



YOU COULD SAY THAT FATE HAS PRESERVED THE HISTORY OF BERRIMA.

This wonderfully enchanting town snuggled against the gently-flowing Wingecarribee River in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales was originally designed to be the capital of the Southern Highlands. Those plans went awry when the railway was built because, while the Old Hume Highway ran right through Berrima, the railway was diverted in another direction, passing through Mittagong, Bowral and Moss Vale. Those flourished and Berrima remained rather sedentary – and that was a good thing, because it's now a very charming place to visit.

THE LIVING HISTORY OF BERRIMA

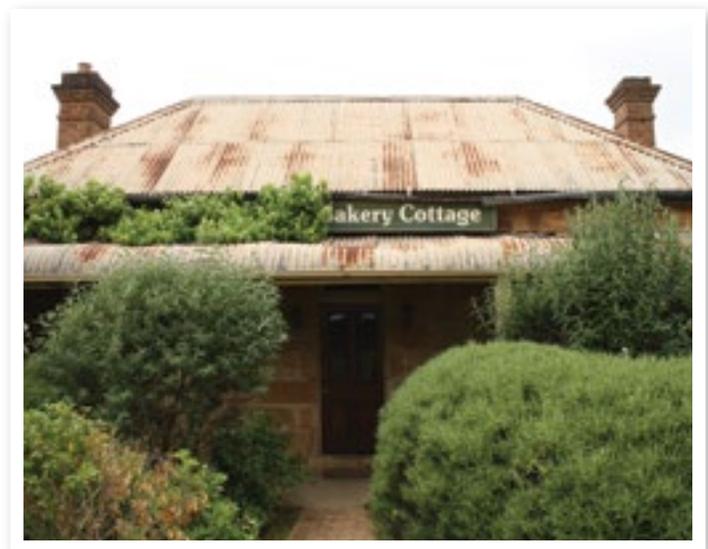
STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS STEVE COLLINS

A WANDER THROUGH HISTORY

Berrima is a town in which there is no need to rush. If you have driven there, simply park your car and go for an amble around town; the less hurried you are, the more you will enjoy its ambience. This lovely Georgian hamlet is mostly flat, so walking is a breeze. There is a rise at the western side of the town, and here the courthouse sits overlooking the hamlet and imposing its grandeur on the citizens below.

The Courthouse itself is not Georgian, but was built in Greek Revival style. Today it is a museum, but when it was completed in 1839, Australia's first trial by jury was held there. The quality of the exacting workmanship is extraordinary. My favourite features are the huge curved interior doors each carved from a single massive piece of cedar harvested from nearby Robertson and Fitzroy Falls.

A highlight of the courthouse tour is to witness the re-creation of a notorious murder trial from the 1800s. The mechanics of the trial are similar





to those held today, but the punishment for the guilty couple was particularly grizzly.

The building has had a colourful history. When it ceased to be a working courthouse, the building was used as a school of arts, and during World War I captured German officers were housed there.

STAY A WHILE

For convenience, right next to the courthouse is Berrima Gaol, which, at the time I visited, was still used for its original purpose. Although the building has imposing sandstone walls, it's the only gaol I've visited that looks somewhat welcoming, with the gardens surrounding well-manicured and quite lovely. In latter years Berrima Gaol has housed some high-profile prisoners, including former politicians found guilty of corruption.

Berrima's most important buildings are very well connected, with possibly the most important place – the pub – right next to the gaol.

The Surveyor General Inn was established in 1834 and is Australia's

longest continuously licensed Inn. Of solid stone construction, tall people, like myself, need to bend down to avoid hitting heads on the low lintels when entering. Although the Cobb & Co coach company used to refresh its passengers here, the inn has evolved with the times, but without losing any of its charm. You can get a good meal here, have a drink, arrange a stay and, most importantly, still enjoy its rustic atmosphere.

Berrima has an enjoyable village feel. As you would expect from a pristine town with such an interesting heritage, the shops appeal to those with a love for arts and crafts, books and good food. But while it's geared to appeal to visitors, there is no gaudy tack here. Residents are house-proud and, as you walk around the town, you admire their well-kept, unique dwellings.

Nowadays, Berrima has seen the Hume Highway bypass it too, and I feel the town is better for the diversion. Indeed, Berrima is a serene and perfect place to base yourself when you visit the Southern Highlands.



[TO SEE AND DO]

[Berrima Courthouse]

Open 7 days from 10am to 4pm

Take the tour and see how justice was dispensed in earlier days

[Ghost Tour]

Join Ghost Tours of Berrima on an evening walk to explore 18 ghostly sites

[Eschalot Restaurant]

Experience fine dining in historic surrounds

[Sugar Daddies Cake Design]

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Steve's internet radio station where travel is talked 24 hours a day.

IN THE BAG

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TRAVELLING WITH KIDS

Routines and familiar surroundings go out the window when you're off on holidays – it's stressful enough for grown-ups but what about the kids? Home Exchange has collected tips from five experienced mothers to make travelling with children more fun for everyone, including parents. Check out HomeExchange.com



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