

WINESTATE

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND WINE BUYING GUIDE

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Limestone Coast

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North East Victoria Limestone Coast Upper North Island (NZ)

upper north island

MOOR YOURSELF IN THE BOATSHED

THERE can be fewer more chic spots to stay in New Zealand than The Boatshed, a boutique seaside hotel on Waiheke Island, just a 40-minute ferry ride from downtown Auckland, or a 10-minute helicopter ride from Auckland Airport.

The Boatshed is a very special place with a unique ambience; very exclusive, but very relaxed. Overlooking small, peaceful Oneroa Bay, it has just seven designer suites. The rooms are gorgeous, the service attentive without being overbearing, the food outstanding. The mood is reminiscent of a small fishing village, a perfect spot for winding down and taking time to smell the sea breezes.

The boatshed suites, beautifully furnished, feature king-sized beds, fine linens, open fireplaces and all the amenities you'd find at a five-star hotel, while the Lighthouse, a three-storey retreat, offers absolute seclusion - and is popular with visiting actors and rock stars.

Breakfast can be enjoyed in bed, around the hotel breakfast table, or alfresco, while lunch is served throughout the day; eat as and when the whim strikes. Dinner customarily features local ingredients: seafood, olive oils, fresh fruits and vegetables and organic homemade breads. As you'd expect, there's an excellent wine list featuring many of the red wines made on Waiheke Island. If you wish to lunch out, three vineyard restaurants are within a 30-minute stroll along coastal walkways, while The Boatshed can also organise a guided tour of several of the island's 27 vineyards and wineries.

Two more bungalows are scheduled to open later this year. Tariffs range from \$710-\$870 per room per night, including aperitifs, accommodation, gourmet breakfasts and transfers. Phone (09) 372 3242; <www.boatshed.co.nz>.

EXQUISITE VIEWS, EXCELLENT SERVICE

THERE can be fewer more beautiful spots to stay in Auckland than at the Hilton, 330m out to sea at the end of Princes Wharf. It's a chic, 159-room city hotel that offers fabulous views, not only from the guest rooms but also from White restaurant and the hip Bellini Bar.

Like all great hotels, the Auckland Hilton has position, position, position - it's just a short walk to Viaduct Harbour and a plethora of



restaurants and bars, and just slightly further to the Sky City casino and the business district. All rooms and suites have decks or balconies, while the deluxe rooms boast full views of Waitemata Harbour. The hotel's bow suites, inspired by luxury liner cabins, have just been completely refurbished.

The suites are located on the northern end of the hotel, with stunning 180-degree views across the harbour from the Auckland Harbour Bridge to the west, Takapuna to the north and Devonport to the east. On a recent stay I was most impressed by the friendliness and professionalism of the staff - and also enjoyed a treatment at the excellent Servilles Spa, just down the wharf from the hotel.

Bellini Bar offers a range of cocktails; martinis, vodkas and single malt whiskies, as well as fine local wines. Phone (09) 978 2000; <www.hilton.co.nz>.



JUST DESSERTS, AND MORE

IF you have a sweet tooth, the After 8 Dessert Special at the Stamford Plaza Auckland might tickle your fancy. Knights on Albert restaurant overlooks the busy Stamford lobby and bar. Desserts are displayed in front of the kitchen and guests are encouraged to help themselves - as many times as they dare. Maybe start with a pannacotta served in a demitasse cup with a berry or kiwifruit coulis. Then take a slice of cheesecake or gateau, carrot cake or any of the other little cakes that change daily. Make sure, however, to leave room for a slice of pavlova with cream. The After 8 Dessert Special includes a cup of espresso or tea for \$16 and is available from 8pm to 10pm. Phone (09) 357 9220.

ISLAND OF DELICACIES

WAIHEKE Island is a beautiful spot for a day trip from Auckland, or to spend a relaxing weekend among the eclectic vineyards, restaurants, cafes, art studios, galleries and rolling hills. Locals agree that some of the best food on the island is found at Cable Bay winery restaurant. Think dishes like rare tuna, spiced lentils and avocado (\$23) and braised short rib of beef with crispy potato galette and truffle (\$33).

Degustation menus are sometimes available on Fridays nights.

The setting is exceptional, with superb views over Motukaha Island and the Hauraki Gulf. The restaurant serves lunch from Tuesday to Sunday and dinner Thursday to Saturday. The tasting room is open from 11am to 5pm, seven days a week. Tastings cost \$5 for six Waiheke and Marlborough wines. Phone (09) 372 5889; <www.cablebayvineyards.co.nz>.



JUST WHAT THE DOCKER ORDERED

NEW Zealand's largest city has a new luxury hotel: the Westin Auckland at Lighter Quay is the first five-star international property to open in Auckland in six years. Overlooking Viaduct Harbour, the Westin has 172 rooms and hopes to focus on providing personalised service. With water on two sides, and built around a central lagoon, the new hotel makes the most of its maritime setting with a waterfront restaurant, cafe and bar opening onto esplanades which face the Viaduct and Lighter Quay Marinas. Two private hotel docks enable Auckland boat enthusiasts, by arrangement, to sail right up to the bar and restaurant - a first for a city centre hotel. The Westin Auckland is also home to the Late Club, offering an intimate bar open until the early hours.

EAT AND WATCH THE WORLD CRUISE BY

SOUL Bar and Grill is an Auckland favourite of mine; a funky, bustling spot on the waterfront where there's always something happening, the food is reliably good and the service spot on. In the heart of Viaduct Harbour, it's a hugely popular spot with views of the super yachts, water taxis and even fishing boats. In addition to a range of local seafood, dishes include the

offerings and guest chefs of the calibre of Matt Moran, Greg Malouf, Stephanie Alexander and Jeremy Storde regularly work the kitchen. Phone (09) 356 7249; <www.soulsearch.co.nz>.

A THRIVING BZZZZNESS

GOURMET visitors to the West Auckland wine region might also enjoy popping into the stylish Bees Online Honey Centre and Cafe at Waimauku. Maureen Maxwell runs a buzzing business



which leading Auckland PR Geraldine McManus says has become a favourite destination for Auckland foodies. The menu comprises a range of honeys combined with traditional herbs and foodstuffs, including locally harvested seafood and shellfish and local small berries from native trees. Dishes include the likes of wild pork sausage and honey-glazed pork belly with chive crushed potatoes and tomato relish (\$24.50) and grilled smoked chicken, tomato and bocconcini mini bagels with honeygar mayonnaise (\$18.50). Maureen says her food is "regional and seasonal" and the cafe is open seven days a week for lunch. <www.beesonline.com>.

likes of crisp pork belly on caramelised parsnips, silverbeet and toasted pinenuts (\$32.50) and a stack of chilli grilled quail and field mushrooms served with a pot of molten gnocchi with taleggio (\$41.50). The wine list contains several interesting boutique

Left: Cable Bay winery restaurant.

Right: The Westin Auckland Promenade.

Below: The Westin Auckland bar.

Opposite page, Above: The Boatshed Lighthouse.

Below: The Boatshed view out to sea.

limestone coast

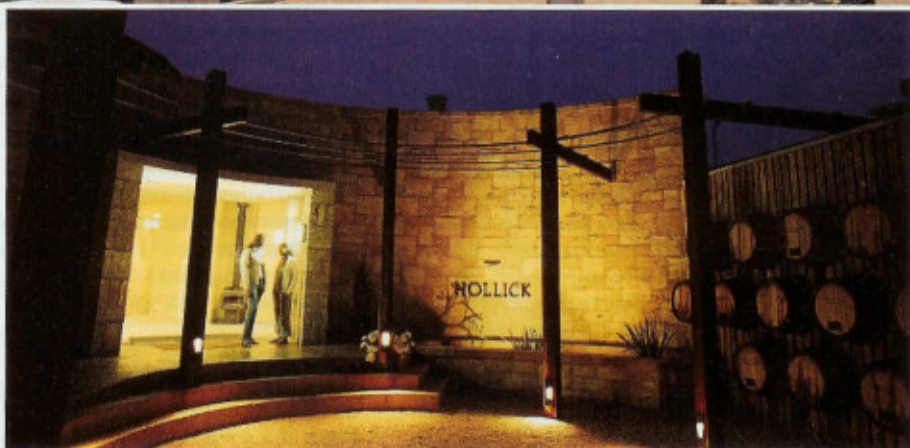


GREAT DATES FOR THE DIARY

COONAWARRA and neighbouring Penola may be sleepy hollows a long way from anywhere (except Mount Gambier) but the region is a hotbed of activities at which wine lovers can get to meet the local grapegrowers and winemakers face to face. If you are in Coonawarra on the last Friday of the month, pop in to the weekly "Club Tea Night" at the Soldiers Memorial Hall, where you'll likely find winemakers John Innes and Sid Kidman in the kitchen and the Redman brothers behind the bar. It's where the locals gather for a drink and a yarn, but wine-loving visitors are made very welcome.

January is party central with the popular Coonawarra Vignerons race day, a picnic race meeting, pulling in thousands of visitors. The 27th annual race day will be held on January 10 and attractions include live music, local food, great wine, fashions on the field, a Calcutta and Imperial Auction.

On April 11-12 Coonawarra After Dark features wineries opening their doors so visitors can enjoy the harvest activities, take tours and meet the winemakers, as well as sample the end product. Other regional favourites include the Penola Coonawarra Arts Festival each May (from May 16-18 in 2008) and the Cellar Dwellers events in July, at which back vintages are sampled.



TOP SPOTS TO REST YOUR HEAD

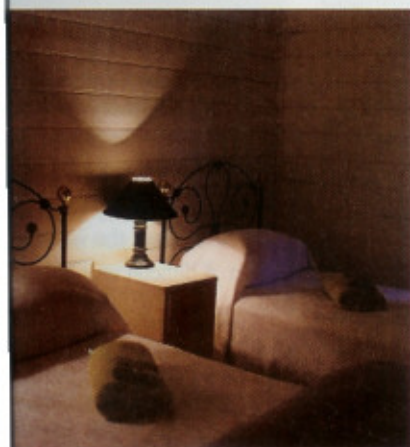
LOOKING for somewhere chic to stay in downtown Penola? Then check out must@coonawarra, where you'll find contemporary design apartments and studios that are fully self-contained. Features include spas and plasma screen TVs and prices start from \$165 for a couple. Phone: (08) 8737 3444; <www.mustatcoonawarra.com.au>.

If self-contained accommodation overlooking the vines is more your style, then the spacious Menzies Retreat (attached to the Yalumba cellar door) may fit the bill. Phone (08) 8737 3603. It's a perfect getaway for a group of six or eight friends and you can walk to Upstairs at Hollick, just across the road, the region's premier vineyard restaurant.

Also check out the new Merlot and Verdelho townhouses in Penola, designed for couples or groups, which can sleep one to 12 people. Breakfast supplies are included, along with a bottle of wine, chocolates and a bowl of fruit. Phone (08) 8737 3035; <www.merlotverdelho.com.au>.

CHEESE FOR ALL TASTES

KITCHEN @ The Poplars Winery is a Coonawarra newcomer that's proving popular with local gourmets, particularly for the large range of cheeses available both for tasting and sale. Products from the Murray Valley Cheese Company, Shaw River Buffalo Cheese, Limestone Coast Cheese Company, Alexandrina Cheese Company, Grampians Cheese and Meredith (cow, sheep, goat and buffalo) are available, along with other regional produce. Kitchen@The Poplars serves breakfast all day and other specialties



Wednesday-Saturday for dinner. Bookings are advised. Phone (08) 8737 3999; <www.pipersofpenola.com.au>.

COSY HERITAGE COTTAGE

THE Reschke family have a long history in Coonawarra, having settled in the region in 1906, and their first house has been renovated to become Koonara Cottage, a traditional family-run bed and breakfast just a couple of minutes from Coonawarra township. With four bedrooms (one queen,



clude bruschettas, a range of salads, burgers, risottos, pastas and lamb shank pie served with creamy mash (\$16.50). It's open seven days a week from 9am-6pm.

THE GOSPEL OF FINE FOOD

PERS of Penola, housed in a restored 1888 Methodist church, has enjoyed tremendous success since opening just over 16 months ago and was recently named best regional restaurant at the Restaurant and Catering South Australia Awards of excellence.

Owners Simon Bowen and Erika Burg purchased the historic restaurant in July of last year and have since presented a constantly changing seasonal menu featuring the iconic produce from theimestone Coast - both wine and food. Chef Simon, a member of the famous Coonawarra winemaking family, has worked with Stephanie Alexander at her eponymous restaurant in Hawthorn, at Chateau d'Aud in Sonoma County in California, and Hans in Denmark (a three-star Michelin restaurant) and The Lake House in Daylesford with Alla Wolf Tasker.

Pipers' a la carte restaurant menu offers dishes like roasted loin of pork, braised veal, crisp pork belly, pork sauce and gnac apple puree or oven-roasted slowway, pan-seared pumpkin gnocchi, roasted Jerusalem artichokes, sage fritter and bagna cauda sauce (both \$27). Pipers is open Friday-Sunday for lunch and



one double and two with two single beds) the cottage, surrounded by vines, can cater for up to eight people. Accommodation rates are from \$135 for two people per night, including linen, breakfast provisions and a bottle of Koonara wine. Guests also get a discount at the cellar door in Penola's main street. Phone (08) 8737 3222; e-mail <wine@koonara.com>.

CAFE WITH CHARACTER

POPULAR Coonawarra cafe Redfingers is now being run by David Coggin, a colourful character and chef with extensive cooking experience. Local chef Miranda Meek, who had widespread experience in the Penola and Coonawarra district before completing her chef's apprenticeship in Adelaide, is behind the stoves. Redfingers is open from 11am each day except Tuesday for lunch and dinner is from 6pm. Bookings are recommended. Redfingers is fully licensed, but BYO is allowed on Wednesday evenings and at other times by arrangement. Phone (08) 8736 3006. 🍷

Above left & right: Koonara Cottage, kitchen and bedroom.
Centre: Must@coonawarra apartments.
Below: Verdelho townhouse in Penola.

Opposite page
Above & Below: Hollick Wines cellar door and restaurant. (Courtesy of SATC).

travelbriefs

WINSOR DOBBIN

north east victoria

GREAT BASE FOR SIGHTSEEING

THE TUILERIES complex in Rutherglen is the perfect base from which to explore the wineries of North-East Victoria, and the local Rutherglen Muscat Trail in particular. Tuileries, which includes accommodation and an upmarket restaurant, is located in the historic Jolimont Cellars, next door to the Rutherglen Estates cellar door and just a short stroll from the restaurants and cafes of downtown Rutherglen.



Overlooking a courtyard, the restaurant has an ambience that's slick but not stuffy and serves contemporary Australian food, such as duck saltimbocca with sage and prosciutto served on a pearl barley, celeriac, sweet potato and rosemary 'risotto' (\$27.50) and char-grilled veal cutlet served on Italian flavoured broken chats with basil pesto and a red wine jus (\$27). There's a wine list with a selection of regional favourites and a nightly wine buffet, from which you can pour yourself as much as you like of several local bottles. For lighter meals, Le Cafe is open for breakfast and lunch five days a week.

The boutique accommodation features luxury units overlooking a 2.5-hectare vineyard and olive grove. Rooms have king beds, air-conditioning, mini bar, direct-dial phones, TV and video, microwaves, tea and coffee-making facilities and are brightly furnished.

Some of the units include in-room spas and guests are welcome to use the heated swimming pool and tennis court. Phone (02) 6032 9033; <www.tuileriesrutherglen.com.au>.

TREAT YOURSELF TO THE SPA

BEECHWORTH is home to some of Victoria's most outstanding wineries, including Giaconda and Castagna, and now visitors can combine fine wine with some pampering at The Spa at Beechworth, which is celebrating its first birthday. The Spa is attached to La Trobe at Beechworth, a hotel set in 11 hectares of heritage gardens. The Spa is open to both hotel guest and day visitors, offering tranquil relaxation areas and private facilities for couples. A range of treatments and packages is available. Phone (03) 5728 3033; <www.thespaatbeechworth.com.au>.

ALE WITH A HINT OF AUSTRIA

BEECHWORTH is better known for wine than beer, but Bridge Road Brewers, a micro-brewery that has picked up a number of awards for its fine ales, is thriving alongside the many wineries. Brewer and owner Ben Kraus, a local, learnt his art in the Austrian Alps, where he met his partner Maria, who brings her Tyrolean flair to the brewery and its kitchen. Located in the historic Tanswells Coach House, in the heart of Beechworth, the brewery boasts a large tasting facility and dining area. Ten ales are available for sampling from the brewery bar, while in summer the beer garden hosts moonlight cinema and live music events. Beechworth Oktoberfest is held at the brewery in the first week of October each year. Open six days (closed on Tuesdays), Bridge Road Brewers is contactable on (03) 5728 2703; <www.bridgeroadbrewers.com.au>.

WEEKEND OF THE SWEET LIFE

THIS is a perfect time to visit North-East Victoria and take in the La Dolce Vita festival in the King Valley on the third weekend of November. This year's event, on November 17-18, incorporates the long-running Brown Brothers Wine & Food weekend. La Dolce Vita is the valley's spring celebration of the sweet life, Mediterranean style. The range of new release and older wines highlights



FOOD AND A CHOICE OF DRINKS

VINTARA winery, brewery and cafe is the new kid on the block in Rutherglen, perched high on a hill overlooking some of the region's most venerable vines. Vintara is run by local couple Michael and Lisa Murtagh and is a cellar door, the Bintara boutique brewery and cafe rolled into one. The Vintara cafe offers panoramic views over vines and the Murray Valley and serves breakfast Thursday to Monday, while lunch is available Thursday to Sunday. Choices range from Peking duck rolls to a rich gnocchi served with a confit of rabbit and black olives. Phone 0447 327 517; <www.vintara.com.au>

A DELICIOUSLY REAL PICKLE

AT WEEKENDS it can be hard to find a spot to sit on the deck of the Pickled Sisters Cafe, part of the Cofield Wines complex at Wahgunyah. This is a relaxed cafe where you can either dine indoors or out on the deck. The menu features dishes like Thai mussel and lemongrass salad, braised wild rabbit or free-range chicken breasts with a sweetcorn pithivier, herbed mash, braised leeks and sherry jus. There's an excellent range of cakes and desserts and a good local wine list. Open for lunch Wednesday-Monday and dinner on Fridays and Saturdays. Phone (02) 6033 2377; <www.pickledsisters.com.au>

CAPITALISING ON CATASTROPHE

THE 2007 vintage was a disastrous one in the King Valley, with much of the grape crop wiped out by smoke taint following the bushfires. Chrismont announced it would not produce any wines from '07 and Dal Zotto reported a vastly reduced yield. Family-owned Dal Zotto, however, is making the best of a bad deal by showcasing back vintages at its recently refurbished cellar door to show visitors just how well its wines age. A different variety will be featured each month to allow visitors to see just how well Italian varieties like pinot grigio, sangiovese and barbera develop in the bottle.

The Dal Zottos, led by Otto and Elena, and with sons Michael and Christian in charge of winemaking and marketing respectively, are a real family operation and also produce traditional varieties like riesling, chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, merlot and shiraz. The cellar door is in the centre of Whitfield in what was once the local police station, and is adjacent to the hugely popular Rinaldo's of the King Valley, which is operated by renowned chef Adam Pizzini, nephew of Otto and Elena Dal Zotto, and is one of the best country restaurants in Victoria.



the diversity of region and the heritage of family winemaking, including many Italian families who settled in the early 1950s.

Genuine home cooking is another regional touch and visitors can take part in gnocchi rolling competitions, sip and spit at masterclasses or dance the afternoon away. Participating wineries include Avalon, Boggy Creek, Brown Brothers, Chrismont, Ciccone, Dal Zotto, Francesco, Gracebrook, King River Estate, La Cantina, Paul Bettio, Pizzini, Politini, Primerano, Redbank, Sam Miranda, Station Creek and Wood Park.

Left: Bridge Road Brewery small malt brewhouse.
Right: Dal Zotto Estate cellar door.

Opposite page
Above left: Tuileries boutique accommodation.
Above right: Tuileries restaurant exterior.
Below right: Tuileries cheese platter.
Below left: The Spa at Beechworth.