

## Where Magazine (Melbourne)

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### YARRA VALLEY VIBES

# VALLEY VIBES

Here's the pick of things to do for one perfect day in the Yarra Valley, writes Mary O'Brien.

#### THE YARRA VALLEY

is where Melburnians like to play. About 60 minutes from the city, the suburbs peter out, replaced by green rolling hills dotted with vines, restaurants, walking trails, farm gates and pretty villages just waiting to be discovered. Much of Victoria's best produce is grown here, the cool climate wines are top notch and Sunday lunch is an institution. Of course, no visit is complete without calling into Healesville Sanctuary where you can get up close and personal with koalas, dingoes and platypus.



Balgownie

memorabilia at the small gallery after brunch in the conservatory restaurant. And, yes, peach Melba (named after Dame Nellie) is on the dessert menu. Coombe Farm wines can be tasted at the cellar door. Book ahead for garden tours.

[coombeyarravalley.com.au](http://coombeyarravalley.com.au)

#### Morning—Healesville Sanctuary

Steal a magic moment with Australia's native animals at Healesville Sanctuary, which is set on 32 hectares of bushland. Sort the platypus facts from fiction at the glass tank where the keepers interact with the little creatures. An elevated boardwalk helps you to spot the koalas among the gum trees. Wade with the platypus, pat the wombat or



Healesville Sanctuary

marvel at cockatoos in flight. Visit the wildlife health centre, which treats more than 1,500 sick animals every year.

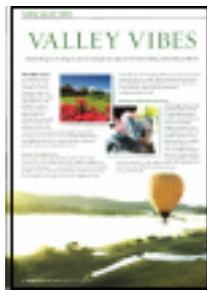
[zoo.org.au/healesville](http://zoo.org.au/healesville)

#### Brunch—Coombe Farm

Once mysteriously hidden behind its giant cypress hedge, Coombe Farm, Dame Nellie Melba's old estate in Coldstream, is now open to the public. You can explore the century-old 2.8-hectare gardens of Australia's famous opera singer followed by morning tea, or instead marvel at the Louis Vuitton luggage and opera



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#### Lunch—Giant Steps

Add some hipster cred to your day by calling into Giant Steps restaurant/winery in Healesville. It's a beautifully designed, large-scale, industrial-style, winery bistro with a wood-fired pizza oven. Opened in 2006, like its wine it has aged well. You can watch the winemaking process through a huge glass wall. Graze on some bites or opt for a main course with suggested wine matches. Watch out for the new Giant Steps bakery and coffee house, Habituel, opening soon. Also new, next door Brown Brothers (who have bought the Innocent Bystander wines) are opening a cellar door and pizzeria. Book ahead at Giant Steps to avoid the queues. [giantstepswine.com.au](http://giantstepswine.com.au)



Yarra Valley Chocolaterie. Photo: Mary O'Brien.

ice-creams. Watch the chocolatiers at work, indulge in some free samples and learn the secrets of chocolate making. Plus, there's a café and spacious grounds. [yvcj.com.au](http://yvcj.com.au)

#### Dinner—Balgownie Estate

A five-minute drive away, you can check into

Balgownie Estate for the night. Vine views, luxurious spa treatments, cellar door and award-winning restaurant: Balgownie ticks all the boxes. Swim in the heated pool, explore the walks around the estate or indulge in a special treatment at the onsite Natskin spa. Drop into the cellar door and compare the very different wines from Balgownie's Yarra Valley and Bendigo vineyards. Dinner at Rae's restaurant competes with views of the vine-covered hills. Note: kangaroo is one of the tempting main-course options. [balgownieestate.com.au](http://balgownieestate.com.au)



Four Pillars. Photo: Mary O'Brien.

#### Afternoon—Four Pillars distillery

Wander through Healesville, past the charming old Healesville Hotel, jewellery and homewares shops to the other end of town. Here the award-winning gin distillers, Four Pillars, has opened a tasting room. The distillery, which started with a crowd-funding campaign in 2013, has grown from a single still in a Warrandyte warehouse to this cool, well-designed joint on the back of the gin boom. Learn how gin is made from the knowledgeable staff and enjoy a paddle of four gins with a tonic. Do take home the breakfast negroni marmalade (a by-product of the distilling process), it's delicious. [fourpillarsgin.com.au](http://fourpillarsgin.com.au)

#### Also try:

Tarrawarra Estate winery and museum of art (Yarra Glen), Piggery café and bakery (Sherbrooke), Watts River Brewing (Hunter Road, Healesville) and Global Ballooning's early morning hot-air balloon rides.

#### Late afternoon—Yarra Valley Chocolaterie and Ice Creamery

Those with kids, or those with a sweet tooth, will want to take a break at Yarra Valley Chocolaterie and Ice Creamery. Inside you'll find hundreds of chocolate treats surrounded by a Willie Wonka-style madness while outside fans queue for the many flavoured

#### Festival Fun

Boutique vineyards, big-gun wineries, local brewers, gourmet food producers and food trucks will turn out in force for the first Yarra Valley Wine and Food Festival on 1–2 April. Rochford Wines will host live music (Chunky Jam and Lisa Edwards), "wine laneways", a farmers' market, cooking demos and wine masterclasses on its lawns. [yarravalleywineandfoodfestival.com.au](http://yarravalleywineandfoodfestival.com.au)



Main image: Hot air ballooning in the Yarra Valley. Photo: Rob Blackburn/Visit Victoria.

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