

The Secret Daylesford

WRITTEN BY BETH MICHELSON for Cherrie Lifestyle Magazine | 27 APRIL 2011

Beth Michelson takes us inside the Daylesford only the locals know.



If, like me, you shun the idea of a bed and breakfast, you may be pleased to know that not all B&Bs are the same. In fact, if you picture doilies, a slight musty smell and an ever-present host, then let me tell you the world has changed - well at least at 65 Main in Hepburn Springs, Victoria. Let's start with our arrival. For many Melburnians the trip to our most-loved queer destination, Daylesford, starts on a Friday evening after work. At about the half-way mark you start to talking about what you may do for dinner - remember, while there is a plethora of restaurants in Daylesford it is still a country town where kitchens can close early, so unless you've packed a sandwich your choice on the highway is McDonald's or um, McDonald's.

Luckily our host at 65 Main - Christine Lewis - is all over it. She understands that the last thing you want to do on arrival is rush through a shower, get dressed and head out again. Instead, picture this: a brief greeting to show you your room and the house before she disappears, leaving you alone with a wood fire blazing, a bottle of organic sparkling and a plate filled with the most delectable locally sourced antipasto. Now that's how to start a weekend in Daylesford.

There's a choice of five rooms at 65 Main, and all are named after wine varieties. Located on the top floor of this three-storey, renovated heritage house is the Champagne room. This spacious room comes with its own ensuite and French doors opening onto the sweetest little balcony with the most magnificent view. Depending on your wants, you may choose from rooms with a double spa and decks, too.

The house itself is a grand thing that's been given a modern make-over that still retains a sense of grandeur. This was the other pleasantly surprising aspect of our stay: while the house was full, we barely saw our fellow guests. One night, before heading out, we enjoyed a pre-dinner drink in the reading room while another couple entertained themselves in the games room, and another two cracked their bottle of organic sparkling on the lavish wraparound deck. As far as we were all concerned, we could have had the house to ourselves. It was at this point that I realised the benefit of a good B&B - how luxurious it is, as opposed to having just the one hotel room to hole-up in or a self-contained house, where you still have to do everything yourself.

A full breakfast of locally produced bacon and eggs, cereal, juices, fruit and yoghurt, is served in the dining room and if you're still people-shy, or it's a glorious sunny morning, you'll feel more than comfortable to takes yours out to the balcony... or to your room!
Sounding good isn't it? But wait, there's more.

At the risk of turning the townsfolk against her, Christine is determined to introduce visitors to the 'secrets of Daylesford'. Yes, you know: those places that only the locals know about. Like where to get the best massage in town, where to get the best deal on antiques, where to eat and drink, where to have lunch by a waterfall and even where to get the most pure water straight from the ground - and no, it's not from those pumps around the Hepburn Bathhouse and Spa.

As I was told not just by Christine but by several locals, if you want a massage you go to see Lisa at Red Sanctuary. I did and it was by far the best I have ever had in Daylesford - and there have been quite a few over the years. Lisa specialises in Chinese medicine, so expect a holistic approach to your treatment. It may include Shiatsu and Bowen therapy, depending on what the initial consultation reveals; however, whatever happens you'll need a good lie down for an hour or so after your treatment: it's powerful stuff.



Once refreshed, head to Ego Culinaria. What a delight this place is. From the moment you step foot in this European style café you know trouble awaits. This is no time to be worried about that waistline. Head chef and owner Christian Reuther knows a thing or two about cakes, and from the chocolate éclairs to the orange blossom Portuguese tarts, sweet-tooths will be in heaven. Those with more savoury tastes will be pleased with the pastries, such as Spinach Banitzza and Tuki sausage rolls. Hopefully, you'll visit when Mel is on the floor - expert and friendly service.

For dinner, head to Breakfast and Beer - the name doesn't do this place justice as it is so much more than its namesake. This beautiful little restaurant housed in one of the oldest freestanding buildings in Daylesford is gorgeously romantic and French provincial in style. While the beer menu will turn even the most ardent beer lover's head, a great wine list is also on offer. However, it is Chef Benjamin O'Brien's cooking that proves he is one very talented young man. This is hearty European cooking with some dishes that are quite simply inspired. On warmer nights head out to the pretty and rustic courtyard and simply order whatever the chef recommends.

For a more casual eating experience, there is nowhere more cosy and entertaining than The Chowder House in Hepburn. Over a seriously big breakfast of pancakes and fruit, or one of the to-die-for chowders for lunch, you may find yourself in the middle of the daily trivia bout. Owners Gary and Shane provide some of the best food in town, along with the best entertainment.

Now it's time to walk off some of that indulgence. Daylesford and Hepburn are two of the most stunning towns in Australia and yet most of us of just experience the main streets. Enter Brendon Murray from Secret Forest Walks and his GPS walking tours. For something different, chose the GPS Treasure Hunt walk. You'll be armed with a GPS, a map and your wits and sent off into the wilds of the forest. The walk can be tailored to your fitness level and so can the treasure hunt. For the more romantic among us why not select the treasures yourself and surprise your partner. Seems like a marriage proposal just waiting to happen! Otherwise this is just a superb way to take in the beauty of the area.

Not a secret at all is the historic Hepburn Bathhouse and Spa. However, have you been here since the \$13 million renovation? You don't need to know anything about day spas to know this is a state-of-the-art establishment. It is exquisite and so are the facials, especially the Vino Choc Facial Therapy. For pure indulgence and for those wanting to turn back the clock about five years, this is treatment for you. Hungarian Tokay is combined with champagne, orange essential oil, chocolate and quince and applied lovingly for a full hour. Combine this with two hours in the bathhouse sanctuary and you won't even remember what stress felt like. The sanctuary itself has three bathing pools and spas at different temperatures, a sauna, and then there are those spa couches. At first glance they are reminiscent of something from a German sanitarium circa 1930, but oh how looks can be deceiving! These metal beds give you a hydro-massage while you recline, immersed in 35 degree Celsius water. Divine.

Many of us have done Daylesford a thousand times, but we tend to do the same things each visit. It's a shame, because this is a town with unlimited options - luckily, locals like Christine from 65 Main are only too happy to spill the beans.



Check Out:

[65 Main - 65main.com](http://65main.com)

[Red Spa Sanctuary - redspasanctuary.com](http://redspasanctuary.com)

[Ego Culinaria - egoculinaria.com.au](http://egoculinaria.com.au)

[Beer and Breakfast - breakfastandbeer.com.au](http://breakfastandbeer.com.au)

[The Chowder House - \(03\) 5348 2221](http://thechowderhouse.com.au)

[Secret Forest Walks - secretforestwalks.com](http://secretforestwalks.com)

[The Hepburn Bathhouse and Spa - hepburnbathhouse.com](http://hepburnbathhouse.com)