

# FLAT-OUT FABULOUS



## A farm stay with benefits

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There's little dispute that fresh country air sharpens the appetite. But when crisp gulps of breath are taken at Daylesford, there's something else afoot. Here in this veritable food bowl northwest of Melbourne, where even casual signposts promise such delights as Apple Tree Lane, the agricultural bounty is so rich I feel my head spinning. But maybe that's because chef Rosa and resident concierge Mariana are serving breakfast at Dairy Flat Lodge & Farm.

The generous spread is composed not just of parish produce but ingredients from the sustainable organic estate beyond the window, across the fields and forests, towards the hills but not too far away. Yesterday, on a tour of the expansive holdings with farm manager (and agricultural engineer, late of Brazil) Pedro, I looked at a lot of fruit, vegetables, herbs, olives and curious plantings straight in the eye. I potted about in greenhouses with icy windows. I am now well informed on the mysteries of sharkskin melons and warty-looking galeux d'eyssines pumpkins. I peeped into polytunnels housing 24 varieties of tomatoes, but such a figure was soon eclipsed by the 48 types of apples just casually hanging about in the orchard, which is also abundant with pears and stone fruit in season. For a fleeting moment I contemplated a spot of trout fishing in the private spring-fed dam, until I was diverted by the outdoor hot tub and fire-pit.

I walked through high-hedged outdoor "rooms" in the Vita Sackville-West style and passed by orderly rows of flowers in the cutting garden bobbing their heads in a brisk breeze as if to the rhythm of a metronome. To stay at this lodge is to feel immersed in an agricultural and botanical reverie. The temptation to overeat and then lie-down has to be tempered with country hikes, electric bike rides and vigorous strolls through the cool-climate plantings of Wombat Hill Botanic Gardens, resplendent with heritage trees. But all that is blown when a waft of oven-fresh bread is lingering on an early breeze and the trail leads to the on-site bakehouse where Domenico and his fellow magicians are rustling up slow-fermented sourdough, baguettes, brioche and glazed pastries. And there's no need to venture into the frosty morn this time of year to visit those master bakers. Just pop down to the lodge's wine cellar and follow a bunker-style tunnel to the ovens and simply draw up a chair.

But now, Mariana and I must discuss the therapeutic benefits of Portuguese custard



Dairy Flat Farm, main; the house is full of high-quality furnishings, art and textural delights, left, above and below; organic farm produce, inset



tarts from her home city of Lisbon while she shows me how to work the gleaming espresso machine in case I wake with the kookaburras tomorrow morning and need to rustle up coffee for our small house-party of four. We are occupying just two double chambers in one wing of this six-bedroom country house. If we'd arrived with more friends, there'd be the possibility to spread across four guestrooms in the main residence and two vineyard suites in an annexe overlooking chardonnay and pinot noir vines.

The decor differs within the accommodation inventory but there's a cohesive country-chic feel of deep comfort, patterned fabrics, classy wallpapers, well-chosen furniture and fittings, and free-standing bath-tubs positioned, quite literally, to soak in the views. Every guestroom is ensuite, generous in size and has a TV and a king bed. Bed linens and accessories are what you'd expect in a five-star hotel, and vases and bowls of roses and dahlias add shots of colour.

Larissa, daughter of owners Alla and Allan Wolf-Tasker, has overseen the design and there are clear Kit Kemp-style touches in her tactile accessorising, high padded bedheads and mix-it-up colour combos. Allan Wolf-Tasker's large-scale artworks feature in key

positions and bronze animal sculptures by Anthony Vanderzweep add charm and whimsy. Fusty country gingham, this is not.

You could just stay put for an entire weekend and lord it up, rural manor-style, or enjoy Dairy Flat in the style of an Italian agriturismo experience and really explore the farm. But this is also a base camp for thorough exploration of the Macedon region, including nearby towns of Kyneton, Trentham and Woodend, all with good retail and dining, or focus on neighbouring Hepburn Springs with its mineral spas and excellent bath-house.

The Wolf-Taskers, who run Lake House inn and restaurant at Daylesford, opened the exclusive-use Dairy Flat Lodge & Farm in the hamlet of Musk, about 10 minutes' drive from the mother-ship, in 2019, just in time for a ghastly bushfire season and for the world as we know it to close down. It had been purchased as a viable but "rundown" farm and olive grove, and the scale of the rejuvenation project might have broken a lesser family. But after massive improvements, umpteen lockdowns and setbacks, the property has hit its stride. While we've all been sleeping, the grounds, beehives and bakehouse, resident alpacas and livestock, have all been meticulously cared for. Staff have been trained in

multiple roles; pivoting like a spinning top has become the new normal. The word "productive" hardly seems to cover the enterprise, which now supplies a significant amount of food to supplement orders from local producers for Lake House's multi-award-winning kitchen and its nearby casual cafe, Wombat Hill House.

This year there are weddings and functions booked at Dairy Flat but it's the house-party concept that will likely rule the roost. The feeling of a perfect getaway starts when motoring up a long drive lined with silver birch and maybe spotting, as we do, kangaroos bounding ghost-like in a wintry mist and shadowy alpacas craning their long necks. By the second day, there could have been llamas in pyjamas lined up and we'd hardly have blinked an eye. That's just how otherworldly this place feels. So, splurge on a romantic weekend or gather a companionable crowd of 12 for a sole-use stay. There's loads of space to spread out, no such thing as the worst guestroom and, to be fair, no point wasting an invitation on anyone who's following a strict weight-loss diet. Bon appetit.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Dairy Flat Lodge & Farm.

## TO-DO LIST

### VISIT

Istra Smallgoods for superb relishes, pressed meats, bottled sauces and nut-studded nougat. Also close by are Passing Clouds Winery and Daylesford Cider Company.

[istrasmallgoods.com.au](http://istrasmallgoods.com.au)  
[passingclouds.com.au](http://passingclouds.com.au)  
[daylesfordcider.com.au](http://daylesfordcider.com.au)

### SHOP

For European-inspired homewares at eCasa, and natural fibre clothing at Manteau Noir. Cliffy's Emporium cum grocery/cafe is an institution, full of wonderful clutter.

[ecasadaylesford.com.au](http://ecasadaylesford.com.au)  
[manteaunoir.com.au](http://manteaunoir.com.au)  
[cliffysemporium.com.au](http://cliffysemporium.com.au)

### DRINK

Housed in a cottage and arranged like an apothecary, the Daylesford Hot Chocolate Company sells top-quality blends (dark ginger; dark chilli etc) to take away or sip on site.

[facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/daylesfordhotchocolate)

### DINE

Lake House for a meal is de rigueur and its supplies from Dairy Flat ensure a focus on vegetable-based dishes as well as best neighbourhood produce.

Without argument, this centrepiece restaurant of the family-owned lodge, is the best in the region.

[visitvictoria.com](http://visitvictoria.com)

## ESSENTIALS

Dairy Flat Lodge & Farm offers sole-use bookings for up to 12 guests. Rates on application.

[dairyflatfarmdaylesford.com.au](http://dairyflatfarmdaylesford.com.au)  
[lakehouse.com.au](http://lakehouse.com.au)