

Getaway Bilpin

Spirits lifted at Ghost Hill

A romantic getaway at a rustic cottage in the Hawkesbury highlands rejuvenates the mind and body, writes **Briar Jensen**

THERE'S nothing quite like cracking the top on the first bottle of beer or wine on a midweek escape, and the fact we've knocked off work early means we have plenty of time to soak up the atmosphere over sunset drinks at our country cottage.

My husband and I have left the kids behind for a romantic getaway and Ghost Hill Road Retreat, set on 8ha in Bilpin, fits the bill perfectly. New Moon Cottage is tucked into the bush out of sight and has everything we need – and more.

In the Hawkesbury highlands, it's a pleasant drive from Sydney, through the rural towns of Windsor and Richmond and along the strangely named Bells Line of Road, which at Bellbird Hill gives a fantastic view over the Hawkesbury plains.

Bilpin is orchard territory and orderly rows of apple trees line the country road. Ramshackle sheds and rusting trucks rest between roadside

stalls beckoning with fresh local produce and homemade goodies. But they will have to wait until tomorrow.

Our first priority is relaxation, and we take our complimentary bottle of bubbly and cheese platter on to the veranda and settle in.

As the sun slips below the trees and the frogs crank into gear, we fire up the barbecue to grill the contents of our pre-ordered dinner hamper of steak, par-boiled potatoes in foil, garlic bread and fresh garden salad. In the fridge and pantry I find mayonnaise, mustard, chilli sauce and balsamic spritz.

That's the beauty of this place – we haven't had to bring any food, although you can self-cater. We just packed a few clothes and stopped en route at the bottle shop.

Everything else is provided in the well-stocked cottage, which belies its rough timber exterior with a crisp white decor accented with golden timber bench tops and floorboards.

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BILPIN

Getting there

Bilpin is about a 90-minute drive from Sydney. Take the M2 to Old Windsor Rd, then Windsor Rd and Bells Line of Road.

Staying there

Ghost Hill Road Retreat, 73 Ghost Hill Rd, Bilpin. Getaways from \$450 a couple for two nights Mon-Thur and \$550 a couple for two nights Fri-Sat-Sun. Detox packages include gourmet vegetarian meals, guided mountain walks, yoga, meditation and massage. Two-day packages \$750, four days \$1400. Ph 0410 484 120, ghosthillroad.com.au

Doing there

Visit Mt Tomah Botanical Garden. See rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au Fill the car with fresh fruit and homemade produce at Bilpin's many orchards and roadside stalls. See hawkesburyharvest.com.au More: Hills Hawkesbury & Riverlands Tourism hmart.com.au



The open-plan design includes kitchen, lounge and queen bed, with a separate second bedroom. A jar of Minties, picnic blanket, umbrella and torch are thoughtful inclusions.

The bathroom features a picture window over the double spa bath, a candelabra and cosy robes.

We retreat from the army of insects advancing at dusk and dine at the candlelit table while the spa bath fills. But it's painfully slow and by the time it's full we've drunk far too much and nearly doze off in its cocoon of perfumed bubbles.

Leaving the sliding bedroom door open, we fall asleep to a cacophony of crickets and frogs and wake to the excited chitter-chatter of early-morning birdsong.

I'd planned to do the inclusive morning yoga class but can't drag myself away from the pantomime outside my window. As well as romantic getaways, owners Brenda and

NOTHING WANTING: Ghost Hill Road Retreat at Bilpin.

Alan McCartney offer detox and yoga packages which include yoga sessions in their attic studio or expansive deck overlooking the property.

Instead of stretching my whole body I just stretch my stomach, savouring the delicious sausages, bacon, tomatoes, herbs and free-range eggs from the breakfast basket, before taking a walk on the private bush track next to our cottage.

As we reluctantly pack up to leave, I realise we haven't given the comfy-looking leather sofas a workout.

But that's a good excuse to come back in winter and curl up around the cosy fireplace.

The writer was a guest of Ghost Hill Road Retreat. See Briar Jensen's travel blog at briarstravelbeat.com.au