

Wollombi and Hunter Valley walking tour

Wollombi (population one hundred- and eighty-eight-people last count) is a gorgeous historic village in a fertile valley surrounded by national parks in the Lower Hunter Valley, two hours' drive north of Sydney centre. It is a beautiful area, rich in colonial and indigenous history, as well as a centre of fine food and wine. It is also home of one of Sydney's finest Italian chefs. The perfect place for a weekend away!

We have had the good fortune to live part-time in the valley for the last five years and have got together with some of the local suppliers to design a holiday that introduces you to the best the district has to offer: excellent accommodation, great walks, fine food and wine, good company, all with an Italian twist.

This seven-day tour includes six nights' 4-star accommodation in an historic guesthouse overlooking the village; four guided day walks in the surrounding national parks; a day visiting two of the Hunter valley's most prestigious vineyards, including wine degustation and a delicious lunch. It also includes lunches and hearty breakfasts each day, as well as five dinners in excellent restaurants. Transfer to and from Sydney CBD can be organised with notice.

Discount of 5% for private groups of 10 or more people. Choose the date of your choice subject to availability.

The accommodation:

The accommodation for the six nights is in a charming guesthouse, purpose-built using two thousand five hundred, convict cut, Grade 1, sandstone blocks retrieved from a demolished wing of the historic Sydney Hospital in Macquarie Street. The five luxurious rooms have en suite bathrooms and open on to private terraces. The guesthouse has a large common living/dining area, centred around a large fireplace. A generous breakfast is served on a long terrace with spectacular views over the village and valley to the hills of the Pokolbin Forest. The guesthouse has beautiful gardens, a large swimming pool and wonderful hosts.

Food and wine:

Food and wine are some of the highlights of this tour. Being part of the wine region of the Hunter Valley, the fertile Wollombi Valley is a gourmet's delight. We have designed the tour to make the most of local produce and wines. Our hosts will prepare lunches for the walks using local produce. We will have four inhouse dinners catered by excellent local chefs, as well enjoying meals at two of the finest restaurants in the region. The meals will be accompanied by (rigorously) local wines. We will also visit three of the Hunter's fine, family-owned vineyards.

The walks:

We have included a variety of walks to highlight the natural beauty and diversity of the national parks that surround the Wollombi Valley (Yengo, Watagan and Congewai NPs). The first walk provides a relatively gentle start, walking through beautiful forest following a well-preserved section of the original convict road; the second is a bit more challenging and longer walk, the climb at the beginning being amply rewarded with spectacular views; the third is a shorter walk up and over a forested hill, again rewarded with great views, but this time over the vineyards of the Hunter Valley; the last walk takes you through a gorgeous neighbouring valley, the perfect end to the tour.

Getting there:

Wollombi is two hours' drive from the centre of Sydney (the second half of the drive is along a very pleasant country road). There is parking available at our accommodation. Newcastle is the closest airport (transfers from here to Wollombi and be arranged on request). Transfer from and to Sydney CBD can be arranged with notice.

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Day 1:

Once you have settled into your accommodation, we'll have an aperitivo before walking into the village for dinner next door at an excellent Italian restaurant (in a previous life, Bruno was head chef for both Lucio's and Buon Ricordo in inner Sydney).

Day 2:

In 1826, re-offending convicts were sent bush and put to work on one of 19th century Australia's greatest engineering feats: The Great North Road connecting Sydney with Newcastle. The first walk will take us through beautiful forest following a surviving stretch of the old road. **13 kms, 5 hrs, 100 mts.** After a cut lunch, we'll head back to our base, stopping for a cleansing ale at an historic watering-hole. Dinner will be a personalised menu at our accommodation.

Day 3:

Today we drive to the Pokolbin district, one of the finest wine-producing areas in Australia where we will visit two privately run vineyards that will open especially for our group. We will have a marvellous lunch in a family-run vineyard before heading back to base. A light dinner will be served at our accommodation this evening.

Day 4:

Today we drive into a pretty tributary valley. The walk picks up another section of the Great North Walk. After a steep climb, this beautiful, well-marked trail levels out to a large flat rock where we'll have a fine picnic lunch. We then follow the easy trail along the ridge down into the neighbouring valley. **13 kms, 5 hrs, 380 mts ascent.** Dinner will be a personalised menu at our accommodation.

Day 5:

This morning, we have an easy walk following a good track through forest up the side of an ancient volcano to a spectacular lookout over the Hunter Valley. **8 kms, 2.5 hours, 150 mts ascent.** From here we walk through vineyards to an award-winning French restaurant (the best in the Hunter Valley). A light dinner will be served at our accommodation this evening.

Day 6:

Today we finish with a gentle walk on a beautiful, unsealed country road that winds through a neighbouring valley past farms and forest. **10 kms, 2.5 hrs, 50 mts.** We will be met at the end of the walk and a local Aboriginal guide will accompany us into the Yengo National Park to visit a number of very significant rock engravings. After a cut lunch, we return to our base, where the afternoon is free. As a finale to our tour, we'll have dinner back at Bruno's.

Day 7:

After breakfast, you are free to continue your holiday in the Hunter Valley.