

SHORT BREAK

Pyrenees blues cure

Mackereth House
Avoca

The basics

Mackereth House is a renovated three-bedroom 1920s home- stead set on the grounds of one of Victoria's first wineries. The winery has long since vanished but the original 1880s homestead remains on the grounds, surrounded by some old gardens and fruit trees.

If you are looking for an escape from the city, this is a great option. The only noises to be heard come from nearby sheep and birds, and the gently creaking house.

A fireplace and cosy couch provide the perfect setting for savouring the district's renowned red wines.

The homestead sleeps up to eight, making it a good option for families and groups of couples.

Location

Avoca is an aesthetically pleasing little town of about 1000 people. It has some great food stores, some remarkable gold-rush-era architecture and a wide main street.

It's about 183 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. The Pyrenees state forest is a short drive out of town.

The setting

Mackereth is set on about two hectares, with well-maintained lawns and gardens and plenty of room for children to run around and kick a footy.

They will also enjoy the ancient plants on the property, including an immense cactus and century-old grape vine. A small creek borders the property and grape vines complete the bucolic setting.

The rooms

The highlight is the living room, the focal point of which is the wood fire. Ample firewood is provided. Roomy couches and floorboards complete the country house feel — ideal for hibernating with a good book and some Pyrenees wine and cheese. There is a television, DVD player and stereo provided.

The spacious kitchen and dining area is another plus, and if you are lucky enough to see some sunshine during your visit, an outside deck with barbecue allows for a relaxing meal with bracing views of the countryside.

The main bedroom is tastefully fitted out but the secondary bedroom — there are two, but we had access to only one — was furnished basically



The great outdoors beckons at Mackereth House in Avoca, in the heart of the Pyrenees wine and goldfields country.

PICTURES: MICHAEL DUNN

It is a good idea to bring extra bedding if you feel the cold more than most — each bed was given one quilt. The two bathrooms are similarly basic but more than adequate. Good linen and towels are provided.

The house is an interesting melange of styles, with random art deco flourishes contrasting somewhat with a modern renovation. But it has a comfortable, lived-in vibe.

The history

An interpretive sign near the driveway entrance alerts visitors to the significance of the property. The old house was built in the 1880s by Edwin Mackereth, who established the region's first winery on the property in 1864. The enterprise was initially successful but failed in the late 1920s. The Mackereth family sold the property in 1929.

What to do

There are several hiking and walking routes in the nearby Pyrenees state park, and after walking there is lunch. The options are varied — an impressive pie from the local bakery, a platter at the Taltarni winery or fine dining at Warrenmang winery and resort. There are plenty of wineries in the area — we comfortably fitted in Dalwhinnie, Taltarni, Redbank and Peerick in one afternoon.

The cost

Mackereth House is \$150 a night for a couple, plus \$20 for

each additional adult. The required \$200 bond was promptly returned.

Getting there

Avoca is a two-hour drive north-west of Melbourne. Follow the Princes Highway past Ballarat, then take the Sunraysia Highway turn-off to Avoca. We dined in Ballarat on Friday night before making our way to Mackereth House — a great option — just be prepared to get the fire going quickly.

Mackereth House is about five minutes out of Avoca

(slightly more if sheep on the road interrupt the trip), about 45 minutes from Ballarat.

Contacts

Mackereth House, 112 Dawsons Road, Avoca 3467; owners: Gareth and Nicole Hunt; phone: 9390 9270; mackerethhouse.com.au; email: gmhunt@ozemail.com.au.

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www.pyreneestourism.com.au
d3/mackereth
All short breaks are conducted anonymously and paid for.



The verdict

Well-equipped, good value, relaxing family or couple holiday option.



The original homestead from the 1880s provides rustic charm.

Taming the trade in wildlife

By LIZ CINCOTTA

YOU'RE in Morocco and that djembe drum you spied at the souk would look quite the part in your living room. But its goblet-shaped wooden frame, fur trim and fish skin drum head might just be the things that will have a customs officer on alert as you present it for inspection at the airport on arrival home.

Souvenir shopping is a big part of many holidays, but there are potential problems with some items — wildlife-related articles in particular. Some tourist mementos can threaten endangered species. The Department of the Environment and Water Resources says uncontrolled trade during the past century has contributed to the extinction of three of the eight tiger subspecies.

Market research for the department indicates people are often unaware of what is "wildlife". The relevant act defines it broadly as including animals and plants, living or non-living, whole, part or derivative. And while not all wildlife is subject to regulation, travellers must declare anything that meets that description.

At the Werribee Open Range Zoo's discovery and learning department, Rachel Lowry and her team are working with community and school groups to help build connections between people and wildlife.

The zoo runs interactive sessions with schoolchildren that include presenting items seized by Customs for discussion. Ms Lowry warns that some of the items range on the "horrific" scale, such as an umbrella stand made from an adult elephant's foot.

She says officials also come across products such as alligator handbags from South America and butterflies pinned into framed boards from Indonesia.

"It's interesting because you might present the elephant foot and the kids will say, 'Oh, that's disgusting', but if you get the butterflies in the frame out, they might often say, 'My aunty's got one of them'. So then we talk about what that butterfly's role is ecologically and why we need the butterfly out there. We ask them, 'If they're all in boxes with pins through their heads, then what's going to happen to the environment?' We get those ecological discussions going and get the kids to recognise a species' role in the environment."

Travellers intending to buy wildlife products should contact the Environment Department to find out if they require a permit. Products without the correct permit will be seized and offenders face up to 10 years' imprisonment.

More information at environment.gov.au or customs.gov.au