



A SWEET TASTE OF MACEDON

CATRIONA MONTALVO enjoys a break sampling the delights of Victoria's newest wine country

The thought of battling Friday night gridlock to escape Sydney for the weekend makes me cringe, so I'm dubious at the thought of flying to Melbourne to do the same.

But less than an hour after landing at Tullamarine Airport, we're pulling up at our destination in the serene Macedon Ranges north of Melbourne, ready to stuff ourselves silly in this food and wine lovers' paradise.

At Rochford Lodge, we're greeted by hosts Greg and Sarsha Ashmore, who are armed with a bottle of local red and smelly cheese. They show us to The Old School House, circa 1857, which they have lovingly converted into a luxury retreat. Tastefully decorated in earthy tones with wide lounges facing the roaring fire (not the TV), softer-than-soft duvets, oodles of pillows, mohair throws and candles, it's instantly inviting and relaxing.

Following a peaceful sleep and farm-fresh eggs for brekkie, we hit the road to explore the region. After dropping in at several impressive cellar doors, we decide to burn off the kilojoules with a walk around eerie Hanging Rock, and can't resist calling out for Miranda. I'm sure we're not the first!

We hit Kyneton for lunch. We know we're in for a treat at Annie Smithers Bistrot when the waiter delivers an appetiser of tiny fresh radish with salty butter, from Annie's garden. It's delicious (as are our next three courses) and proof that even the humble radish tastes better in this part of the world.

We spend the afternoon wandering along Kyneton's Piper Street, perusing antiques, homewares, boutiques, country

crafts and exotic jewellery.

We should really have skipped dinner – but we heard such good things about the Royal George Hotel, we decided it would be criminal not to pop in. Its restaurant serves a melt-in-your-mouth selection of local produce and wines – and the bar next door is warm and friendly, so we easily settle in for the evening.

It's raining the next day when we head for home, and we already miss the roaring fire. I gaze out at the rolling countryside and signs enticing us to buy farm-fresh goodies and sigh. If only we had one more day... and pants with slightly wider waistlines.

Past and present unite at Rochford Lodge.



THE ESSENTIALS

STAY Rochford Lodge, 0417 572 019, rochfordlodge.com.

EAT Annie Smithers Bistrot, 72 Piper Street, Kyneton, (03) 5422 2039.

DRINK Royal George Hotel, 24 Piper Street, Kyneton, (03) 5422 1390.