor. Generosity plays out in food that's refined but not fussy. Alla Wolf-Tasker - a champion of ethical, sustainable, seasonal eating - ensures a meal here is as current and delicious as any you'd be served in the state. Whether you opt for four à la carte courses or the full tasting experience, you might find smoked eel dashi adding depth to bug-meat mousse wrapped in charred cabbage or clever and elegant silken ocean trout with fennel custard. An essential Victoria dining destination.

**Stay** Country-chic studios, suites and villas. From \$760 for a pool studio.

**Getting there** It's a 90-minute drive from Melbourne.



cover story

**ROOM AT THE INN** The Argyle Inn is home to considered cooking with the region's finest.

### MUSE AT MITCHELTON, NAGAMBIE

At this winery restaurant Dan Hawkins backs up farm-to-fork talk with brilliant dishes such as a Bald Rock pork cutlet crumbed in fennel seed and served with apple mustard, and roast chicken with bacon and foraged pine mushrooms. Value-forward estate wines are joined on the list by a few other interesting Victorians. This is dexterous cooking that celebrates the region without too much fuss, but a whole lot of flavour.

**Stay** Rooms at the estate's Hecker Guthrie-designed hotel start at \$329 midweek; from \$369 on weekends.

**Getting there** A 90-minute drive north from Melbourne.

### ROYAL MAIL HOTEL, DUNKELD

Royal Mail Hotel's beautiful new dining room - rebadged as Wickens at Royal Mail Hotel - now has the view of the Grampians to complement Robin Wickens' exciting food and a cellar of worldly wines to match. Wickens' devotion to homegrown produce is seen in the likes of leek and pine mushrooms from the vast kitchen garden served with salt fish brandade. Same goes for those mustard greens and turnips with the local lamb. Add intuitive service and a sublime setting and you have a Royal Mail experience that really delivers.

**Stay** Choose from bluestone cottages, apartments and rooms; from \$295.

**Getting there** Just over three hours' drive from Melbourne. ★

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