

EXPLORE Blue Mountains



STEP BACK IN TIME: Varena has been lovingly restored by owner Lorraine Allanson.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Escape to another more genteel era of comfort

MOST of us are seduced by the thought of a mini-break at an historic property: the allure of four poster beds and ornate fireplaces, the drama of swathes of curtains and rich fabrics, the fascination of fine china and elaborate silver, the appeal of antique sideboards and cabinets. All luxurious. But we modern-day travellers demand comfort with our olde-world charm.

Fortunately, it waits at Varena in the leafy village of Leura in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

This Victorian property has been passionately restored to its past majestic glory by owner Lorraine Allanson, a lady who doesn't just regard the property as her baby, it is her breath, her being, her soul.

Every centimetre of the three-bedroom home has received her devoted touch. She has painted balustrades, fitted cornices, hand-chosen fabrics, and – this bit we love – installed discreet technology so the glamour of yesteryear melds effortlessly with the efficiency of today.



Ann Rickard finds delightful olde-world charm in the Blue Mountains

Underfloor heating beneath the gleaming chequered tiles in the bathroom means even in the depth of a Blue Mountains winter, you can linger in the original (but recently resurfaced) bath with its 24 carat gold claw feet.

The three-bedroom property, sleeps six but can be booked as a one-bedroom arrangement, giving you full run of the house. Choosing which bedroom might be difficult. They're all luxuriously furnished: luxe bed linen and sumptuous pillows on four poster beds, thick curtains in exquisite fabrics falling from imposing pelmets, ornate bedside lamps casting a sensuous blush over vintage paintings and photographs on the deep red, olive green and pale pink colours of the walls. Thick robes sit on the beds with heart-shaped chocolates in red foil;



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rose petals flutter in vases of water where floating candles wait to be lit to add even more romance to the setting.

And Varena is spotless. Lorraine trusts no-one but herself with its cleanliness and maintenance. The immaculate kitchen contains more than you probably have in your own home. The fridge is stocked with eggs, bacon, butter, preserves and local wine. Marshmallows and drinking chocolate sit in the cupboard next to cookies and every imaginable variety of tea.

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Then there's Varena's unbeatable location: a three minute stroll to the charming village of Leura with its cherry blossom trees, opens up a world of sassy art galleries, charismatic cafes, one-off gift shops, gorgeous homewares stores, innovative boutiques and fine-dining restaurants.

Leura Garage – a funky tapas bar in a converted 80-year-old mechanic workshop where the historic hoist has been converted to an eye-drawing

wine rack – buzzes from morning until late. Around the corner, Silks Brasserie in a 100-year-old building is all high ceilings, ochre-coloured walls, black and white chequerboard floor. Its blue swimmer crab and prawn salad in a lime, chilli and palm sugar dressing competes for the title of "best dish you'll ever taste" with a feuilleté of asparagus topped with soft-poached egg, shaved parmesan and herb truffle butter.

The train from Sydney will deliver you close to Varena's doors, and an all-day hop-on-hop-off trolley bus will take you to all the spectacular sights of the Blue Mountains including the Three Sisters, Echo Point, and the renowned charms of Katoomba.

Lorraine Allanson owns three other properties in the area which she has restored and maintains to Varena's high standards. She is looking to create a wedding vista in Varena's extensive gardens due to demand from couples who otherwise face a three-year wait to marry in the little church next door.

The writer was a guest at Varena



If you decide to go

Varena in Leura is part of Mountain Whispers Luxury Accommodation. The Mountain Whispers properties, Varena, Leura Rose, Strawberry Patch and The Gatsby are AAAA 4.5 star rated. More information: mountainwhispers.com.au. Leura Garage: leuragarage.com.au. Silks Brasserie silksleura.com

