

HUNTER VALLEY,



DESTINATION:

HUNTER VALLEY, NSW

DATE OF TRAVEL:

March, 2019

WEATHER:

23°C, sunny & breezy

TRAVELLERS:

Catherine Van Brunschot

COUNTRY:

AUSTRALIA



Gundog Estate



Sunrise at Bracken Ridge Villa



Veal Tartare at Margan

JUST A TWO-HOUR drive from Sydney, the Hunter Valley is not only Australia's oldest, but its most visited, wine region. With fall markets, year-round food and wine festivals, and concerts featuring international pop stars to chamber music virtuosos, it's easy to see why. A covey of stellar vineyard restaurants and artisanal food producers cements the Hunter's place as a food-lovers' haven.

Country Living

If your perfect start to the day includes sipping coffee on the verandah with birdsong surround-sound and a parade of wildlife, then **Bracken Ridge Villas** is destined to be your happy spot. Each self-contained villa boasts its own garden and uninterrupted views of the lawns and vineyards of the 25-acre estate. Count on amiable hosts Chris and Judith Breckenridge to stop by with a complimentary bottle of wine, crafted from their own shiraz or semillon grapes. www.brackenridgevillas.com.au

Paddock Pairings

Among the spoiled-for-choice dining options in the Hunter Valley, **Margan Restaurant** is a standout for its exquisite paddock-to-plate cuisine paired with **Margan Winery's** own award-winning wines. Settle onto the terrace of the hatted restaurant (Australia's answer to Michelin stars) and dive into the five-course tasting menu, featuring the estate's own Suffolk lamb (in season). Or make your a-la-carte choices from the likes of veal tartare topped with cured egg and flower petals, or pork belly and loin with carrots three ways. After dinner, wander the one-acre kitchen garden and orchard to see where your meal began. www.margan.com.au

SUPER CELLARS

The Hunter Valley boasts 150+ cellar door tasting rooms — so where's a wine lover to begin? Why not start at the historic Pokolbin school house, home of **Gundog Estate**, twice-named Best Small Cellar Door by *Gourmet Traveller WINE*. This Halliday Five-Red-Star-rated winery pours champion single-vineyard wines and stocks its gourmet pantry with local products. Then head on over to **Scarborough Winery Co.**, whose vineyard views of the Broken Back Range are worth the visit alone. This family-owned winery, now with two tasting rooms, shows a commitment to chardonnay that is unique among Hunter Valley winemakers. www.gundogestate.com.au ; www.scarboroughwine.com.au

GARDENS AND GOODIES

You may be loathe to leave the Hunter Valley's culinary plenitude, but an array of specialty food shops makes it easy to take a piece of it with you. Cheese, local olives, honey, preserves, sausage and chocolate — they're all here. The shopping village at manicured **Hunter Valley Gardens** rounds out the take-home selection with glassware, fashion and gifts. When it's time to refuel, share the generous Country Ploughman's Platter at **Taste of the Country** cafe. www.huntervalleygardens.com.au

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