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ESCAPE

## Escape to Osborn House – the coveted countryside retreat in Australia redefining boutique luxury

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By Caroline Phillips

Established in 1892, Osborn House is in the heart of Australia's Southern Highlands, the Aussie version of the Cotswolds-gone-Scottish (with two houses and homesteads). You'll find the property between Morton National Park (with its fab Fitzroy Falls and even fabber walks) and Bundanoon village (go there for its och-aye feel – they even have a Highland Gathering – with historic sandstone buildings and country pubs). All under two hours' drive from Sydney.



The property is Down Under's answer to Soho House (in fact, it was designed and styled by former Soho House Design Director, Linda Boronkay). Think vintage pieces alongside contemporary design. It's also oozing with history. Built by early settlers, George and Dinah Osborn, with views over the gullies, it then opened for paying guests in the early 1900s and, later, housed Dutch WWII internees.



The vibe's relaxed and welcoming. But its biggest selling point is its splendiferous food and the walks in the National Park, a few kangaroo hops away. The blurb for this boutique hotel claims that if tranquillity had a home address, this would be it. Add in some piped music, and that's spot on.



Whilst here, hot foot it across the foyer to George's and its terrace with views over the National Park. The Mexican chef, Axell Torres, deserves a medal and most people would drive twice as far for food this good, from great sourdough to wood-fired avocado and guacamole that will send even the most level-headed into orbit. Then there's the delicious crispy Fremantle octopus à la Gallega, tempura mushrooms, ooh and corn ribs with garlic paprika and sweet chilli sauce so scrumptious you'll never eat straightforward boiled corn on the cob again. Oh, and don't forget the mouth-melting wood-fired Wagyu and sirloin. Or the side of baby beetroot salad with pomegranate molasses and candied nuts. Not to mention the Dulche de Leche pancakes.



They also do a monthly al fresco Fire Feast, an Argentinian-inspired "asado" (BBQ) with an iron dome, and "infiernillo" (or "little hell" as this fire translates literally). Think open-fire cooking and a Latin American theme. All re-imaginings of the mouth-watering food of Argentinian chef-cum-legend, Francis

Mallman.



You're spoilt for choice in this 27-room luxe boutique hotel. Nab a suite in the main house complete with four-poster and double shower. Or grab a Forest Lodge set in the grounds and with timber-panelled walls, wood burner and boho rugs - think log cabin in the wood with soaring ceiling, plus a freestanding outdoor bath overlooking the ooh-ah views of the valley and visits from Skippy the bush kangaroo.



There's a weeny bit of heaven on earth - call it Nature's cure - surrounding the property: the gardens where you'll breathe in bliss. You'll enter Osborn House under a scented archway of jasmine bordered with white hydrangea and loll in "rooms" boasting agapanthus, water lilies, passion fruit, and azalea. All visited by cockatoos, red parrots and rabbits. Plus palm-sized butterflies.



If you're in a Forest Lodge, you get exclusive access to the Forest Bathing Deck midst the pine forest. You'll probably never want to part with your white Frette towelling robe. But who can resist an ice bath with the wind in your hair, the caw-cawing of birds, *that* park as your view and a fire pit to your side, followed by a hot tub or sauna? (The weather here turns on a pin, so this has you sorted for cooling

down or warming up.



There's a teeny spa in the house for facials and LED light therapy. Or you can do lengths in the 25-metre indoor pool or chill in the jacuzzi. Then bring out your inner Alex de Minaur (the Antipode's top-ranked tennis champ) and play tennis on the outside court.



You can become every inch the Scottish laird with local horse riding and fly fishing in rivers and streams (perfect whether you're a casting virgin or experienced angler). But there are also wine tasting trips (in a nearby micro vineyard, Dawning Day Farms), flower farm tours (at Oxley Hill Flower Farm, and forget field-to-fork, as they'll help you make a field-to-bouquet,) bee experiences for those wannabee apiarists, and if you're aching to become a potter, local ceramicist Bruce Pryor will teach you to make a piece, glaze and fire it. Nip a few minutes down the road from the house, slowing down for wallabies and 'roos, to hike happily in the rugged National Park with its spectacular sandstone cliffs – perfect whether you're a newbie to the bush wanting easy tracks, or a seasoned bushwalker yearning for remote trails – and there are more parks than you can throw an (Aboriginal) stick at nearby.



For more information or to make a booking, go to [www.osbornhouse.com.au](http://www.osbornhouse.com.au).