

STAY HERE
EMIRATES ONE&ONLY
WOLGAN VALLEY
NEW SOUTH WALES

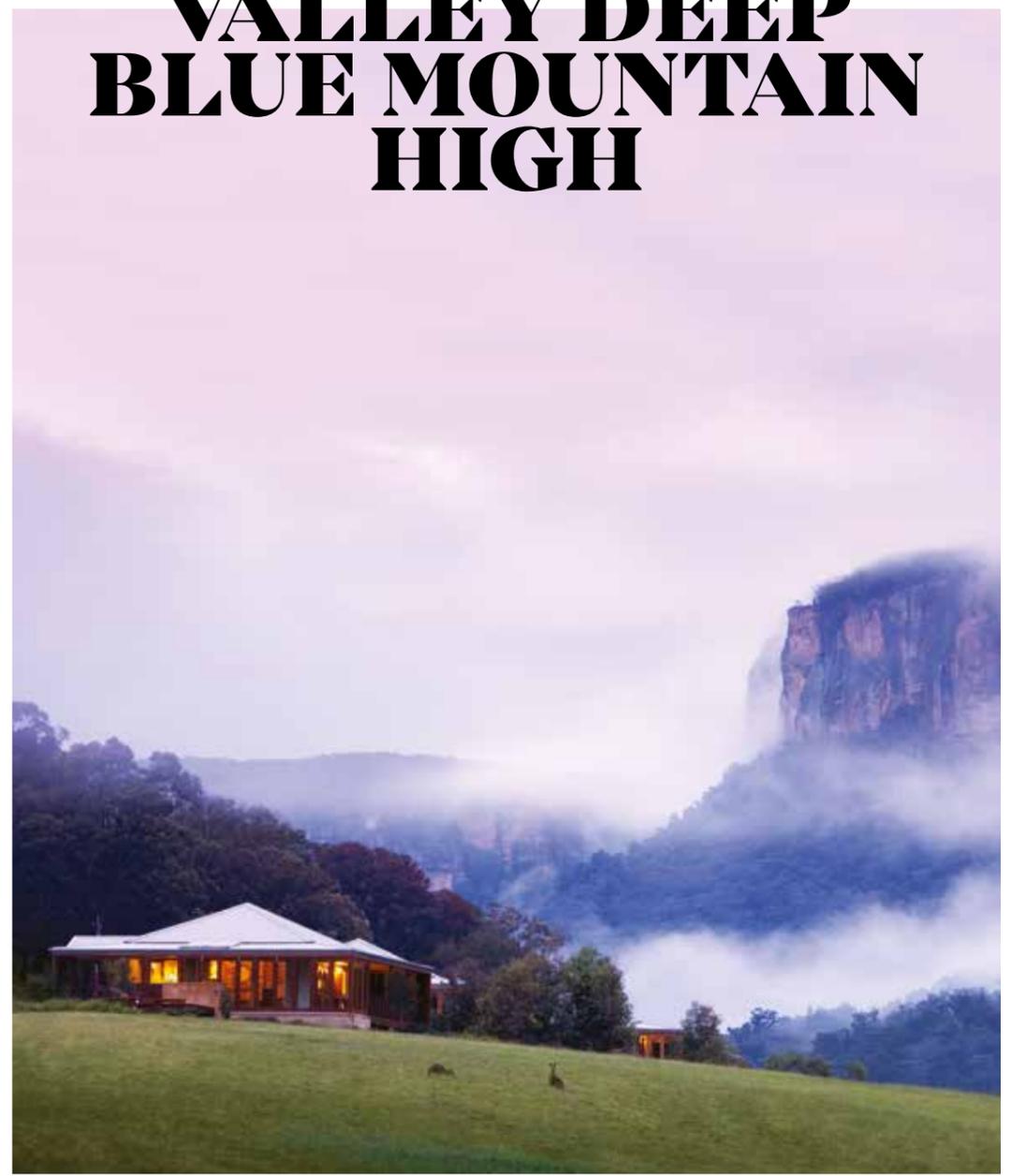


This page:
Natural wonders
in the UNESCO
world-heritage Blue
Mountains.

Opposite page:
Morning mists and
kangaroos descend
on the villas.



VALLEY DEEP BLUE MOUNTAIN HIGH



A SHORT BUT SWEET ONE-NIGHT GETAWAY TO THE WOLGAN VALLEY NATIONAL PARK IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS, NEW SOUTH WALES, IS ALL IT TAKES FOR Katrina Holden TO CAST THE CITY CHAOS ASIDE AND HEAR THE BIRDS.

IT'S THE DRIVE DOWN A STEEP road en route when I begin to feel it the most. With each descending metre down the rock-framed path towards the valley floor in this vast UNESCO world-heritage protected Blue Mountains national park, I smile at the increasing reality that the stresses of the city have no place here. Instructed to leave our car at the main gate, we're picked up in a One&Only khaki jeep for the drive to reception, bumping slowly over the stones and flowing rivulet of Carne Creek, which is the property's own still spring with fresh, clear water; and passing the resort's stables.

Check-in takes place comfortably in the main lodge with a glass of bubbles on the sofas in the bar area. I can't resist a wander out onto the deck where the fresh, rural air breathes new life into this weary city gal at year's end, and I gain an elevated view of the 7,000 acre property, its 36 heritage suites; three x two-bedroom Wolgan suites; and one x three-bedroom Wolgan suite; plus the swimming pool that has arguably one of the most striking backdrops for a pool in Australia. The city feels very far behind indeed.

With a restrained colour palette, the carbon-neutral resort exudes the homely vibe and aesthetic of a sophisticated lodge – high ceilings with exposed timber beams, enormous sandstone fireplaces, velvet and leather studded armchairs, timber floorboards, oversized rugs and subtle placement of both Australian memorabilia and recycled materials. Don't miss the imposing Wolgan clock, designed locally in Lithgow from a single piece of 600-year-old Red Box root, felled 400 years ago, and weighing an almighty 300 kilograms. There's plenty to see at the main homestead, but I'm keen to check-out my room for the night.

Entering the one-bedroom heritage villa, passing the two mountain bikes on the patio for complimentary guest use, I am instantly in love with the 2 x 7 metre indoor heated lap pool, a feature of all the property's villas. Sophie, the guest services manager provides a tour of the room and its facilities. A sky view shower with a glass ceiling is designed to

This page:
Each villa features a beautiful 2 x 7 metre private plunge pool surrounded by nature. Meanwhile throw rugs, exposed timber beams, four-poster, king-sized beds and fireplaces are featured throughout the villas.

Opposite page:
The daily Wolgan Signature Wildlife Drive will have you knowing the difference between a wallaroo and kangaroo; do not miss the opportunity to indulge in a spa treatment – a highlight of this rural retreat.



“A Mountain Aromatherapy massage using premium Australian skincare range Sodashi and overlooking the bush, with massage pressure to suit my tastes, took care of the last of the computer neck tension that was refusing to budge ...”

make the most of the wildlife that flies ahead and with the Wolgan area home to 153 species of birds (more than all of New Zealand), I'm accompanied by a bird on the other side of the glass during my showers. An outdoor patio area is fully enclosed with mesh to keep mosquitos and presumably the abundant wildlife at a respectable distance; a bathtub is set below windows that can open to the elements; a double-sided fireplace can be enjoyed from either the enormous four-poster,

king-sized bed or in the living area. Sophie, leaving the best to last, throws open the double-doors to the walk-in-robe and dressing table with theatrical aplomb. Rooms in the resort are currently undergoing a progressive refurbishment (or refresh) with all rooms due to be completed by December 2016.

In the late afternoon, I head out on the Wolgan Signature Wildlife Drive which runs daily. Our expert guide shares his passion for the region, getting us up

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Rates in 2016 start from A\$2,050 per evening twin-share. The property is 190km from Sydney or a three-hour drive. One&Only can arrange a private chauffeur car service from a Sydney CBD or airport location. Rates start from A\$695 one-way for up to four passengers. Helicopter transfers with Sydney Helitours from Sydney airport start from A\$770 per person, one-way, taking 45 minutes.

close to plenty of kangaroos, wallaroos, wallabies and even the usually nocturnal wombats. He explains, over sundowners, that forests would have once dominated the valley floor in this national park which is roughly three times the size of Sydney. We pass other resort guests who are making the most of the seven-kilometre bike trail. Other experiences for guests include horse trail rides, bird watching, hiking, stargazing tours and picnics at lookouts. As the resort is very welcoming to families, there's also a range of Wolgan Rangers Children's Activities.

Up at the dining room, we enjoy a window seat and I admire the native flowers in vases as we survey the menu. In keeping with the resort's policy to be as sustainable as possible, produce is sourced from within a 160km radius – as long as the standard passes the One&Only quality test. The food was fresh and of high standard, though some dishes on the menu could do with a little less fuss and deconstruction. The wine list has a pleasing dose of New South Wales wines from Hunter Valley, Mudgee, Orange; along with wines from other Australian states and a solid selection of imported wines. Our sommelier is a fabulous host and enjoyed the opportunity to match wines to our tastes, beyond those suggested alongside each dish on the menu.

While the entire resort feels like a tranquil escape, One&Only Spa is where I really lose myself. An architectural masterpiece, the waiting room before your treatment is so aesthetically pleasing, with its giant wooden chandelier, that it's almost a disappointment when you're collected for your treatment (almost). A Mountain Aromatherapy massage using premium Australian skincare range Sodashi and overlooking the bush, with massage pressure to suit my tastes, took care of the last of the computer neck tension that was refusing to budge, allowing me to finish my valley stay with a sense of calm and on a highly-scented note of lemon myrtle, letting me take a little piece of the bush back to the big smoke.

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