

Orange

aspirations

Ben Connor visits a town bursting with colour and flavour.



I have to admit it: I'm spooked. Twenty-five kilometres from any living soul and feeling very much the intrepid adventurer, I have penetrated an old mining tunnel in the gold rush country of Ophir. Guided only by the light from the screen of my mobile phone, the darkness is all-encompassing. I can stand but it's getting harder to breathe, and as the tunnel branches in two directions, my heart starts racing. I will go no further. I simply do not trust that my easily-unsettled, oxygen-depleted brain would recollect the right turns for the journey out again.

Named after the Biblical region of Ophir, from which King Solomon is said to have received many a cargo of riches, our Ophir, a picturesque, 40-minute drive from Orange, was the site where gold was first discovered in Australia in 1851. Within months gold prospectors had arrived in their thousands and the gold rush began.

I look down from a steep escarpment, cliffs rising behind me, to a fast-flowing creek beneath river oaks with a rocky bank on one side. The wind is icy as I excitedly fetch my hired gold pan to try my luck panning for gold in the fading light on the banks of Summer Hill Creek.

WILD TIMES

"There were bloody rough people around in those days," says Phil Stevenson, local historian with the Orange and District Historical Society, describing the Ophir settlement. "There are stories that you had to have a pack of wild dogs tied to your tent if you went there. They were a very important part of your kit."

Phil is the kind of grandfatherly figure every child dreams of. With wispy white hair, a groomed white beard and many stories, I find myself wishing we were sitting fireside with mugs of hot milk. A retired viticulturalist, Phil holds a wealth of historical knowledge, particularly on Orange, Ophir and gold finds in the area. In 1850, he says, Orange was a sleepy town with a population of 60 graziers. With the gold rush, people started farming to meet demand and soon found the area's high rainfall and volcanic soils were perfect for growing. Orange has been a significant producer of fruit, particularly apples, ever since.

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Live or invest - either way you win!

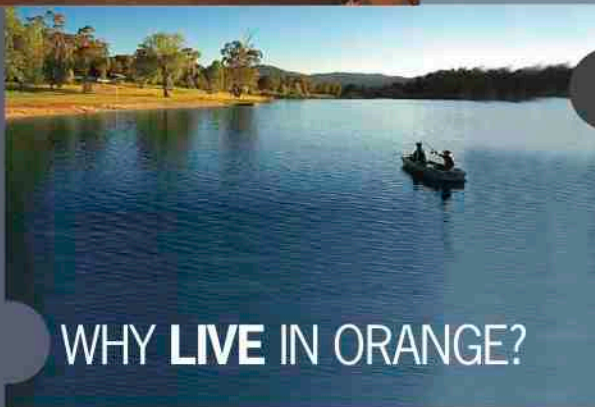


WHY INVEST IN ORANGE?

- > Large developments in mining, health, education, retail and construction
- > High rental returns on investment – much higher for serviced housing
- > High motel occupancies – the accommodation sector is bursting at the seams
- > Large population of health, mining, public sector and education employees – stable employment offsets financial crisis

UPCOMING DEVELOPMENTS

- > Construction of Newcrest's Cadia East Project – in excess of \$2B
- > Expansion of Charles Sturt University's Orange Campus
- > Shopping Centre redevelopments
- > Quest Apartments – new development
- > Completion of Northern Distributor Road

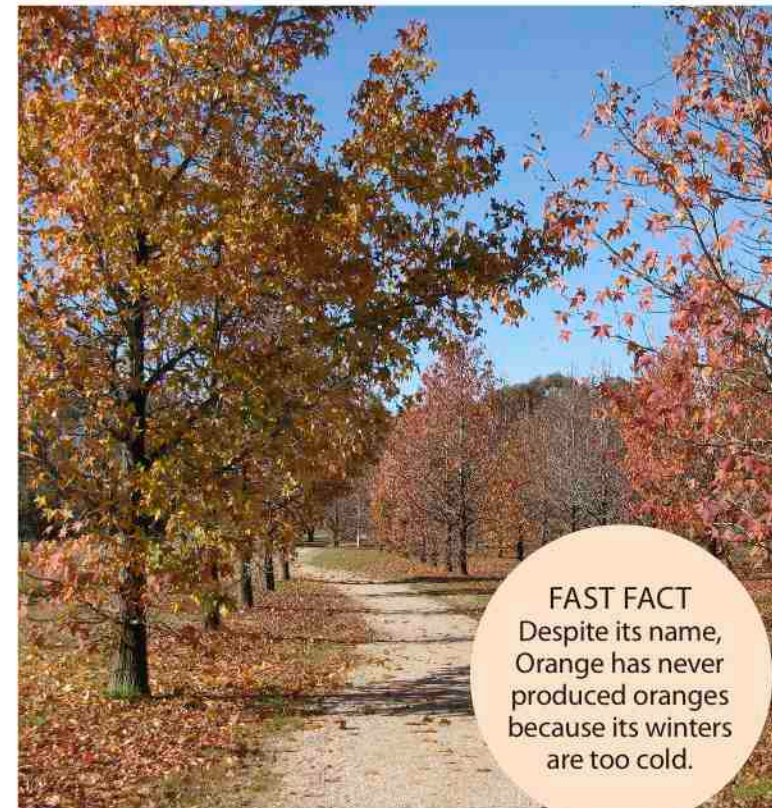


WHY LIVE IN ORANGE?

- > Excellent health and education sectors
- > Live close to work – forget commuting
- > Easy access to Sydney and Canberra
- > Great lifestyle for individuals, couples and families
- > Picturesque landscapes and cityscapes

WHAT'S IN ORANGE 4 ME?

- > Great retail offer – most national chains and boutique retail
- > New Base Hospital offering large range of specialisations
- > Private and public schools, TAFE and Charles Sturt University
- > Affordable housing of all styles
- > Great base to do business – both regionally and into Sydney



FAST FACT
Despite its name, Orange has never produced oranges because its winters are too cold.

Opening page, above, then below, clockwise from left: Mayfield Vineyard; autumn foliage; Racine Restaurant; arts and crafts lodge in Cook Park; the region has proved suitable for growing a range of grape types.

APPLES & GRAPES

"There's a guy who arrives here in his Iriquois helicopter," says Borrodell Vineyard owner Borry Gartrell, seated in the glass-panelled Sister's Rock Restaurant at the vineyard. To the amazement of guests, the military helicopter, of the kind used extensively in the Vietnam War, regularly sweeps in to land on the landscaped helipad flanking the restaurant.

Helicopter access is just one of many qualities that makes the Borrodell experience so memorable. The beautiful boutique vineyard, winery and cellar door on the outskirts of Orange also offers stylish cottages and suites, fantasy-inducing apple, plum and cherry orchards (in which guests have free rein), black-perigord-truffle-bearing oaks, quince, almond and pear trees and a fine-dining restaurant with a sweeping vista that puts it all to use. Borrodell is the full package.

Rain pours down on the field of cherry trees and vines gently descending from the restaurant's timber decking outside as Borry explains that while Orange has long been known as having an ideal cool climate for wine, 45 years ago, as was the trend, he planted apples. In the '80s, the planting of a few vineyards – and some damaging years of hail – inspired him and many others to focus on vines.

The area is now a rapidly-growing wine region, with local wineries winning numerous awards nationally and internationally. A parallel growth in fine dining – significantly enhanced by the region's wealth of fresh produce – along with a vibrant arts culture and the indisputable beauty of the town and surrounding countryside, are fast establishing Orange as a popular tourist destination.

ALL KINDS OF ART

Seated amid gleaming white tablecloths, arched timber chairs and tastefully selected artworks at Lolli Redini restaurant, it's hard to deny its appeal. An amuse-bouche of zesty pumpkin soup with butter melting on hot bread baked on the premises is the perfect beginning to a cold-climate culinary adventure. My three-course lunch here is only marginally topped, later the same day, by dinner at Racine Restaurant, where an inventive pumpkin marshmallow is the introductory delight and I experience what is, hands down, the tastiest, most tender pork belly I've ever had – propelled to even greater heights by a caramelised fennel puree.

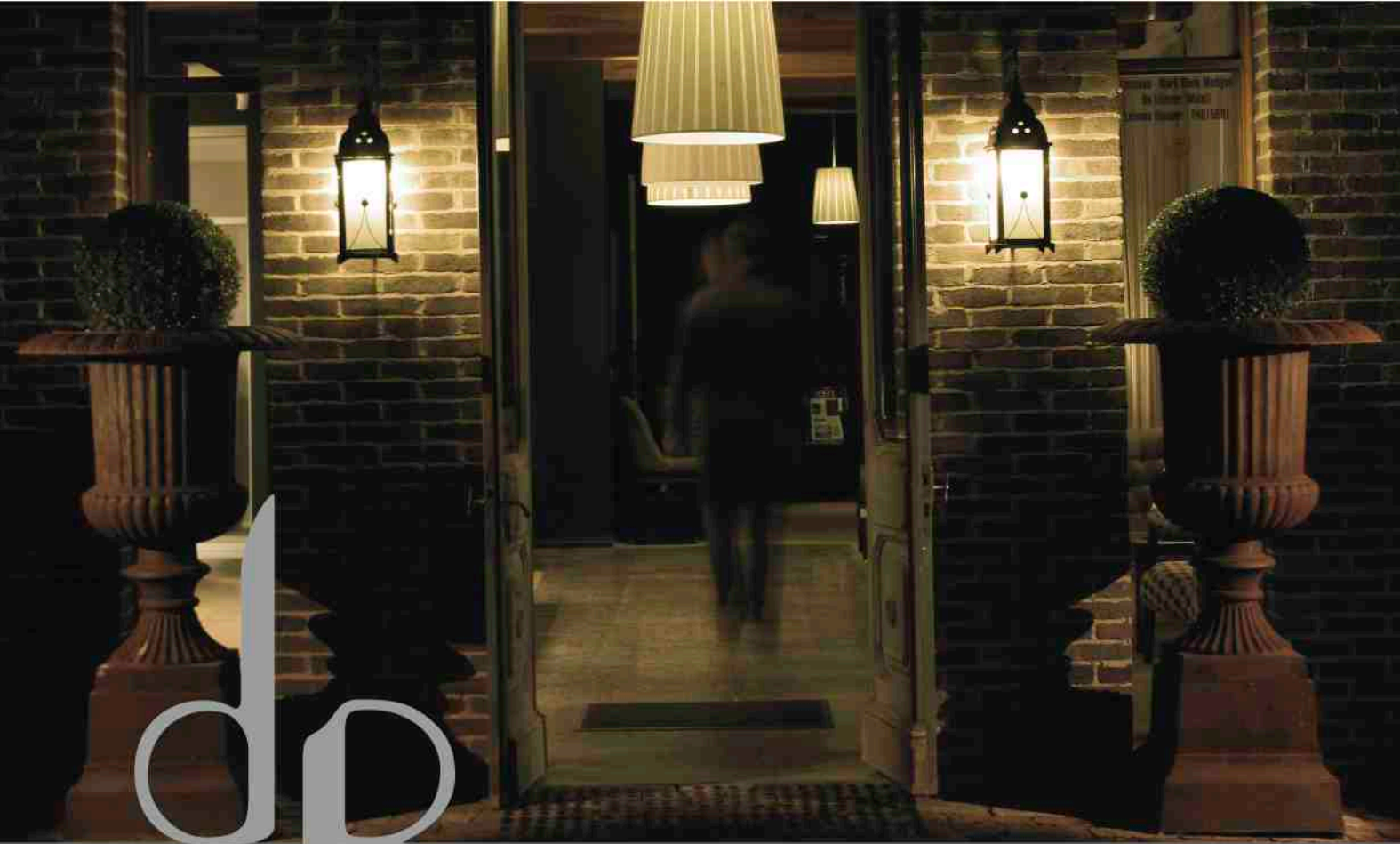
But food and wine aren't the only art forms in Orange. "As a child, I remember sewing buttons on cloth and proudly calling it art," says Heidi Lefebvre as we chat at the Orange Regional Gallery. A respected local artist, Heidi has exhibited regularly here and in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and other regional centres. I leaf through her portfolio and find the childlike playfulness of the girl she was. Now, however, with whimsical assemblages of objects, skilfully rendered drawings and splashes of colour, this playful disposition makes regular exploratory dips into an adult world of social conflict, human frailty and mankind's damaging effect on the environment.

After living in Canberra and Sydney, Heidi is back home. Here, among a vibrant network of local artists that extends to the satellite towns of Millthorpe, Molong, Hill End and Stuart Town, there's support, generosity and a sense that she can create her own opportunities. ☺



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Contact **Tony Boland** on 02 6393 8250 | evocities@orange.nsw.gov.au
www.orange.nsw.gov.au | www.evocities.com.au



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de Russie Suites Orange is Orange's only boutique, self-contained apartment hotel offering a combination of urban style with a sprinkling of Tuscany and Rome.

Choose from studio, studio spa, one, two and three bedroom apartments or the exquisite Blue Room. As a bonus, enjoy the indoor plunge pool, complimentary light continental breakfast and wireless broadband.

de Russie Suites Orange is located in a quiet tree-lined street, one block from the CBD and a short walk from the city's vibrant restaurant strip.

Visit Orange's wineries, play golf, dine out or just get away from it all, relax and enjoy your stay at de Russie Suites Orange.



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OPENING OCTOBER 2011



Above: view across Mayfield Vineyard.

Many professionals, including locals who left Orange in their late teens or early twenties, are applying their hard-won skills and experience to snap up opportunities in this now thriving regional hub, so Heidi's story is not unusual.

Lisa Lovick is a case in point. After years spent working in the advertising industry in Sydney, Lisa recognised the appeal of the region's fresh produce and, with sisters Jess and Moni and mother Vicki, started A Slice of Orange, a providore of boutique and seasonal produce from the region. Visitors can drop in for coffee and cake, peruse assorted delights and purchase a picnic hamper, perhaps with olives, dips, lavosh, cold meats and pumpkin-fetta salad, before setting off on an exploration of the town's parks, lakes, local vineyards, historic and natural sites, stopping to picnic wherever they please.

Tree-topped rolling hills, pine-tree-lined reservoirs, vineyards and quaint little bridges drift by ...

AND WHAT DO YOU TASTE?

For lovers of the good life, it is the region's wineries that shine, and there is no better place to start than in the lyrical company of Matt Heagney at the stylish Union Bank Wine Bar and Wine Store in town. With 20 years' experience in Sydney and Orange, Matt knows the region well and will guide you merrily through its tantalising taste topography: "pure passionfruit pavlova" and "foundations of creamy smokiness" accompany tidbits of information on talented boutique producers "tinkering away beneath the radar". Wine tastings come with guidance about the most picturesque wineries to visit in the area.

I wander Orange's wide, tree-lined streets past historic homes and buildings and take a stroll through the elegant Cook Park before venturing out to more wineries. I lazily drive to idyllic wineries east and west, then head north-east of Orange to Ophir Reserve. As tree-topped rolling hills, pine-tree-lined reservoirs, vineyards and quaint little bridges drift by, I know I'll be back soon. ●

Fact File

HOW TO GET THERE

Rex Airlines (13 17 13) flies regularly to Orange.
www.rex.com.au

WHERE TO STAY

Old Convent
Lot 1, Convent Lane, Borenore, Orange
02 6365 2420, www.oldconvent.com.au
Borrodell Vineyard
298 Lake Canobolas Road, Orange
02 6365 3425, www.borrodell.com.au
de Russie Suites
72 Hill Street, Orange
02 6360 0973, www.derussiehotels.com.au

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Union Bank Wine Bar & Wine Store
Corner Byng and Sale Streets, Orange
1300 712 731, www.unionbank.com.au
Racine Restaurant
42 Lake Canobolas Road, Orange
02 6365 3275, www.racinerestaurant.com.au
Lolli Redini
48 Sale Street, Orange
02 6361 7748, www.lolliredini.com.au

WHAT TO DO

Ophir Reserve has many bush trails to explore and the odd tunnel venture is permitted. There are camping grounds, toilets and wood-fired barbecues, and you can hire gold pans from the visitors' centre. Orange Helicopters offers scenic flights to nearby attractions such as the Blue Mountains, or can drop you off for lunch at Borrodell Vineyard.
www.orangehelicopters.com.au

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.orange-nsw.com

