



check in
 ELISABETH KING



In a league of their own

Only a hermit could be unaware that 2008 is the centenary of rugby league in Australia. The South Coast is playing its part in the 13th Rugby League World Cup – the first since 2000 – this year by staging the clash between Fiji and France at WIN Stadium in Wollongong on Saturday, November 1. Ten countries – Australia, New Zealand, England, France, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji, Samoa, Ireland and Scotland – will battle it out over 18 matches in 12 venues. Rydges Central City Wollongong Hotel is offering great rates for the big weekend from \$194 a room. As are the Novotel Wollongong Beach Hotel (from \$199) and the Ibis Wollongong (from \$129); go to www.accor.com.au for bookings at both hotels. Call 1300 857 922 for bookings. Go to www.rlwc08.com for more information and tickets

Romantic getaways

Sometimes you don't want to travel halfway across the continent for a romantic getaway. The good news is – you don't have to. The South Coast is peppered with luxurious havens of tranquillity and privacy. Bannisters Point Lodge at Mollmook started life as a seaside motel in the 1970s, but over the past four years it has been spruced up beyond all recognition as a 4.5-star boutique hotel. There are only 31 rooms, including eight suites, and all have textbook ocean views. Bannisters Restaurant and Lounge serves the sort of modern fusion cuisine that would be perfectly at home in a trendy Sydney or Canberra restaurant and the wine list is renowned throughout the area. Relax in the day spa or engage in the activity most often nominated in personals ads – walking on the beach. Prices for a three-night stay, including continental breakfast, begin at \$460 for two; go to www.bannisters.com.au for bookings. Sandholme Guesthouse is only a 2½-hour drive from Canberra and close to Jervis Bay and trendy Hyams Beach. Featured in the Sydney Morning Herald *Good Weekend* magazine's "52 Weekends Away" last year, this is a true five-star guesthouse. Visit www.sandholme.com.au for bookings and more information on the five ensuite guestrooms, movie theatre, games room and more. Barefoot Springs B&B allows you to live the life of the squattoocracy for a night or two in the three studio cottages or the private Queen

bedroom with ensuite in the "big house". Only 800m from the summit of Cambewarra Mountain, just past Kangaroo Valley, Barefoot Springs offers two-night midweek stays in the main house from \$370 a couple. But true romantics will be tempted to trade up to the Weekend Pampering Package which includes two nights in a studio cottage, a hearty breakfast for two every morning, a bottle of sparkling wine on arrival, a two-course dinner and a 90-minute pampering package for \$790 for two. Go to www.barefootsprings.com.au for bookings.

Whale of a time

Over the past 30 years whale-watching has become a national obsession. Hardly surprising considering that 43 species of these magnificent marine mammals choose to call Australia a temporary home from June to early November. The South Coast is the premier whale-spotting region of NSW and the two-day Eden Whale Festival – bigger and better than ever – provides non-stop fun and activity for the whole family on November 1 and 2. The famous Carlton Clydesdales and Pirate Pete will entertain the kids, and there will be a carnival market and outdoor food stalls. Bob the Builder on stage, live bands, cooking demonstrations and whale watching tours complete an action-packed weekend. For a full rundown of the program, go to www.edenwhalefestival.com

Time for a fling

Take to two wheels for Fling in the Vines, a daylong ride on a mountain bike through the vineyards south of Berrima scheduled for November 8. If you're up for a 25km itinerary along country roads and farm tracks, the delights are numerous. A component of both the Days of Wines, Arts and Roses Festival and the Highland Fling Mountain Bike Race weekend, the Fling route begins at the Magpie Cafe in Berrima and includes stops at the Blue Metal Vineyard, High Range Wineries and Tertini Wines. After a leisurely lunch under the trees at Bou-Saada Winery, wend your way back to the Magpie Cafe where any wines you ordered at the wineries will be waiting for you. It costs \$50 an adult to join the ride. Go to www.wildhorizons.com.au or call 4883 6509 for bookings and further information.



Floral tributes

Spring is still coming into bloom in November – especially on the South Coast. The Australian Native Orchid Show takes place at Twyford Hall in Merimbula on November 7 and 8. The highlight of the event will be a spectacular show of Sarcanthinae orchids, Australian natives that grow principally in rainforests and rock ravines. More than 150 of these prolific bloomers will be on show, from crystal whites to deep reds. A week later you can enjoy the jacarandas in full flower at the Meroogal Garden Fair, Nowra, on November 16. In the beautiful gardens of a timber homestead built in the 1880s – restored to all its original glory – you can learn to make your own garden more frog-friendly and learn to grow fresh produce via the Slow Food method, as well as listen to live music and tour the gardens and the house. Meroogal House could have been the setting for an Australian version of *Little Women*: owned by four generations of women from the same family, its furniture and memorabilia showcase more than a century of social history. Tickets sold on the day: \$8 for adults; \$20 a family – Meroogal House, cnr West and Worrigea Streets, Nowra: Ph: 4421 8150.

Deal of the week

It's become a modern Holy Grail to locate travel websites that sort through all the options in one click when you want to take a quick break or longer family holiday. When the destination is the South Coast - www.takeabreak.com.au delivers 41 pages of getaway options from Rosedale Beach House at Malua Bay (from \$700 a week) to the luxury duplex Aquamarine at Denhams Beach, Batemans Bay (from \$120 per night; three night minimum stay). There's plenty of lower-priced choices, too, such as My Place, Sanctuary Point B&B, at Jervis Bay from \$85 a night. And you can also bypass the whole list and click on to specials and last minute offers. Go to www.takeabreak.com.au/SouthCoastNSW/accommodation.htm



Make a date to spend time with the pelicans on the South Coast this summer