



**check-IN**  **VERONICA MATHESON** guides you through the travel maze

**Forget the rest; here's two of the best Victorian B&Bs**

**F**ORGET that laid-back, run-down seaside shack that was the bolt-hole of yesteryear. Victoria's B&Bs are the new places to cocoon when we need to escape the cruel world.

We read a titivating B&B review in the media or fall for pretty pictures on a website and decide to book in for a night or two.

So why is it a surprise — we all know what digital imaging can do — to find the real thing is not half so inviting as the cottage we drooled over on the web?

Check-IN has stayed at more than a few B&Bs — many more, to be honest — and is still not smitten by the concept.

Some do have beautiful beds and bountiful breakfasts, but many are little more than the spare room at someone's house that has been turned into a nice little earner.

Do you really want to take a break away from home chatting to a B&B owner who wants to be your new best friend?

Even breakfast (the most private meal of any day) may be served in the family kitchen. Hopefully you notice the orange juice is freshly squeezed, the muesli hand mixed, the yoghurt homemade and have you ever tasted such wonderful herbed sausages?

Do you really want to get this close and personal?



**the winners:** 1860 Luxury Accommodation, Surrey Lane, Beechworth is \$225 a night midweek (minimum two nights) and \$245 a night at weekends (minimum two

nights) including a generous breakfast hamper of local produce, [www.1860luxuryaccommodation.com](http://www.1860luxuryaccommodation.com)

The Ridge at Towong has a few cabins and a two-bedroom apartment with stunning views from \$160 a night, [www.accommodationguide.com.au](http://www.accommodationguide.com.au)

**Others:** TakeABreak website recently chose its top B&Bs, naming Red Paws at Lorne the most pet friendly. There is a dog bed indoors with toys and treats, a dog shower and a dog minding service. Two-night minimum stay from \$130 a night, [www.TakeABreak.com.au](http://www.TakeABreak.com.au)

Check-IN reckons a singularly strong black coffee is a far better option.

And once breakfast is over it is time to ponder the decor. An old teddy bear, lace doilies, lavender bags and scented candles seem de rigeur in so many B&Bs. But we have those back home in the kids' bedrooms or as leftovers of happy, hippie days or from grandma's inheritance.

In a B&B we want a roomy, private space well away from the owner's pad. It's not that we want to swing from the chandeliers — though if the mood takes us we may — it's just that we don't want to be in the owner's sights every waking minute.

Check-IN would rather go to a large

chain hotel where anonymity is guaranteed.

B&B operators should note individual preferences on their websites. If looking for guests who enjoy a good chat then say so. There's nothing wrong with being a social animal. It's just that some of us chat constantly through our working days and if we want in-depth chat later we'll bond with our nearest and dearest, not a stranger.

But don't get check-IN wrong. There are some outstanding B&Bs in Victoria and so much choice — there are hundreds of operators across the state — that standards have lifted.

If check-IN was handing out awards for top B&Bs, those awards would be



winging their way to northeastern Victoria and two of its newest properties.

A standout is the wonderful 1860 Luxury Accommodation at Beechworth. The faithfully reconstructed stand-alone slab cottage opened five months ago.

Built in 1860 (hence the name), it was originally a mountain cattleman's hut in Taggerty. Owners Gina Bladon and Matt Pfahlert moved it to Beechworth and rebuilt it using an original lime mortar recipe to caulk

between the horizontal timber slabs.

Such authenticity makes 1860 look like a *Man from Snowy River* set from the outside, with simple luxury and great character inside. What's more there is not a spider's web in sight — unlike some B&Bs, where age is used as an excuse for cobwebs and musty smells.

Guests will find breakfast in the fridge and the daily paper and freshly baked bread on the doormat, yet not a person in sight.

Another winner is The Ridge at

Towong, near the NSW/Victorian border. It is an ultra-modern apartment built into a hill below the main house. There are to-die-for views of the Snowy Mountains from a large balcony that sits 120m above the Murray River Valley.

The apartment is self contained and guests can use the house's outdoor pool and deck. Guests are also encouraged to cook their breakfast with fresh ingredients from the fridge and they don't have to see the owners after check-in.

