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Retro Leura: a guide

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Leura village is dotted with white picket fences, a picnic strip lawn in the middle of the main drag, historic houses and quaint gardens that make for a veritable mid-century cocktail of charms. Local hotelier Lorraine Allanson has clocked countless hours in the local library archives researching the pasts of her gilded homesteads, and tells us where to tread a retro trail for a nostalgic Blue Mountains break...

STROLL

Everglades

"This 13-acre living watercolour of flowers has enough pretty corners to feel like your own secret garden," says Allanson. "It's lovely whatever the season. The grotto pool is enchanting, but it's hard to beat the breathtaking views of the Jamison Valley." Roam among the rhododendrons of one of the country's most admired heritage homes. Have scones in the Tea Rooms, a picnic (your own or one prepared in the kitchen), a look in at local art in the gallery that makes clever use of former squash courts, and a top-to-bottom recce of the main house. The 1930s luxury weekend retreat of Belgian-born Sydney businessman Henri van de Velde was a collaborative effort between its owner and Danish-born landscape designer Paul Sorensen. Two bathrooms are the flamboyant exception to its pared-back modernism, the ground-level bathroom ablaze with burnt-orange glazed tiles. Prime time to visit is October when the cherry blossoms are out in full force and the town swells with visitors to the Leura Gardens Festival (leuragardensfestival.com). The 50th anniversary of the event takes place this October 4-12. January hosts the outdoor Sport for Jove Theatre Co's Leura Shakespeare Festival. This year, the Artarmon-based thespians performed al fresco versions of Much Ado About Nothing and Cyrano de Bergerac. If visiting in winter (March-August) and are in a group of six to eight, consider booking the popular \$30-a-head Sunday roast lunch, held in a private room adjoining the main dining floor, with a vista of the World Heritage Blue Mountains.

Tea Rooms

37 Everglades Avenue. (02) 4784 1938. everglades.org.au
Mon-Fri 11am-2.30pm, weekends 11am-3pm. Call ahead to make sure they are not booked out.

SHOP

The Mall

Allanson likes to keep an eye out for antique-inspired furniture and describes Leura's shopping strip as "packed with unique gifts in creative boutiques stocking products to rival Sydney and Melbourne's retail haunts."

Chocolates

Jodie Van De Velden's delectable Fair Trade Belgian couverture chocolates burst with natural fresh flavour infusions. The Lime & Basil creation is Josophan's award-winning signature offering, but there's a long list of addictive bestsellers: Honey Java Hive, Mint, Mayan Chilli, Peanut Butter Cups, dairy-free pralines, and big koalas. Children's favourites include White Ganache and the Blueberry Pyramid. There is a boutique, a workshop/tasting room and production laboratory where visitors and aspiring candy pullers get an insight into the chocolatier's workbench. 132 Leura Mall. (02) 4784 2031. josophans.com.au

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 [10 celebrity-owned fine-dining hotspots \(& 1 honourable mention\)](#)

Care to share a salmon sashimi with De Niro? Or get stuck into a roast fillet with director Guy Ritchie? You don't need a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame to dine with an A-lister at these celebrity owned restaurants.

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Vintage

You could easily miss an upcycled vintage gem if you fail to spot the staircase up to first-floor handmade accessories, homeware and fashion zone Bespoke & Found, a sweetly eclectic store that spotlights local and Australian craft talent. The green-fingered will be taken with the pastel contemporary ceramic plant hangers that seem to have come from a 1920s time capsule.

147 Leura Mall (no telephone).

What's a country jaunt without a trawl through the vintage racks? Mrs Peel is no neglected op-shop, though, rather a savvy selection of wardrobe statements from the 1950s through to recent second-hand pieces waiting to be re-loved. There is a good range of sunglasses to choose from, too.

7/166-168 Leura Mall. (02) 4784 3065. modernvintage.com.au

Men's

Teddy Sinclair stocks a cool collection of guy-aimed curios and essentials from around the world: innovative umbrellas, French wooden sunglasses, stylish shavers, bags, belts, jewellery, watches, computer and phone accessories, pens and wallets.

177 Leura Mall. (02) 4784 3154. teddysinclair.com

EAT

Leura Garage

Allanson: "Leura might be a retro-seeker's magnet, but that doesn't mean the dining scene is stuck in a time warp. The only thing old-fashioned, about the three-year-old Leura Garage is its honest approach to food and warm service. I love what they have done with this former auto-repair shop's modern and eco-aware fit-out, too."

Olives from Forbes, honey from Logan Brae on the Shipley Plateau, herbs and vegetables from Kanimbla Valley - The 100 Mile Diet is in good stead here, with pristine regional produce and wines from Orange and Mudgee on the menu steered by a young head chef who could not have a more apt name for a car-obsessed venue: Chevy McGrath. A stack of mufflers sitting high above the bar and automotive staff shirts lend a vintage appeal in a restaurant that aspires to the urban buzz and grunt of Melbourne's dining and cafe scene.

Pizza and 250g grain-fed Kilcoy scotch with salsa verde and beetroot crisps vie for regulars' favourite, while vegetarians will appreciate the deft simplicity of the mixed baby root and heirloom vegetables board, before leaving with a bottle of the popular pomegranate balsamic. Finish off a share plate night with dark crème caramel and a pour of Patina Sticky Tea Riesling.

84 Railway Parade. (02) 4784 3391. leuragarage.com.au

PLAY

Leuralla Toy & Railway Museum

Allanson, a busy mum to three boys, vouches for the town's attractions for families, such as Leuralla Toy & Railway Museum, the Southern Hemisphere's largest collection of toys, trains and associated memorabilia: "The museum is housed in an early 20th-century mansion and is literally packed with childhood treasures. But it's the gardens' Matterhorn Mountain Railway that is the highlight of any visit."

36 Olympian Parade. (02) 4784 1169. toyandrailwaymuseum.com.au

The Gingerbread House Katoomba

The Gingerbread House has been spicing up an old Katoomba church with its take on the childhood Christmas favourite. Young and old can't seem to resist the retro refreshments, either - spiders and floats made with Bundaberg ginger beer, sarsaparilla and traditional creaming soda.

56 Lurline Street. (02) 4784 2031.

EXTRA DESTINATION READING:
visitbluemountains.com.au

Lorraine Allanson is a hobby leadlighter who gave up Sydney corporate life to run a boutique collection of four historic homes in Leura and Katoomba (www.mountainwhispers.com.au). She has clocked countless hours in the local library archives researching the pasts of her gilded homesteads, and tells us where to tread a retro trail for a nostalgic Blue Mountains break..



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Everglades house



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Everglades grotto pool