

## Short breaks Granite Belt



# Days of wine and roses amid the hills

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where vines grow over the lintel, is a perfect place to have breakfast or an afternoon drink.

You might wonder what the inside would be like, but here is the big surprise. Michelle and Tim Coelli have restored it to a simple elegance – nothing fancy, but clean, comfortable and roomy, with watercolours and pencil drawings by Michelle's grandfather and great-grandfather adorning the walls.

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**DRIVE RIGHT IN:** The Twisted Gum vineyard at Ballandean.

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# Days of wine and roses amid the hills

You do the cooking, but it's a pleasure at this Granite Belt bolthole, writes **Alison Cotes**

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From the outside there's nothing flash about it, although the drive from the gate to the cottage goes past a huge lake and the roses at the end of each row of vines are going berserk in their summer beauty.

The cottage itself was built in the 1920s as a simple house for the manager, and it looks like it, with stucco walls and rooms added haphazardly as the family grew.

A big, wide veranda at the front,

where vines grow over the lintel, is a perfect place to have breakfast or an afternoon drink.

You might wonder what the inside would be like, but here is the big surprise. Michelle and Tim Coelli have restored it to a simple elegance – nothing fancy, but clean, comfortable and roomy, with watercolours and pencil drawings by Michelle's grandfather and great-grandfather adorning the walls.

Although there were only two of us staying, the house is set up for six, with two double bedrooms and one twin, and there's a big separate dining room as well as a roomy kitchen. A playroom extends the length of the house, and there's a very civilised living room for the grown-ups. Two bathrooms, including an ensuite for the main bedroom, mean there's no fighting for the shower, and the beds are extremely comfortable.

A word of warning, though – it's not a bed-and-breakfast, but fully self-catering, so although there's plenty of tea, real coffee, some cooking oil and condiments, take all your own tucker because you won't want to drive the 5km every night to dine at some of Ballandean's fancy restaurants, such as Shiraz and Masons.

The kitchen is so well equipped that cooking is a pleasure.

If you don't want to cook the first night, though, stop at the Big Apple at the northern end of the Granite Belt and pick up some of its genuine homemade Italian pasta sauce and some good gnocchi, and don't forget to pick up some of the house-made gelati – the turkish delight flavour is fantastic and the strawberry gelati is good enough for a Roman emperor. And remember, the Strawberry Fields are open for DIY or pre-picked berries.

When you reach the cottage (stop at Tim and Michelle's pole house to be escorted and shown around), you're sure to be visited by the mad family pooch Cass, but don't let him in the house, although he'll love playing outside with the kids, and will accompany you on a walk in the bush.

Lauren, the family's charming six-year-old, is happy to be your guide, and now that she's learnt the trick of holding a buttercup under your chin to see if you like butter, she'll probably try it out, because the Granite Belt is covered in them at the moment, beside the lake, beneath the trees, fluttering and dancing in the breeze, as

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If playing bushrangers among the granite boulders on the property doesn't satisfy the kids, it's only a short drive to Girraween National Park, and if you want to make this an educational trip for you as well as the kids, drive the few kilometres south of the border and visit Tenterfield, the home of Federation, where Henry Parkes made the famous Tenterfield Oration that began the movement that united the states, so that you no longer have to pay taxes when crossing state borders. There's a wonderful museum display with a full-sized photographic reproduction of this occasion, the bushy whiskers and leonine beards of our Founding Fathers showing just how important they were and why their decisions should never be questioned.

Easier on the brain, and less ethically taxing, is a visit to a vineyard or two in the area – Ballandean has thousands of them, but you may prefer to stay in the cottage and sample the Coellis' own label, Twisted Gum, which isn't at all bad. Their 2009 cabernet sauvignon was awarded a silver medal at the Australian Small Winemakers Show.

There's a free bottle for guests, and if you buy three bottles, you get them for half price. I asked for the driest white they had, and after a few sips pronounced it delicious, with a hint of fresh-mown grass, and then they told me it was a chardonnay, a grape that has never passed my lips in 20 years. They don't have a cellar door – their sales are to restaurants or online.

Talking of food and drink, we stopped on the way home as usual at Suttons Juice Factory and Cider, where Dave has recently added to his range a delicious apple and strawberry juice – the perfect holiday drink for teetotallers, teenagers or even for those who just want a break from beer and wine.



WINNING WINES: A Twisted Gum white.

## Wish you were here

### Getting there

Ballandean is a small village about three hours south of Brisbane along the Cunningham/New England Highway, two hours from Toowoomba (follow the signs to Warwick and head south to the Granite Belt), and 20 minutes south of Stanthorpe. Turn right into Eukey Rd immediately past the dinosaur statue.

Tariff \$240 a night for four guests; extra guests \$30 a night. Minimum two-night stay. Accommodation only – meals are self-catering, but continental breakfast baskets are available for \$15 a person. No pets, no smoking, but children welcome.

### Doing there

Bushwalking or simply mucking around in Girraween and Sundown National Parks, exploring food outlets, especially fresh fruit and wineries.

For more information about what to do, check [www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au](http://www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au)

### Staying there

Twisted Gum Vineyard, 2271 Eukey Rd, Ballandean. Ph 4684 1282, email [info@twistedgum.com.au](mailto:info@twistedgum.com.au); visit [www.twistedgum.com.au](http://www.twistedgum.com.au)

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