

Come! Sit! Stay!

Highland Fling

To celebrate all that's wonderful about winter, head to the mountains.



Story and Photography by Melissa Rimac

The log fire is flickering and crackling. I'm sinking into a Chesterfield lounge and sipping Shiraz in the parlour of a bungalow that's so elegant, I keep expecting Cary Grant to walk in. Best of all, our puppy Onyx is curled next to me in the glowing warmth, eyes twinkling. I'm struggling to recall feeling quite so deeply contented.

The days may be shorter but our sense of adventure is undimmed. For us, getaways usually involve carefree beach frolics. But this weekend, we're set to revel in the shifting seasons and are seeking cosy pleasures—romantic evenings, bracing air and lofty vistas. Happily, the area surrounding the world-heritage listed Blue Mountains rolls out picturesque winter visuals and atmosphere within two hours of leaving Sydney.

Onyx may be genetically geared for non-stop action, but he's a tween now and we're keen on trying to counter hormone surges with an introduction to urbane pursuits. Not that we're setting a great example: we

pack tracky-daks, flannelette PJs and fluffy slippers.

However, as we settle into our home here—Corner Cottage, situated in the dashing, canyon-edged village of Leura—we instinctively correct our posture, our diction and our car-creased clothes. There's something of the hunting lodge about this genteel, rambling early 1900's bungalow that's hugged by conifer and maple trees.

By the time we make a dint into the big box of Belgian chocolates and champagne that's part of the Corner Cottage welcome, we're growing accustomed to the dark wood panelling, the plump 30s styled furniture, the imposing timber columns and beams and the stately glass cabinets crammed with books. We're giddy with almost childlike wonder at the prospect of experiencing a home so suggestive of big-band swing and flapper dancing.

Come morning, we're blessed with a lapis lazuli sky and pine-scented air so bracing, it tickles as we inhale.

On the vast front patio, we cocoon behind a curtain of golden leaves and spread out our newspapers, coffee and freshly heated bread; smug as cats in the dappled sunshine. Onyx, however, has other ideas and brandishes his lead.

Crunching loudly as we walk over spongy piles of fallen leaves, we duck through tunnels formed by overhanging fire-coloured branches. We sigh at sprawling estates hemmed in huge hedges and the stained glass and timber bungalows where a butler wouldn't be out of place. Proud of his surfer credentials, Onyx won't be humbled by the mountain mutts—he treats fences, innumerable trees and testy terriers to an icy, dismissive leg-lift.

At Sublime Point the earth abruptly drops away to reveal a canyon filled with thick mist. The sheer, ochre-coloured rock walls look as if they're floating, the sky goes on forever. We spot lyrebird, crimson rosellas and black and red cockatoos almost an arms-length away.

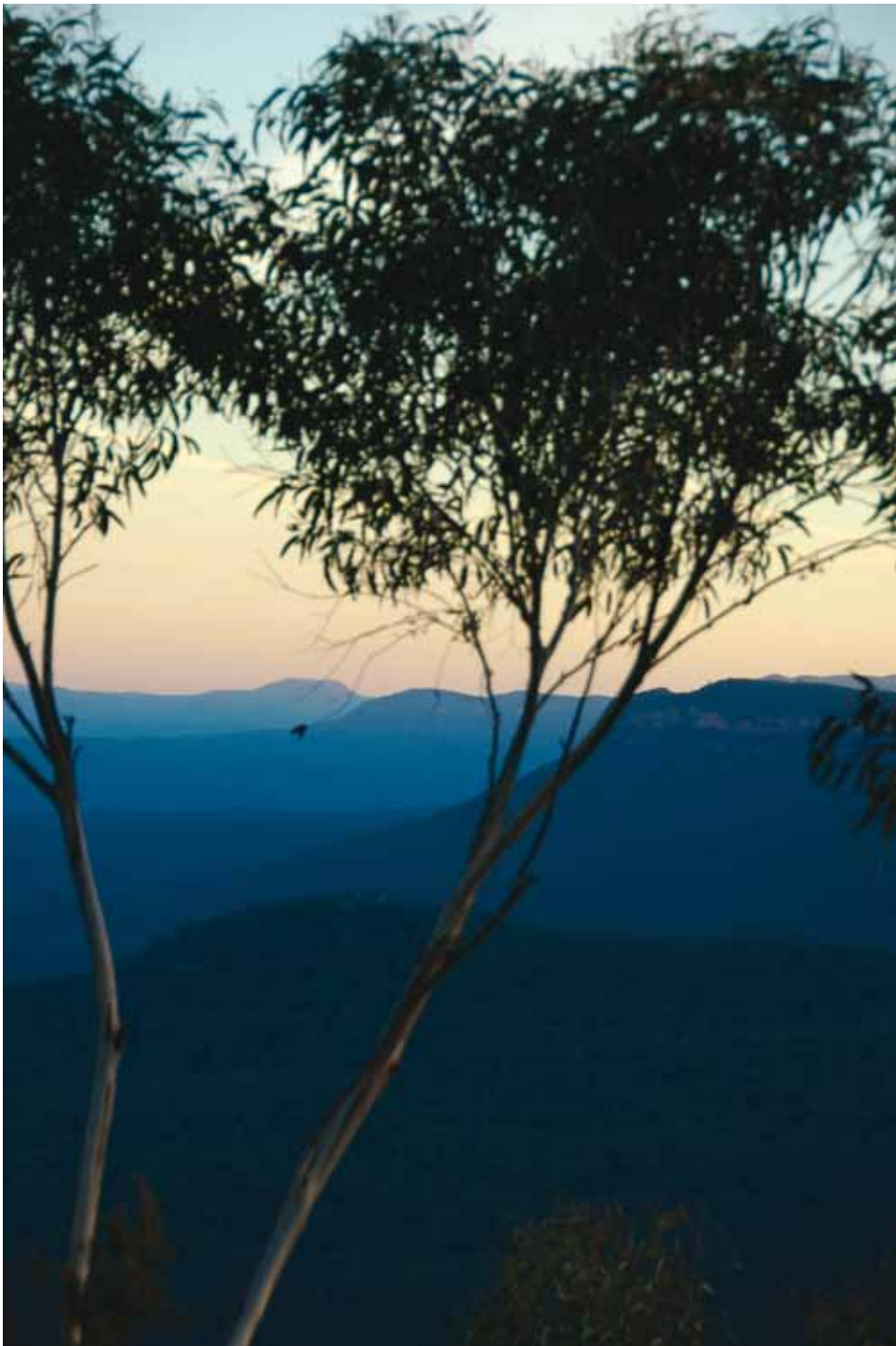
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Onyx's Highland Travel Tips

Room with a mood:

Corner Cottage

Nestled into the prettiest of streetscapes, this gracious abode was made for gay fireside soirees and lingering drinks on the huge patio. A real fireplace, central heating, throws and hiking jackets crank up the comfort.

More: Phone: 0411 700 523; tmjanis@bigpond.net.au

Kookawood:

Rustic, barn-style chic with dreamy views.

More: Phone: 0418 105 543 ;

www.takeabreak.com.au/kookawood.htm

Paw-Friendly Feasting:

At Leura:

- Stockmarket Café: Phone: (02) 4784 3121
- Watzgoose Café: Phone: (02) 4784 1973
- Bygone Beauties Antiques and Tea rooms: Phone: (02) 4784 3117
- Bon Ton: Phone: (02) 4782 4377
- Post Café & Bar: Phone: (02) 4784 3975

At Katoomba:

- The Savoy: Phone: (02) 4782 3845
- Zuppa: Phone: (02) 4782 9247
- Carrington Hotel Lawns: Phone: (02) 4782 7033
- Picnic at the edge of the unfurled canyon; there are several supermarkets at Katoomba.

Scenic Leg Stretches:

- Sublime Point
- Wentworth Falls Lake
- Streets of Katoomba, Leura or Wentworth Falls
- Panorama Drive, near Echo Point

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continued on page 32 »



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