



FOOD AND WINE ARE A LOCAL HIGHLIGHT



HOT AIR BALLOONING OVER THE REGION



IN THE BARREL ROOM AT CASSELA

DESSERT WINES ARE UNQUESTIONABLY WHAT THE REGION DOES BEST WITH DE BORTOLI'S NOBLE ONE THE TRAILBLAZER FOR WINERIES LIKE LILLYPILLY ESTATE AND NUGAN...



HORSE RIDING

Lillypilly Estate and Nugan, whose 2005 Cookoothera Botrytis Semillon was named the best sticky under £10 at the 2006 *Decanter* World Wine Awards in London. Owned by the Fiumara family, Lillypilly produces a range of superb stickies made from sauvignon blanc, riesling and muscat of alexandria.

"We're so absolutely subject to the vagaries of the weather, with the grapes hanging on the vine into late autumn and early winter, and disaster only a rainstorm away," says Robert Fiumara, explaining why he cannot produce a vintage every year.

The Lillypilly vineyard, winery and cellar door are located on Lillypilly Road on the outskirts of Leeton, close to the Golden Apple supermarket, which the Fiumara family also owns.

Leeton's town centre, like that of Griffith, was designed by Walter Burley Griffin prior to his Canberra work. It's an attractive little town that features some magnificent Art Deco buildings, especially the Roxy Theatre and the Hydro Hotel.

Other wineries that should be on a visitor's list include Beelgara Estate in the village of Beelbangara, outside Griffith, and pretty, Italianate Westend Estate. The Beelgara cellar door is open daily but Westend is closed on Sundays. There are also plenty of attractive little towns dotted throughout the area that are worth exploring including Gundagai, famous for its Dog on the Tuckerbox, and Cootamundra, birthplace of Sir Don Bradman and home of the famous Wattle Festival held each August. Temora's aviation museum houses

one of the country's finest collections of historic aircraft while Junee is famous for its licorice factory.

There are plenty of great stop-offs for visiting gourmets, including the Yandilla Mustard Seed Oil factory at Cootamundra, Riverina Cheese in Leeton, T&C Confectionary in Temora that sells home-made chocolates, the award-winning Charles Sturt University wine and cheesemaking facilities in Wagga Wagga and farmers' markets in Wagga Wagga on the second Saturday of each month.

The region is also home to several food and wine festivals including La Festa; a music, food and wine celebration held in Griffith each Easter Saturday; and UnWINEd, which features wine and food tastings in Griffith and Leeton each June. ■

TRAVELtips



SUNRISE AT LILLYPILLY VINEYARD

GETTING THERE

Regional Express (Rex) flies to Griffith, Narrandera-Leeton and Wagga Wagga from Sydney.

WHERE TO STAY:

The Manor is a guesthouse and bed and breakfast in a beautifully decorated Federation-style mansion opposite Memorial Gardens in the centre of Wagga Wagga. 38 Morrow Street, Wagga Wagga, (02) 6921 5962.

Nanna Moloney's Bed & Breakfast is a stylish bed and breakfast in a century-old former Bank of New South Wales building. Pressed metal ceilings, open-fire places, claw-foot baths and classic furnishings add to the ambience of the three rooms. There are also two self-contained cottages. Cnr Cowabbie and Loughnan Streets, Coolamon, (02) 6927 2222.

The Clarenton is a stylish self-contained apartment, ideal for couples. A 10-metre saltwater swimming pool and barbecue area are available for guests to use. 22 Palla St, Griffith, (02) 6962 5284.

WHERE TO EAT:

Michelin is a slick, contemporary restaurant serving modern Australian cuisine with a Mediterranean twist. It's open for lunch and dinner Tuesday to Saturday and for Sunday brunch. Tapas is available from 4.30pm each evening Tuesday to Saturday. 72 Banna Avenue, Griffith, (02) 6964 9006.

Picasso's is situated in downtown Griffith and serves dishes such as stuffed mushrooms or salt and pepper calamari. 201 Banna Avenue, Griffith, (02) 6962 9229.

Three Chefs uses quality local produce, changes its menu every three months and is known for its excellent service. There are daily lunch specials. 70 Morgan Street, Wagga Wagga, (02) 6921 5897.

Magpies Nest is situated in converted bluestone stables with great views and serves inventive Australian cuisine as well as producing quality olive oils. Old Narrandera Road, Wagga Wagga, phone (02) 6933 1523.

MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.winecountry.com.au and www.riverinatourism.com.au.