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# THE BLUE MOUNTAINS: REDISCOVERING AN OLD FAVOURITE

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*During the past few years, quickened by the necessity of bushfire adversity and under the cover of COVID-19, the Blue Mountains has undergone a transformation as businesses have morphed, adapted, thrown caution to the wind and flung open doors mid-crisis. However the region remains a perennial favourite as ELLEN HILL writes.*

Golden escarpments towering over prehistoric landscapes. Bushwalks into untamed wilderness. Grand hotels with sublime views and a history of a halcyon heyday when Australia's first tourist destination bedazzled in frippery and fun.

That is certainly the Blue Mountains beloved for more than a century by hordes of thrill seekers, nature lovers, gastronomes and connoisseurs of luxe and pamper experiences, not to mention those chasing the elusive flurries of snow.

But it's more than that now. Much more. Enjoy this re-introduction to a perennial favourite

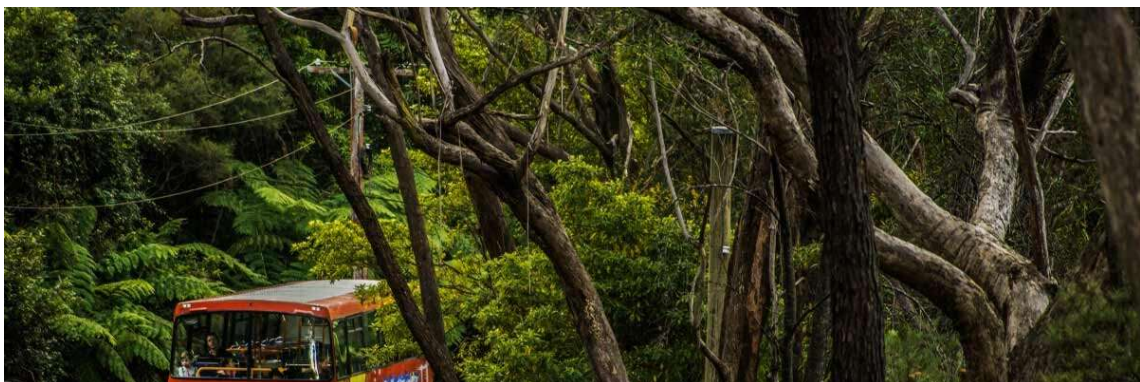


Stay at Mountain Whispers Chatelaine

## HOW TO GET TO THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Australia's most accessible wilderness is just 90 minutes from Sydney by train or car.

If you're travelling by train or want to ditch the hassle of leaving the car at your accommodation, explore Katoomba and Leura aboard a [Blue Mountains Explorer Bus](#). Operating every Saturday and during school holidays, the hop-on/hop-off red double-decker sightseeing bus operates on a 37-stop route around Katoomba and Leura every 45 minutes from 9am to 5.15pm.







Take the Blue Mountains Explorer to see the best of the Blue Mountains.

Snaking almost in tandem over the Blue Mountains, the rail line and Great Western Hwy roughly trace the ancient First Peoples main pathway along the ridges.

The Bells Line of Rd that climbs through the neighbouring Hawkesbury and links to the upper Blue Mountains at Bell before continuing to Lithgow is an alternative route.

A series of 26 towns and villages, a visit to the Blue Mountains is not complete without experiencing each section.



Mountain bike trails wind through bushland of the Blue Mountains.

## HOW TO EXPLORE THE BUSHLAND OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Pause for a latte or gourmet burger and browse interesting boutiques at Glenbrook or Springwood before venturing on your first experience of true bushland in the national park.

Camp in the wild at Euroka campground at Glenbrook surrounded by bushwalks, including access to Red Hands Cave with amazing examples of Aboriginal art.

The two-hour Blue Gum Swamp Track at Winmalee descends into the valley between two ridges. A civilised stroll along a wide fern-lined track, wild waratahs daub the greenery with splashes of red in spring.

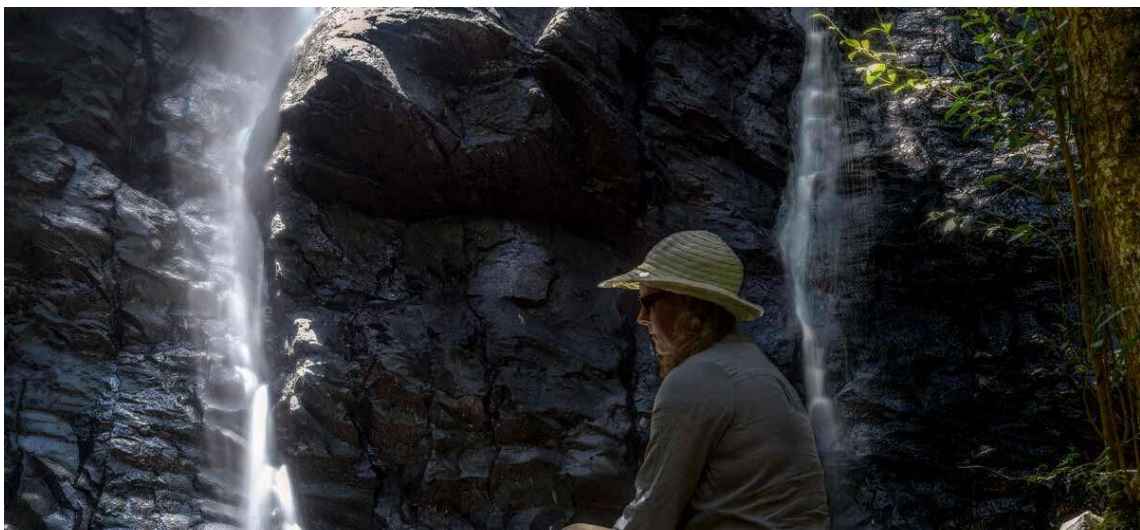
For an energetic day in the bush, the Victory Track starts near Faulconbridge station and winds through patches of rainforest, connecting with the Sassafras Gully Loop Track ending behind the Springwood shops and station.

The 5km Empress Pass track in north Lawson in the mid-Mountains passes through a gorgeous gully of temperate rainforest and delightful waterfalls, while the South Lawson Water Circuit Walk is dog-friendly.

If you're after a more challenging hike, continue up the highway to Wentworth Falls, Katoomba and Blackheath.

With jaw-dropping views of velvety ranges rippling into the horizon and waterfalls plummeting over cliffs of giddy heights, the effort will be worth it.

But there's more to the Blue Mountains than bushwalks, and more ways to experience the bush than walking.







Walk the Waterfall Track in the Blue Mountains

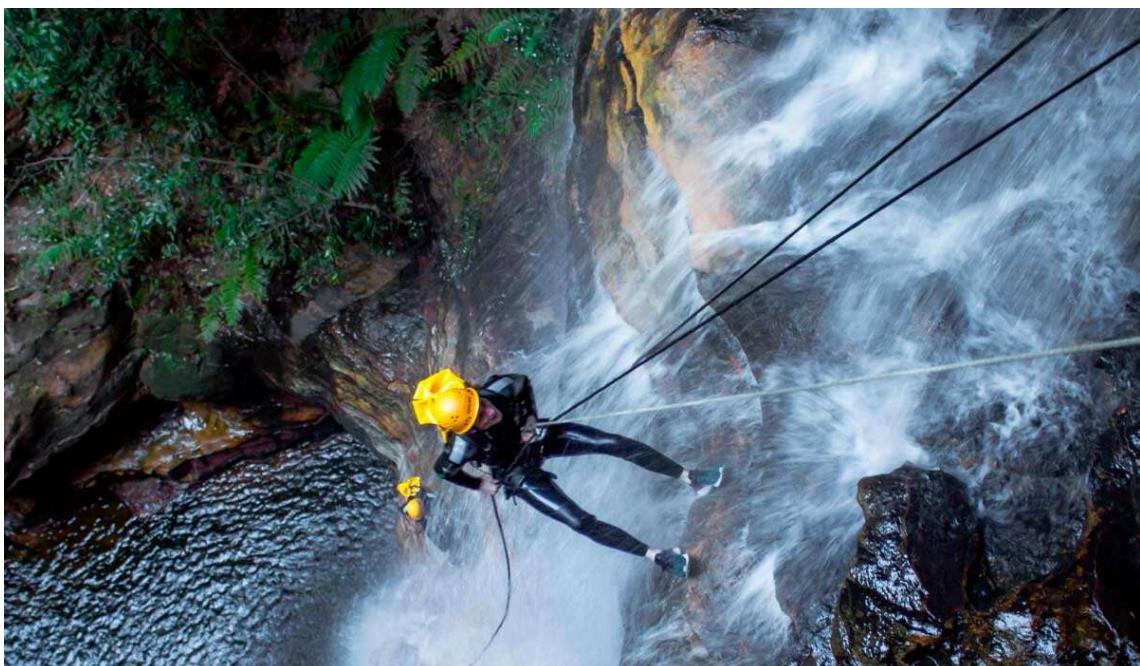
## WHERE TO PLAY IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Great for walkers and mountain bikers alike, the 13km return Faulconbridge Point track ends at a remote clifftop with a gob-smacking view over the wild, untouched lower Grose Valley and river. There's a walking track down to a swimming hole for the spritely.

Another good mountain bike track is the invigorating Oaks Fire Trail from Woodford to Glenbrook (or vice versa). Ride or walk one way and get the train back. Bring your own mountain bike or hire one from a local provider.

For the ultimate exhilarating zing, there's nothing like placing your trust in someone else's hands as you step backwards over a cliff.

[High and Wild Australian Adventures](#) offers a range of packages from a half-day abseiling adventure for beginners (5m working up to a 30m drop) and The Super Jump full-day 60m venture for the serious adrenalin junkies to the Boars Head and Malaita Point for those with previous experience.



Take an adrenalin-fueled adventure in the Blue Mountains with High & Wild

They also have an abseiling and rockclimbing combo activity, winter canyoning (from May to August) that doesn't involve full water submersion, and a two-day bush survival skills course.

A visit to [Scenic World](#) nurtures appreciation of the vastness of the 1.1 million square hectare Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Take in the panoramas with a return trip between clifftops on the Scenic Skyway, descend into the Jamison Valley on the world's steepest train, stroll under a temperate rainforest canopy on the Scenic Walkway and glide past ancient sandstone cliffs, the Three Sisters and Orphan Rock on the Scenic Cableway.

But it's not all hard track yakka. The Blue Mountains has long had a reputation as a haven for fine food and indulgence.



Indulge in great dining experiences in the Blue Mountains.

## WHERE TO EAT & INDULGE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Once you've pulled off your hiking boots, give your muscles over to the team at [Spa Sublime](#) at Katoomba. Located in a heritage house with drenching

showers and a hydrotherapy spa, the day spa specialises in bespoke rituals and advanced skin treatments. Book a high-tech makeover, immerse in traditional spa relaxation or try a combination of both using the Australian made Akorah range with healing native plant extracts and nourishing essential oils.

Before you float away, stock up on handmade fragranced silk flowers, essential oil-infused candles in reusable embellished boxes, herringbone jars, diffusers, bath oils, books and more.

Satisfy your hunger with seasonal, regionally-sourced food accompanied by regional wines and craft beers at [Leura Garage](#) in the charming Leura village. Open all day, every day from 12pm, the award-winning funky eco café/restaurant is in a converted mechanics workshop (couldn't you guess by the name!). The menu features loads of hearty shared dishes, takeaway pizza and desserts, with sister store [Pizza Sublime](#) at the bottom of Leura Mall selling pizza by the slice.

The [Ellie Belly's Dessert Bar](#) ploughman's lunch for two is a generous serve of four cheeses, pork pie, meats, pickles, pickled eggs, nuts and savouries, while the high tea offers three layers of bite sized goodies. The Blackheath venue also has a local fondue hot chocolate, gelato and sorbets, crave coffee, cakes, savoury and sweet bagels, croissants, waffles and a beautiful atmosphere to enjoy with friends.

Don your finest smart casual attire and indulge in time-honoured civility on an exquisite four-tier selection of sweet and savoury delicacies at the Blue Mountains' newest brunch and high tea venue, [Archer & Hobb Fine Tea Merchants](#). Accompany your repast with a pot of TWG tea or upgrade to a glass of sparkling wine or flute of champagne.







Take an elegant high tea at Archer & Hobb

Or explore a veritable punchbowl of boutique potions concocted by distillers; brewers; and cider, wine and non-alcoholic drink makers along the new Blue Mountains Craft Beverage Trail. Infused with the flavours, aromas and textures of the area, craft beverage alchemists have created a carafe of distinctively flavoured beverages for connoisseurs of alcoholic libations and teetotalers alike.

Wend your way along the Blue Mountains Craft Beverage Trail up the Great Western Hwy to Valley Heights and Lawson and pause to slake your thirst at Katoomba. From Blackheath, drive down into the Megalong Valley before returning to the highway. Make your way up to Mt Victoria and cut across the Darling Causeway to Bells Line of Road.

Pause enroute at Bilpin for woodfired pizza and to imbibe in [Hillbilly Cider](#). Open seven days and located in the home of the mountain apple, Hillbilly Cider embraces hillbillification, which encompasses all that is great about living life in the slow lane, getting out into nature, good times with mates, a chilled cider in hand. That hillbilly philosophy is reflected in the bevv: no added sugar, no artificial flavours, unpasteurised.







Hillbilly Cider is all about savouring nature and all natural goodness with nothing artificial.

Hidden at the foothills of the Blue Mountains, discover one of Australia's highest award-winning gins from up-and-coming [Karu Distillery](#) at Grose Vale. The boutique independent/small batch distillery uses homegrown and local botanicals cut down with pure mountain rainwater. Established in 2017, Karu (Estonian word for "bear"), is open Saturdays, other days by appointment.



Karu Distillery produces one of Australia's most awarded gins.

## WHERE TO STAY IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

The region has welcomed visitors since the first highway inns cropped up more than a century ago. These days, the region has myriad accommodation options like [Blue Mountains Escapes](#), along with free camping in remote

locations, grand hotels, charming guesthouses and countless Airbnb properties.

If pampering is the aim, then bedding down at one of the five [Mountain Whispers MW Collection](#) properties in Leura or Katoomba is an essential element to your visit. French champagne on ice, handmade chocolates, antipasto platters, indoor fire, in-house massage and/or facial in opulent surrounds are all package options. Each of the self-contained immaculately restored heritage properties – Varenna, Leura Rose and Strawberry Patch in Leura and The Gatsby and Chatelaine in Katoomba – promises a luxurious getaway in total privacy.



Stay at Mountain Whispers Varenna for ultimate Blue Mountains style

But before you sink beneath the puffy quilt of luxury, venture out into the Blue Mountains nightlife with a difference and explore the new [Katoomba Falls Night-lit Walk](#). Along the 1.3km wander, see natural features such as Orphan Rock, Witches Leap, Katoomba Falls and Katoomba Cascades in a new light. You'll see the Three Sisters lit up, and the walk connects other previously lit areas.

*This article was produced in collaboration with [Visit Blue Mountains](#).*

ELLEN HILL has been a journalist and travel writer for 30 years and now, through her public relations role, promotes one of the most recognisable destinations on the planet – the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Follow her and photographer partner David at [Deep Hill Media](#)

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