

October 4, 2009

It doesn't take long to understand why Bright was rated Victoria's premier tree-change destination by KPMG. Arriving late on a wintry Friday night, the senses are overcome first by the crispness of the chill air, then by the welcoming aroma of logs burning on scores of fires around the town. Then, 24 hours later, we find ourselves tucking into a five-course feast at the launch of a new range of wines in neighbouring Kiewa Valley, prompting the question: "When do we move?"

Less than four hours' drive from Melbourne and nestled next to Mount Buffalo National Park at the southern end of Alpine Valley, Bright is bordered on three sides by tree-covered mountains and is home to several riverside walks, including the picturesque Canyon Walk, and serves as a base for anyone wishing to take advantage of the region's vast range of adventure sports.

The expansion of nearby Mount Hotham and Falls Creek in recent years has led to fewer people staying there while on skiing holidays, but that has not slowed the influx of visitors.

**Wining and dining (with a swig or two of beer)** Undecided on where to dine on our second night, we're told by the friendly staff in the main tourist information centre of the launch of a new range of wines at Annapurna Estate, in nearby Mount Beauty. Going beyond the call of duty, the lady in the centre arranges a lift for us with a couple already heading there in a welcome act of spontaneous hospitality.

The new wines (Petticoat Lane) are served alongside five courses including



Bright is a centre for all manner of outdoor adventure sports.

Victoria's favourite tree-change region is a magnet for outdoor adventurers, says **James Smith**.

escargots, crab ravioli, buffalo and various estate-grown fruits in what proves a delicious insight into the quality dining available in these parts. Bright itself is home to two-hatted Simone's as well as classy newcomers such as Sole e Luna, while every neighbouring valley hosts a handful of wineries.

Those who prefer grain to grape are spoilt for choice, too. One of Victoria's newest breweries — Sweetwater — has opened a small bar at Annapurna, while

Bright Brewery and Bridge Road, at Beechworth, are well established and offer a variety of interesting beers.

**The adventure playground** Sitting on either side of us at Annapurna were one of the world's leading paragliders and a road racing cyclist. We soon discover this was no accident: Bright is a centre for all manner of outdoor adventure sports. At any one time, there is likely to be a microlight overhead, a cyclist overtaking

## THE FACTS

- For Bright tourist information, visit [brightvictoria.com.au](http://brightvictoria.com.au)
- To find out about special events at Annapurna Estate, call 5754 1356 or visit [annapurnaestate.com.au](http://annapurnaestate.com.au). Our five-course meal with matched wines cost \$95 a person.
- To arrange a tour of the region's wineries and breweries, contact Alpine Valley Tours ([alpinevalleytours.com.au](http://alpinevalleytours.com.au)) whose half-day wine tours cost \$55 a person.



your car on a steep road and the sound of off-road motorbikes tearing through the woods. Suitably inspired, we took mountain bikes (free to hire from our accommodation — [alpinevalley.com.au](http://alpinevalley.com.au)) and followed the creek to neighbouring Wandiligong, home to Australia's largest hedge maze.

**Festivals** With snow-capped peaks guaranteeing winter tourists, and visitors flocking in summer in the hope of escaping the worst of the heat (although it can get mighty hot there too), Bright ensures its four-season boast rings true with large spring and autumn festivals.

The forthcoming Spring Festival starting at the end of October combines open gardens and fireworks with special events at many of the local restaurants and wineries as well as the annual Four Peaks Climb over the Melbourne Cup weekend.