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STYLE FILES: COOL COCKTAILS, CHIC GIFTS, SHIMMERING JEWELS

COLLECTOR'S EDITION



George's Place

A NEW BOUTIQUE BED AND BREAKFAST ON THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA IS A GOOD REASON TO RAISE A GLASS.

BED AND BREAKFASTS have come a long way. The new wave of B&Bs are slick, chic and very private – like George's Boutique B&B and Culinary Retreat, a recently opened, architect-designed facility that's the perfect base for exploring the Mornington Peninsula – one of Australia's most beautiful wine regions.

The suites at George's (there are only four of them) come with private balconies offering sweeping views of Port Philip Bay. The ambience is more designer guesthouse than traditional B&B. The suites are beautifully furnished, with large bathrooms (think fluffy towels and Molton Brown accessories), and the breakfasts are superb with fresh fruit followed by a range of options from hearty to healthy. Hosts Stan and Marg Schofield are fountains of knowledge about local attractions and love to chat with guests.

George's hosts regular hands-on cooking schools under the tutelage of chef Duncan White-Robertson, and offers a range of packages. Those looking to really spoil themselves might consider the Luscious Package, which includes a dozen red roses in your suite on arrival, a bottle of Champagne (the real stuff) and strawberries, two nights' accommodation, gourmet breakfasts daily, dinner for two at either the Ten Minutes by Tractor or Long Table restaurant, a private spa at Peninsula Hot Springs and a personalised wine tour of one of the world's finest pinot growing regions. The cost is \$1,490 per couple. The on-site cooking school offers a choice of eight different themes, ranging from classic French menus to the flavours of south-east Asia to health-conscious cooking.

The deluxe golf and gourmet package, at \$1,500 per person, includes two nights' accommodation, golf at two of the world-class courses on the Peninsula, meals and beverages including two seven-course degustation dinners with chef and sommelier, spa, wine tour, transfers and a gift pack.

While you are just minutes away from some of the best pinot noir producers in the country; names like Stonier, Ten Minutes by Tractor, Kooyong, Paringa Estate and Yabby Lake, you are also surrounded by farmland – and the local produce is excellent. Try to time your visit to coincide with the Red Hill

Market on the first Saturday of each month, or visit the local Red Hill Cheese factory, Mornington Peninsula Chocolates or the Red Hill micro brewery.

There are also simpler pleasures to be enjoyed; like a walk around the Arthurs Seat National Park. On a clear day the views extend as far as the Melbourne skyline and Mount Macedon. Throw in art galleries, bird watching sites and some beautiful beaches – there is no shortage of choices.

George's Boutique B&B and Culinary Retreat, 776 Arthurs Seat Road, Arthurs Seat, Victoria. Suites range from \$220 to \$420 per night depending on room size and the season. A range of packages is available. Phone 03 5981 8700, www.georgesonarthurs.com.au

THINGS TO DO:

ENJOY lunch at one of the many cellar door restaurants that dot the Mornington Peninsula. Ten Minutes by Tractor, Montalto, Stillwater at Crittenden, Max's at Red Hill Estate, Salix at Willow Creek and Jill's at Moorooduc Estate are all outstanding. A visit to Foxeys Hangout for tapas at the weekend is de rigueur.

VISIT Merricks General Store, built in 1924, for a slice of country hospitality, local produce, great breakfasts, brunches and lunches and the chance to taste wines made by local icon Kathleen Quealy under the Elgee Park, Baillieu Vineyard, Quealy and Pobblebonk labels.

EXPLORE some of the wines from lesser-known boutique producers like Paradigm Hill, Nazaaray Estate and Hurley Vineyard. Many small cellar doors are only open sporadically, so it pays to phone ahead to make an appointment.

GET dozens of ideas about what to see and do on the Mornington Peninsula by visiting the website www.visitvineyards.com



On The Hunt

FOR TRUE GOURMANDS, FINDING TRUFFLE IS LIKE HITTING PAY DIRT.

ERROL THE TRUFFLE dog is excited. And no wonder. He is about to be unleashed on the hunt for what French gastronome chef Jean-Anthelme Brillat Savarin described as 'the diamond of the kitchen' – the black truffle. One of the world's most sought-after delicacies, over the past couple of years black truffles have been harvested in Australia. At the Wine and Truffle Company in Manjimup, Western Australia – the largest producer of black truffles in the southern hemisphere – visitors can share the thrill of the chase to locate truffles worth up to \$4,000 a kilogram.

During the winter truffle season a range of packages offer guests the chance to join handler Damon Boorman, his amazingly skilled Labrador, Errol, and other truffle dogs in the trufferie (a picturesque 21-hectare hazelnut and oak forest) help dig up the truffles the dogs locate from the ground, and then smell them fresh from the ground (the aroma is amazingly pungent). Errol keeps his nose to the ground, pausing only when he has located a truffle in the shade of a tree.

Visitors can later help the resident chef shave the truffles that have been unearthed, and, in the case of premium packages, enjoy a meal featuring the truffles they've dug up. Chef Iain Menzies has crafted a menu using the local truffles, so you can taste the delicacy in a variety of dishes (including truffle ice cream) as you learn about the fungi that has fascinated gourmets for centuries.

Outside the winter truffle season, you can still enjoy a

simulated hunt, with the dogs displaying their prowess by locating hidden tennis balls that have been doused in truffle essence. They can locate the truffle scent from 50 or more metres away. Dogs have largely taken over from pigs in the role of unearthing truffles; they share a keen sense of smell but are easier to train and control, says Boorman, a former customs dog handler. "Many people in Australia associate truffles with chocolates, so they are fascinated with the hands-on experience," says the Wine and Truffle Company's Joe Anza.

Between 500-600 kilograms of truffles are expected to be harvested this year, much of them for export.

Best of all you, don't have to travel to France to savour this unique experience, although if you want to take some of the truffles you have unearthed away with you you'll have to be prepared to spend at least \$3 per gram – and you'll need at least 30 grams to give your omelette or casserole that unique flavour.

A range of truffle hunting and educational packages are available, from \$55 per person for a truffle hunt and tasting, to a \$99 package that also includes lunch and a glass of wine. Bookings are essential. Details, 08 9777 2474 or www.wineandtruffle.com.au

Winsor Dobbin

