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What's new in the Blue (Mountains)?

The Blue Mountains NSW has been a favourite visitor hotspot for more than 100 years – but there's a whole lot of new in the Blue in 2023.

From retro hotel makeovers, new foodie flavours and the Blue Mountains Craft Beverage Trail to upgraded views accessible to all, fresh activities and an entire hidden valley to explore.

Blue Mountains Tourism president Jason Cronshaw says: "The Mountains has been blessed with a long visitor tradition because it has the fantastic ability to evolve and offer visitors new reasons to return time and again."

Think you've "been there, done that" in Australia's first visitor destination? Read on and think again.

ACCOMMODATION

Megalong Valley

When Covid put the kybosh on renowned chef Colin Barker's The Boathouse at Blackwattle Bay, he re-established on Lot101. The 600ha property tucked under the cliffs of the Megalong Valley includes the fine dining **Megalong Restaurant**, historic **Megalong Valley Tearooms** and **Werriberri Cottages**. Vegetables and fruit, sheep, cattle, ducks and chicken are grown and served onsite.

Mt Victoria

The top Mountains village is home to Australia's first social enterprise hotel, **Hotel Etico**, which opened in November 2020. The **Victoria & Albert Guesthouse** is undergoing a glamorous revamp and hosts regular events, and the **Victoria Tea Rooms** serves wholesome food made to CWA recipes. There's also plenty of that renowned Blue Mountains quirk at **Mt Vic & Me** and **Mt Vic Flicks**.

Blackheath

Chalets of Blackheath with four luxury eco chalets has risen from the ashes of the well-known Jemby Rinjah Eco Lodge that was destroyed in the 2019 bushfires, while the old Redleaf Resort was unveiled as **Kyah Boutique Hotel** at Blackheath in December 2021 as a Palm Springs-inspired modern venue with a twist of old Hollywood glamour.

Jenolan Caves is undergoing a major overhaul, with the Mountain Lodge already refreshed and the historic Caves House to be unveiled soon.

Katoomba/Leura

One of the original grand hotels of the Blue Mountains and official ``home of Yulefest'', **Hotel Mountain Heritage**, and **Falls Mountain Retreat** was purchased by Illawarra Catholic Club (ICC Group) in March 2022 with plans for a major refurb.

Escarpment Group of luxury hotels (Lilianfels Resort & Spa and Darleys Restaurant, Echoes Boutique Hotel and Restaurant, Parklands Country Gardens & Lodges and the Hydro Majestic Hotel) were purchased by Salter Brothers in May 2023.

Nesuto Leura Gardens was purchased by Elanor Investors Group in June 2023 and the well-known **Old Leura Dairy** is on the market, as is **Brightlands Retreat**, **Bethany Manor** and the **Alexandra Hotel** in Leura.

Equeva Group has renovated the accommodation rooms at **Echo Point Discovery Motel** to offer a more comfortable stay with eco-friendly features in contemporary cosiness in designs inspired by the nearby Echo Point.

FOOD & BEVERAGE

Blackheath

Whether you're looking for a place to enjoy a lazy brunch, unwind after a local bushwalk or catch up with friends over dinner, **Hounslow licensed café** serves great coffee, local and seasonal ingredients, housemade pastries, bespoke cocktails and leading Australian and international wines.

Showcasing hyper-local produce plucked straight from the garden and gathered from local producers, the **Blaq Restaurant** at Blackheath menu has been created under the culinary vision of executive chef Mate Herceg.

Blue Mountains Craft Beverage Trail

People often come for the bushwalks, but there's another type of track weaving its way through the Mountains – a trail where exploration means sampling some of the best beverages in the Blue.

There's cider from a century-old orchard, beers brewed down canyons and spirits infused with local botanicals for a true taste of the region.

Along the way is the world's best (it's official) vodka at **Karu Distillery**, the only brew pub in the Blue (**Mountain Culture Beer Co**) with the country's top craft beer, and newbies **Frankly This Wine Was Made by Bob** (Blackheath) and **Blue Mountains Gin Company** (Katoomba).

Leura

The Bunker Leura has a dining dome overlooking Leura and Katoomba, while the **Fairmont Resort** has the new No. 1 Sublime Pt child-free restaurant and Two Doctors Whiskey Tavern.

Katoomba

Gazelles Restaurant & Café Royale at the **Palais Royale** has a new chef with fresh offerings at one of the original grand hotels of the region, while the renowned quirk venue Avalon Restaurant has a new sister in **The Bowery**.

New kid on the block **Tempus Restaurant** at Katoomba serves modern Australian cuisine, well-known chef Misha Laurant travels the world in eight street food dishes at his **8Things** venue (and mobile food truck) and his latest **Leura Dumplings** turns out dumplings, noodles and Hainanese chicken rice.

Lower Mountains

Newcomer **Arrana** at Springwood has made an immediate impact with executive chef Daniel Cabban's focus on Indigenous ingredients. The venue has two Chef's Hats.

ACTIVITIES

Smell the gum leaves and feel the breeze on your skin as you venture into the rugged Blue Mountains wilderness in an open-topped ex-army vehicle for a full day with **Beyond the Blacktop Adventure Tours**.

Blue Mountains Biking Adventures takes the thigh burn out of bike riding to spectacular locations in the Blue Mountains.

End the day with **Blue Mountains Stargazing** under the twinkling lights of heaven, stargazing with an astrophysicist, who will guide you through the night sky with cultural storytelling.

Go beyond anything you've ever experienced before – suspended 270m above the ancient rainforest canopy with the Beyond Skyway experience at **Scenic World**, which also operates Dinosaur Valley until January 28.

Out of the Blue – The Local Guide Book to the Blue Mountains includes 250 insider gems and experiences beyond the famous walks.

SUSTAINABILITY & CULTURE

Gundungurra man Uncle David King (aka Dingo Darbo) is a member of the Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association Incorporated and a Gully traditional owner. He mainly works with traditional custodians conducting walks and talks @dingodarbo and has also worked as a Discovery Ranger at National Parks & Wildlife Services and is the Indigenous engagement officer at Scenic World.

The Blue Mountains achieved **Eco Sustainability Accreditation** in March 2023 after a rigorous two-year assessment and auditing process. ECO Certification is a global standard recognised by the Global Sustainable Travel Council. Managed in Australia, the ECO Destination Certification program is managed by Ecotourism Australia in partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature Australia. Gaining this certification means that a region's local government, national parks agency, tourism organisations and other destination management stakeholders have all committed to meeting internationally recognised best practice standards across all four sustainability pillars: economic, social, cultural and environmental.

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