

# MOUNTAIN HIGH

Situated just 100 kilometres west of Sydney, the misty, blue-clad cliffs and valleys of the Upper Blue Mountains serve as a glorious backdrop to vibrant villages bursting with fun things to see and do. Lisa Doust spent a weekend exploring the region

Famous for being home to an incredible one million hectares of World Heritage Listed landscape, the Blue Mountains are spectacularly beautiful and holidaying here makes for a relaxing retreat where you can breathe fresh air and get up close to nature. And, just in case you're wondering, the mountains really are blue thanks to the haze created by oil evaporating from the gum trees.

The towns that comprise the Upper Blue Mountains - Wentworth Falls, Leura, Katoomba, Medlow Bath, Blackheath and Mount Victoria - are all uniquely charming and attract a fascinating mix of artists, musicians, writers and creative personalities all using the natural surrounds as inspiration.

From a historical perspective, the mountains were occupied for at least 20,000 years by Aboriginal people; the region was an impenetrable barrier that kept European settlers out until 1813. Today, the mountains are widely enjoyed by people from all over the world and the abundance of natural wonders here are easily accessed via well-maintained tracks and trails.

Wentworth Falls offers a range of bushwalks and spectacular views. A corridor of trees leads to Wentworth Falls Lake and the massive waterfall after which the town was named. The lake is a popular picnic spot with a playground and good facilities.

Visitors to Katoomba flock to Echo Point to see the famous Three Sisters - a set of giant Triassic sandstone pillars that overlook the vast Jamison Valley. Their name is derived from an Aboriginal legend that tells of three sisters, Meeni, Wimlah and Gunedoo, who were turned to stone for their misdeeds. You can either view the pillars from the viewing platform at Echo Point or take a leisurely walk right up to them.

Govett's Leap in Blackheath offers a spectacular view to Govetts and Grose gorges 400 metres below, with Govetts Leap Falls (also known as Bridal Veil Falls) off to the right - this is the tallest single-drop waterfall in the mountains, dropping 180 metres into the valley. Govetts Leap is also the starting point for many wonderful walking trails, including Grand Canyon walk, which takes you through open forest canyons where a wide range of flora and wildlife reside.

Blackheath also provides entrance to Megalong and Kanimbla valleys, where horse riding is a popular pastime. Centennial Glen Stables can be found on Kanimbla Drive, 12 kilometres from Blackheath, and there are horses to suit all ages and levels of riding experience (call 02 4787 1193 or 0417 273 438).

### Shopping spots

There's plenty of great shopping to enjoy in the Blue Mountains. Leura is a particular hotspot and features an abundance of clothing, homewares and book stores, along with a generous serving of cafes and art galleries. There are also some fantastic vintage

clothing shops here, one of which is the delightful Mrs Peel owned by Jacqui Godfrey and Roger Barber.

"Mrs Peel has been up and running for two-and-a-half years, selling hand-picked vintage clothing, as well as recycled designer goods and new things," says Jacqui, who formerly co-founded well-known Sydney vintage store Zoo Emporium. "Our aim is to provide an interesting mix of stock that is reasonably priced. We've also just extended the business online, so you can see some of the things we sell at [www.modernvintage.com.au](http://www.modernvintage.com.au). It's exciting to be selling things that we source from many different places."

Jacqui has lived in the Blue Mountains for 11 years and has several favourite shops in the region. "In Leura, I love Megalong Books, Whisk for homewares, Maharani for great skirts in vintage fabrics, Josephan's for handmade chocolates and Red Door Café for good food and coffee during the day," she reveals. "I always enjoy the Victory Antique Market at Blackheath - it's full of vintage clothes, furniture and homewares - and I like to get to the various markets held up here. I live in Mount Victoria and we have several antique stores and markets on the second Sunday of each month."

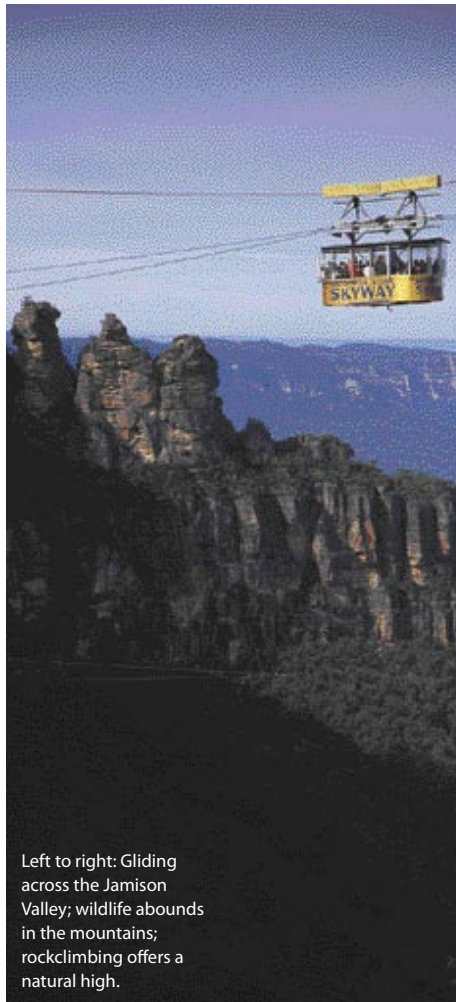
### Fare enough

Fabulous food is available in every town throughout the mountains, with lauded destinations including:

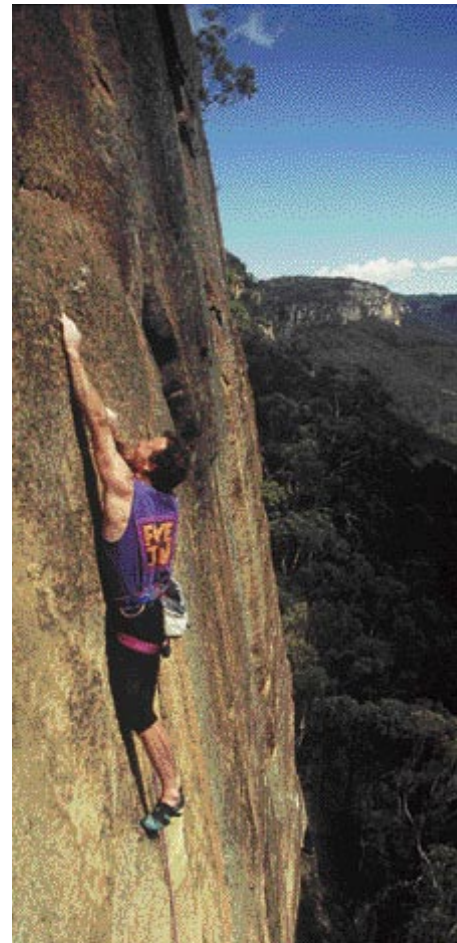
- **Blackheath:** Bookings are essential at the award-winning Ashcrofts; Vulcans is a key destination for Sydney foodies.
- **Katoomba:** Darley's at Lilianfels serves outstanding modern Australian cuisine; Elephant Bean is great for warm beverages and light lunches; The Gallery Restaurant is a French-style restaurant; and Zycca serves sumptuous Indian dishes.
- **Leura:** Café Bon Ton has a lovely outdoor dining area; Hana serves up light and tasty Japanese; Silk's Brasserie is a favourite with local fans of fine dining; Leura Gourmet is the perfect place to fill your picnic hamper.
- **Medlow Bath:** Whisk & Pin Store and Café is ideal for breakfast and cute homewares; or head to the historic Hydro Majestic Hotel for high tea complete with fabulous views of the Megalong Valley and Kanimbla Ranges. →

Opposite: The sandstone cliffs of Hanging Rock in the Grose Valley. This page: One of Blackheath's walking tracks; Katoomba's Three Sisters; a glorious backdrop; meet a colourful local.





Left to right: Gliding across the Jamison Valley; wildlife abounds in the mountains; rockclimbing offers a natural high.



- **Mount Victoria:** During summer, the garden at the Imperial Hotel is a good place to meet friends for a hearty pub meal and refreshments.
- **Wentworth Falls:** Escargot To Go is a hole in the wall serving fab French fare for those on the run; Seven serves fine Italian food for the whole family; Canton Palace dishes up delicious Chinese meals in an ambient environment.

**Stay a while**

There's no shortage of accommodation in the Upper Blue Mountains, with options ranging from five-star resorts to quaint B&Bs and heritage-listed worker's cottages. Some options include:

- **Branksome House:** Just a short stroll from Leura Mall, this pretty cottage is ideal for a weekend stay. 98 Railway Parade, Leura. Tel: 0412 038 251. W: www.branksomehouse.com.au
- **Lilianfels Resort & Spa:** Overlooking the Three Sisters and housing one of the region's most popular day spas and award-winning restaurant Darley's, Lilianfels is an ultra-modern retreat with all the mod cons. Lilianfels Avenue, Echo Point, Katoomba. Tel: 4780 1200. W: www.lilianfels.com.au
- **The Falls House Studio & Stables:** Formerly owned by Australian artist John

Olsen, this beautiful property is set on 1.5 acres and is great for small or large groups. You can even stay in Olsen's two-storey cedar studio. 169 Falls Road, Wentworth Falls. Tel: 4757 4517. W: www.fallshouse.com.au

- **Waratah Cottage:** This meticulously restored 1890s worker's cottage makes for a cosy retreat. 30 Waratah Avenue, Katoomba. Tel: 4782 9500. W: www.waratahcottage.com.au

**Out and about**

Fans of action adventure are spoilt for choice in the Blue Mountains. You can try everything from rock climbing and canyoning to horseriding, mountain biking and bushwalking. You can also travel southwest of the Upper Blue Mountains to the amazing Jenolan Caves, the best-known limestone caves complex in the country.

There's also a thriving music scene in the region, with well-known local and international performers regularly appearing at the Clarendon Hotel in Katoomba (tel: 4782 1322). Hotel Gearin, also in Katoomba and owned by actor Jack Thompson and his son Patrick, gives local bands the chance to battle it out onstage (tel: 4782 4395). The Hillcrest Restaurant in Leura hosts jazz on Friday on Saturday nights (tel: 4784 3265) and Tresilies Restaurant in Katoomba also features regular music nights (tel: 4782 1217).

Movie buffs should head to the quaint township of Mount Victoria to step back in time

at the lovely old cinema, which is housed in the 1934 Public Hall. The movie selection is always sophisticated and the candy shop is filled with edible delights (tel: 4787 1577).

**Child's play**

Children are well catered for in the mountains, with four fun options including:

- **Scenic Skywalk:** Located in Katoomba, this glass-bottomed carriage glides 270 metres above the Jamison Valley. It's an awe-inspiring experience for the whole family.
- **The Edge:** This giant-screen cinema in Katoomba is great for rainy days.
- **The Zig Zag Railway:** Built in the 1860s, this full-size, narrow-gauge tourist railway is located at Clarence, east of Lithgow. It's worth a day trip to experience the vintage steam train.
- **Toy & Railway Museum:** Housed in Leura's historic Leuralla mansion, the museum has an impressive collection of toys, dolls, teddy bears, ships, automobiles, airplanes and trains, including working models.

**Annual events**

- **January to December:** Cello Concerts in the Cave - Jenolan Caves are held in Lucas Cave on the third Saturday of each month and feature Georg Mertens playing a varying program that includes the Bach Suites, medieval songs and original compositions.

The entry fee includes a tour of Lucas Cave. Tel: 6359 3311.

- **February:** Mountain folk make an annual pilgrimage to Oberon, a 45-minute drive from Mount Victoria, to experience the Oberon Show. Highlights include sideshow alleys, line dancing, bull rides, ring events, a championship dog show, snake shows, fireworks and other delights. Tel: 6336 0777.
- **March:** The Blue Mountains Music Festival of Folk, Roots and Blues, held in Katoomba, attracts a range of Australian and international performers for your enjoyment. W: www.bmff.org.au
- **June:** Each year, Katoomba hosts the region's biggest annual event, Winter Magic Festival, which attracts more than 40,000 people. The festival celebrates the Winter Solstice and the main street gives way to stalls and stages for a multitude of performances. Tel: 1300 653 408.
- **June to August:** Yulefest in the Mountains celebrates winter Northern Hemisphere-style, with traditional Yulefest dinners, carols and live entertainment taking place throughout the region. Tel: 1300 653 408.
- **October:** Leura Gardens Festival comprises a range of events all based around beautiful display gardens. This year there will be music and art to enjoy along with some glorious new gardens. W: www.leuragardensfestival.com.au

No matter where you choose to stay or what you plan to do, it's guaranteed that you'll want to return again and again to this glorious part of the world. **SL**

**Getting There**

**Train:** Regular rail services operate from Sydney to Lithgow each day, stopping off at all major villages throughout the mountains. For details, call 13 22 32 or view timetables at

[www.cityrail.nsw.gov.au](http://www.cityrail.nsw.gov.au)

**Car:** Head west along Parramatta Road and turn right onto the M4 motorway (the Great Western Highway) at Strathfield. All towns in the Upper Blue Mountains are signposted and are accessed directly from the motorway.

**For more information:** History buffs should head for the Blue Mountains Heritage Centre, in Blackheath, to find out about local geology, flora, fauna and history. Call 02 4787 8877.

For more details about things to do and places to stay in the Blue Mountains, log on to:

[www.visitbluemountains.com.au](http://www.visitbluemountains.com.au)



Take a horse ride through the magnificent Megalong Valley.