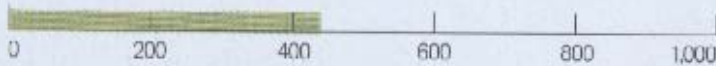


HUNTER VALLEY

*Best for food
and wine*

MILES INTO YOUR TRIP: 437



Head back along the M4 and M7, before going northwards along the M2 and Tourist Drive 33

At daybreak, Hunter Valley sets a quintessentially Australian scene. Eucalyptus trees wave gently on hills overlooking rows of grapevines, with the low Brokenback Mountains as a backdrop. In the foreground, kangaroos emerge one by one from pools of mist. The air is cool and heavy with the scent of moisture and the Australian bush, and as the sun rises, 'utes' – or utility trucks – and other rugged vehicles begin to appear on the backroads, marking the start of another working day.

This place is considered the birthplace of Australian winemaking. Where once the land was taken up with small farms, this is now the domain of family-owned boutique wineries, and a number of world-class wines are produced here.

Andrew Margan grew up in the area before heading to France to sharpen his winemaking skills. Now, after 15 years of work, the fruit of his labour and experience stands among his 300 sweeping acres of vines – the Margan Restaurant, Hunter Valley Winery and Cellar Door. Margan is a perfectionist and is committed to remaining true to the region's strengths, such as its

sémillon – Australia's unique dry white wine. 'We have a special climate in the Hunter Valley,' Andrew explains. 'This is what makes a Hunter sémillon so individual. Attempts to replicate it elsewhere have never worked.'

Increasingly, the local emphasis has been on creating high-quality food to go with the area's excellent wines. Organically grown produce is everywhere – from Valençay cheeses with a dash of ground vine ash, to chicken and macadamia sausages made by the local charcutier.

This theme is abundantly clear at Margan Restaurant, where the fresh herbs that coat a salmon carpaccio are sourced from the organic vegetable garden just metres from the outdoor table. Their taste is as vivid as their colour.

'The climate and soil don't allow us to grow a mass-market product in the Hunter Valley, so we don't try,' Margan says happily over a glass of buttery sémillon. 'I don't know who invented the philosophy that bigger is better, but a small, good-quality winery has always been my vision. Now I'm living the life I wanted.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

- winecountry.com.au
- margan.com.au
- smallwinemakerscentre.com.au

WHERE TO EAT

- At Margan Restaurant in the village of Broke, couple a shiraz with braised wagyu and pomegranate or a merlot with spiced duck breast and mustard cherries (mains from £13; margan.com.au).

ABOVE, FROM TOP Tasting fine local wines at Cellar Door; Margan Restaurant is known for the quality of its food and wine.

RIGHT A misty Hunter valley early in the morning