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No-frills Elicia Murray dives in among the pink scatter cushions and canopy - and is ultimately won over.

In interior design terms, I'm a minimalist gal: clean lines; neutral tones; no fuss. In other words, about as far as you can get from the canopy beds, curtain tassels and fluffy pink scatter cushions at Varenna, a luxury guesthouse at Leura in the Blue Mountains.

I clicked through the photos on Varenna's website with the same feeling of angst Louis XIV might have experienced leafing through an Ikea catalogue. There are plaques engraved with sweet sayings about love, cherubs in the garden beds and yet more cherubs holding candlesticks on the mantelpiece. It almost seems a waste to stay in this shrine to lovers with my buddy Narelle but we've bunked down together in many places that didn't grasp the concept of twin beds, so I think we'll survive.

Lorraine Allanson and her husband, Roger, own Varenna. When I book online she sends a lengthy email covering the boring bits such as payment and address, which she prefers not to advertise, plus a few details to get us excited, including mention of "complimentary" port, wine and chocolates on arrival. The rate covers exclusive use of the house, so there will be no awkward B&B-style conversations with strangers over the breakfast table.

The day before our trip, Allanson asks what time we expect to reach Leura. As I unlock the door her motive becomes clear. The gas fireplaces are lit, jazzy tunes drift from the stereo and floating candles twinkle in a bowl on the coffee table. It's as close to being married to a '50s housewife as I'm ever going to get.

Leura is the height of Blue Mountains chichi. In shops on the main street, shabby chic furniture competes for space with French provincial-style accessories and English country-inspired knick-knacks. Described as a combination of Victorian and Edwardian styles, Varenna, which dates from the early 1900s, contains trinkets that cover the fancy furniture spectrum.

Each of the three bedrooms is decorated with a different theme: mahogany and red velvet in the largest room, pale blue and gold in the middle room and girly pink in the smallest.

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Two bathrooms have deep tubs - one claw-foot, one double spa bath - and heated floor tiles, as well as toiletries, fluffy robes and slippers. There are also a well-equipped kitchen, a breakfast room and, in the lounge room, a formal dining table. It's too cold even to think about using the outdoor setting or huge backyard. Inspired by my inner six-year-old, I go for the pink bedroom with the chandelier, while Narelle settles in the blue-and-gold room.

After a quick drive up the road to the supermarket at Katoomba, we sit down to steaming bowls of risotto, a bottle of red and Breakfast At Tiffany's, plucked from an excellent selection on the DVD shelf.

Apart from the rumble of trains from the railway track, which stop running at about midnight, the warm house is blissfully quiet. We enjoy a late breakfast (everything for a continental breakfast is supplied) then explore the area. The main street is just 200 metres up the road. Gordon Falls and the Three Sisters are less than five minutes' drive away.

By mid-afternoon we've settled into another Blue Mountains icon, the Hydro Majestic Hotel, where my travelling companion's grandparents spent their honeymoon. We order high tea and note that everyone else in the room seems to be gazing lovingly into their partner's eyes. We eye the delicate sandwiches and glasses of bubbly.

Varenna may go against everything I ever believed about interior design but after two nights in this cosy little house I'm prepared to change my view. The attention to detail is outstanding, from the little chocolates in the port glasses to the marshmallows in the pantry. I may not be any closer to starting a cherub collection but I did buy a silky cushion for my bed at home - in neutral tones, of course.

Weekends Away are reviewed anonymously and paid for by Traveller.

VISITORS' BOOK

Varenna

Address: Leura, Blue Mountains. Full address supplied with booking confirmation.

The verdict: Luxury and privacy with so many special touches it's tempting to move in for good.

Price: \$750 for two nights, the minimum stay.

Bookings: Phone 0430 496 755 or see <http://www.varenna.net.au>.

Getting there: A two-hour drive from Sydney. Easy to find, not far off the highway.

Perfect for: A romantic escape or a decadent girls' weekend away.

Wheelchair access: No.

While you're there: Explore the Jenolan Caves, visit the Three Sisters or be pampered at one of Leura's day spas.




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