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A soak among the gum trees



Nature is never far away at the Long Weekend Retreat.

Photo: *Winsor Dobbin*

January 28, 2007

Even the wildlife is relaxed at this bush retreat, writes Winsor Dobbin.

THE LARGE eastern grey kangaroo seemed unperturbed that its afternoon feast was being watched by a naked human luxuriating in an open-air bubble bath. Two rabbits were rather more startled, although rosellas and lorikeets went about their business without a care in the world.

If you love to commune with nature, to get away from the grime and grind of the city, the Long Weekend Retreat, an eco-friendly getaway on the South Coast, will be very much your cup of hand-blended tea.

Opened late last year, the Long Weekend is the ideal rural escape for a family of four, or two couples. Down a dirt track, a couple of kilometres from Lake Conjola, its ambience is truly rustic.

It's a nifty little spot, using green power, solar-powered hot water and mineral spring water for the outdoor Balinese-style bath and showers.

You are surrounded by bush, there's an immense amount of bird life in the trees, and echidnas and goannas allegedly abound.

A 25-minute walk through some glorious national park brings you to pristine Buckleys Beach, which

you might share with half-a-dozen other folk (if it's a busy day).

But if you think a rural retreat means roughing it, think again.

The facilities here are equal to those of any five-star hotel; it is beautifully furnished with modern artworks on the walls, fresh flowers in all the rooms, a huge wide-screen TV, DVD player and library. There's an office with broadband connection, printer and scanner, and the kitchen has a wide range of cooking implements and utensils.

Meals can be ordered from Leo's Kitchen in nearby Milton and will be in the fridge when you arrive. We opted for some very good curries, a couple of tasty quiches (although the crab quiche was notably crustacean free), and two excellent soups.

Or you can plan your menu around the big, modern barbecue.

All guests are given breakfast provisions, including organic free-range eggs from the property's own hens, fresh fruit and muesli, hand-blended teas and espresso coffees, as well as a couple of bottles of wine from the local Bawley Vale winery (in our case a fruity 2006 verdelho and a rather austere '05 cabernet sauvignon).

In winter there's underfloor heating, but in summer it is nice to open the windows and doors and turn on the ceiling fans.

The retreat has trail bikes and boogie boards, along with a set of boules and several board games.

In-house yoga classes and massage treatments are available.

The owners have put together an excellent house book with details of several bushwalks as well as instructions on how to use the retreat's video equipment.

There are plenty of activities close at hand: boating or fishing at Lake Conjola, exploring Milton and Ulladulla or simply strolling through the Narrawallee Creek Nature Reserve, on which the retreat is situated.

A better bet for your first afternoon is to kick back on the veranda and take in the sounds of the country with a glass of wine in your hand. You'll need to relax after battling the laughably named Princes Highway.

The writer was a guest of Tourism NSW and The Long Weekend Retreat.

TRIP NOTES

Address: The Long Weekend Retreat, Narrawallee Creek Road, Lake Conjola, NSW 2539.

Bookings: (02) 4456 1501, email stay@thelongweekend.com.au, or see <http://www.thelongweekend.com.au>.

Rates: From \$325 per couple per night at weekends, \$250 per night weekdays. Extra couple \$25 per night. Three-night packages from \$696.

VERDICT

A secluded rural getaway with big-city amenities. **Why you'd go:** You like peace and quiet and being surrounded by nature. **Why you wouldn't:** You need to be close to night-life and department stores.

FIND TIME TO

- Pop into the attractive nearby village of Milton, which has a range of boutiques, antique stores, cafes and delicatessens.
- Take a bushwalk from the Long Weekend Retreat to either Buckleys Point or Conjola beach.
- Lie back and enjoy a soak in the mineral-spring-fed bath.
- Pick up some lake prawns or mussels at the Ulladulla seafood co-op.
- Get in touch with nature on one of the tours of the Shoalhaven region offered by South Coast Nature Tours. Phone (02) 4454 0072 or see <http://www.southcoastnaturetours.com.au>.

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