

## Hidden Italy guided tour: Wollombi Winter Getaway

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 winter getaway!

We have had the good fortune to live part-time in the valley for the last four 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 starts and finishes with transfers from and back to Sydney. It 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.

*Private groups of 8 to 12 people can save \$50 per person off the standard prices when they book a departure. Choose the date of your choice subject to availability.*

### Wollombi Winter Escape Itinerary:

#### *Day 1: Sunday*

Mid-afternoon transfer from Sydney city centre to Wollombi. Once you have settled into your accommodation, you'll be taken on a guided tour of this fascinating then a pre-dinner drink before dinner is 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: Monday*

In 1826, re-offending convicts were sent bush and put to work on one of 19<sup>th</sup> 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, untouched sections of the old road. **12 kms, 4 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 at personalised menu at a neighbouring restaurant.

#### *Day 3: Tuesday*

Today we drive to the Pokolbin district, one of the finest wine-producing areas in Australia, where we'll visit one of Australia's oldest vineyards, founded 160 years ago. Including a private 'premier' tasting of the vineyard's award-winning wines. We will have lunch (Italian with a modern twist) in a nearby vineyard before heading back to base. A light dinner will be served at our accommodation this evening.

#### *Day 4: Wednesday*

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** (it is possible to shorten the walk). Back at base, the evening is free.

#### *Day 5: Thursday*

This morning, we have an easy walk following a good track that through forest up the remnants of an ancient to a spectacular lookout over the Hunter Valley. **8 kms, 2.5 hours, 150 mts ascent**. We will have a long lunch in a nearby award-winning French restaurant in vineyard. Back at base, a local Aboriginal guide will accompany us into the Yengo National Park to visit a number of historic sites, as well as watching the sunset over sacred Mt Yango (with a glass of champagne). A light dinner will be served at our accommodation this evening.

#### *Day 6: Friday*

Today's walk takes us through some of the most pristine wilderness in the Yengo National Park with views of the unique geology and surrounding sandstone landscape. **14 kms, 4 hrs, 250 mts**. 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, where he will cook us a slap dinner from his native Sardinia.

#### *Day 7: Saturday*

This morning, we will transfer you back to Sydney.

#### **Inclusions:**

- 6 nights' accommodation in 4-star accommodation (an historic guesthouse in village centre)
- All breakfasts, all lunches and five dinners with wine included (see itinerary for details)
- All transfers listed in the itinerary (including pick up in central Sydney at the beginning of the tour and drop off at the finish)
- Private guided tour of one of Australia's premier vineyards
- Private guided to Aboriginal sites in the national park
- All paid admissions during the tour
- 4 guided walks, accompanied by two guides

#### **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 and a large swimming pool.

**Walks:**

We have included a variety of walks to highlight the natural beauty and diversity of the national parks that surround the 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, longer walk with a climb at the beginning amply rewarded with spectacular views (it will be possible to break this, if needed); 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 the pristine forests of the Yengo NP.

**Food and wine:**

Food and wine are some of the highlights of this tour. Being part 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 and we will dine in some of the finest restaurants in the region. The meals will be accompanied by local wines and we will also have a private tour of one of the Hunter's historic vineyards.

**Getting there:**

We will include a pick-up in Sydney CBD at 14.00 on Day 1 and transfer to Wollombi. Wollombi is two hours' drive from the centre of Sydney (the second half of the drive is along a very pleasant country road). If you prefer to drive yourself, there is parking available at our accommodation. Newcastle is the closest airport (transfers from here to Wollombi and be arranged on request).

**COVID 19 precautions:**

All aspects of the tour will comply with the NSW government Department of Health protocols, including: the maintenance of social distancing (in the accommodation; in the transport; at meal times and during activities); each member of the group will be provided with surgical face masks, disposable gloves and a bottle of hand sanitiser.

**Dates:** 5-11 July, 2020

**Cost:** \$3,660 per person twin share. Single supplement \$350 - two single places available. A maximum of 12 on this tour.