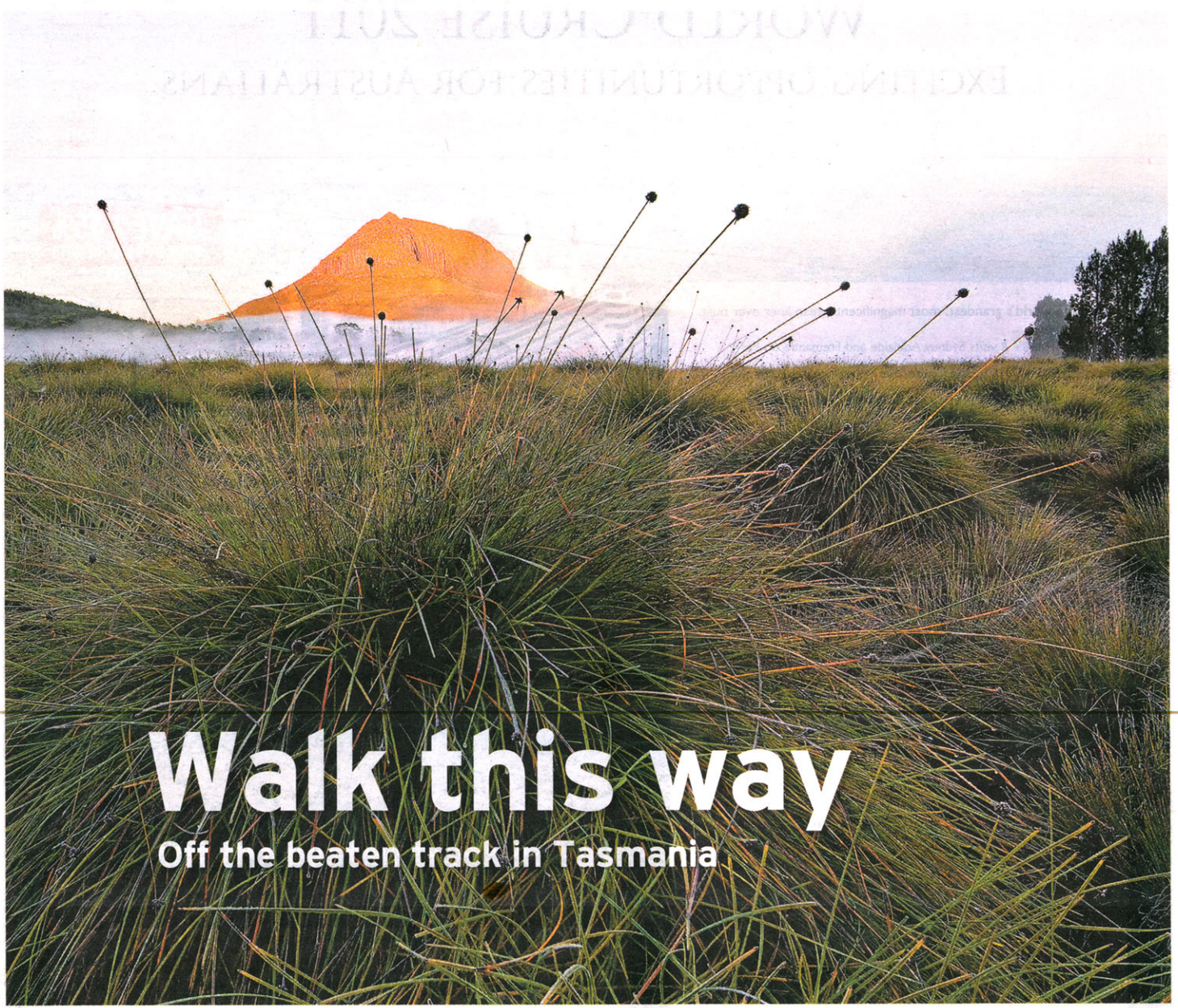


The Sydney Morning Herald March 6-7, 2010

Traveller

'All good things are wild, and free.' Henry Thoreau



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GREECE

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The gravity of the situation

Lissa Christopher succumbs to elemental forces on the veranda of a country cottage.

The first time a kookaburra glides in towards the back veranda of the Lotus Retreat, it seems to be planning to embed itself, beak first, in the middle of my forehead. In fact, it pulls up neatly on the railing and turns one inquiring eye my way, a gesture that's easy to interpret: "Food?"

Shortly thereafter, the bird takes a lump of raw mince directly from my fingers, tips back its head and guzzles it as if it were the dregs of a bottle of bourbon. Then it turns around so we're both gazing at the scenery, like old pals. We can see younger, more timid kookaburras perched on paddock fence posts and a dam with big lily pads on it. My new best friend even permits me to scratch under one of its wings. I like it here.

The Lotus Retreat is a self-contained cottage on a 28-hectare property between Buladelah and Seal Rocks. It's part of the same building in which owners Kerry Bromage and David Flakelar live but, thanks to the cunning layout, it's as if you're in an entirely separate house. Occasionally, we spot Bromage out in the paddocks feeding the horses or heading up the road for a walk with her sweet-faced old dog, Venus. The place is peaceful and secluded and I sleep as if under anaesthetic.

The retreat has two bedrooms, each with a queen bed, a big bathroom with a gleaming spa bath, a laundry and an open-plan kitchen, dining and lounge area. The television and sound system are impressive, there are books, games and videos, and the kitchen is outstandingly organised – even the knives are sharp. Between the electric wall oven, gas cooktop, microwave and big, handsome stainless-steel barbecue, we have the technology to cook up a storm. But we don't. We just throw a couple of steaks from the Buladelah butchery on the barbie. And they're good.

Bromage has supplied chilled sparkling wine, chocolate truffles, plunger coffee, tea and breakfast provisions that include eggs, muesli, smoked salmon, bacon, bread, butter, jam and milk.



The decor includes a lot of polished wood and Bromage's attention to detail reminds me of Bali, particularly the bouquets of fresh flowers beside the beds and the platter of fresh fruit and flowers in the kitchen. The set-up is so outstandingly clean and organised, I wish she would come to Sydney and sort out my place.

Gravity seems more intense than normal on the retreat's back veranda. We sit out here for lengthy spells in the mornings, with breakfast, coffee and our books, and again at sunset with wine and crisps. I wonder how long I could spend here before the need to do something productive got the better of me. Decades, probably.

As if all this weren't comfort enough, Bromage is also a masseuse and has a treatment room inside her part of the house. It's a treat to have such a short distance to travel home after a massage, when you're all dazed and messy.

With some reluctance I consent to leave the veranda on Saturday morning to take a look around nearby Seal Rocks. It's a beautiful hamlet and the stroll to its lighthouse is superbly undemanding, the view big and blue.

There's loads more to do in the area, from surfing and fishing to bushwalking in the national parks, but adding anything extra to the itinerary is just going to subtract from the time we could be lounging around on the veranda. And so we drive back. And lounge around some more. I like it here.

Weekends Away are reviewed anonymously and paid for by Traveller.



Ambience ... the Lotus Retreat's lounge; (top) Sugarloaf Point Lighthouse. Photo: George Seper

VISITORS' BOOK

The Lotus Retreat

Address 812 Wattley Hill Road, Wootton.

The verdict A relaxing and reviving rural respite, with creatures and creature comforts.

Price From \$550 for two adults for a two-night weekend stay, including breakfast basket.

Bookings Phone 4997 7320, see lotusretreat.com.au.

Getting there The Lotus Retreat is close to Seal Rocks and about three hours' drive north of Sydney via the Pacific Highway.

Perfect for Intensive unwinding.

Wheelchair access No.

While you are there Have a massage; feed the kookaburras; visit the idyllic beaches and lighthouse at Seal Rocks; lounge on the veranda.



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