

PUTTING THE TENT IN TENTERFIELD

STORY CATH JOHNSEN

TENTERFIELD IS A COUNTRY TOWN THAT IS CERTAIN OF ITS PLACE IN HISTORY, BUT IT'S WORTH DOESN'T BELONG EXCLUSIVELY IN THE PAST.

A STROLL DOWN the main street of Tenterfield in NSW, one of the New England region's oldest towns, reveals nods to its colourful history everywhere you look.

Even the local lodgings are aptly named – the Jumbuck Motor Inn, the Henry Parkes Motel and the Peter Allen Motor Inn all point to events and people that have influenced not only the township, but indeed the whole country.

On a recent visit, our family picked up a map at the well-resourced information centre and began a self-guided heritage tour of the historic buildings punctuating the picturesque town.

The first stop was the Sir Henry Parkes Memorial School of Arts, built in 1876 and still welcoming visitors today.

Stepping inside, there is a meticulously restored library, banquet hall, museum and cinema, originally showing silent films but now screening all the latest flicks.

Looking around the hallowed rooms, it's easy to imagine Sir Henry, a former premier of New South Wales, delivering his impassioned Federation speech here in 1889.

The courtyard cafe, located within the facility, is a great place to enjoy a coffee in the sunshine and reflect on Tenterfield's claim as the birthplace of our modern nation and Sir Henry's pivotal role as the 'Father of Federation'.

Just up the road and around the corner is the Tenterfield Saddler, immortalised by Peter Allen's song of the same name.

Built from blue granite in 1860, the building was where you could find Allen's grandfather, George Woolnough, hard at work.

As the song goes, "for 52 years he sat on his verandah and made his saddles".

Today, passionate volunteers love to regale tourists with stories of Tenterfield-born Allen and his family. They even display a pair of his sparkly red dance shoes.

History buffs will also enjoy the tales of

old that are shared, with guides pointing out the tough working conditions of the time, the aged floors patched with scraps of leather and the worn ceiling stained with more than 100 years of tobacco smoke.

The saddlery was a meeting place of sorts for locals and travellers alike, including the celebrated poet Banjo Paterson, to discuss the hot topics of the time.

After many more worthy stops on the town's historic trail, including the Centenary Cottage Museum and the Tenterfield Railway Museum, we were ready to step even further back in time.

Tenterfield boasts six surrounding national parks, with Boonoo Boonoo one of the most impressive and easily accessible.

The park, as old as time itself, has long been appreciated by the local First Nations people.

It was also here that Paterson proposed to his sweetheart, against the backdrop of the Boonoo Boonoo River cascading over granite rock before it rushes into a spectacular waterfall, plunging 210m into the gorge below.

Visitors can enjoy the park's many bushwalks, waterholes for swimming, picnic locations and scenery that is ever-changing with the seasons.

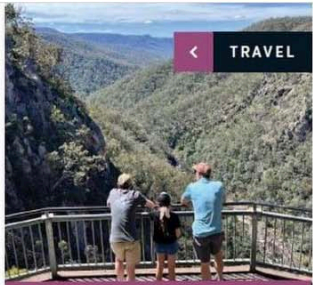
But not everything about Tenterfield is steeped in history.

The region is now home to one of the world's newest and most sought-after accommodation trends – bubbletents.

At Mirumiru Bubbletents, just a five-minute drive from town, you can

Mirumiru sunset. Photo: Sera J. Wright.





Gorge at Boonoo Boonoo National Park. Photo: Cath Johnsen.

fall asleep while gazing at a starry constellation and wake up to a glorious sunrise without even having to leave the tent, or your bed.

Host Cathryn Van Der Walt has installed two French-made bubbletents on her granite-studded property, complete with queen beds, luxury linen and a translucent ceiling to create a private observatory.

A rustic outdoor bath, camp kitchen and a suspended tent in the trees to house the kids complete the 'just turn up' glamping experience.

Although only three and a half hours from Brisbane, Tenterfield has a temperate climate, with four distinct seasons.

In winter, Cathryn said it was not uncommon to see snow at the back of the farm or frost on the tents.

In summer, the place is awash with wildflowers. Spring and autumn are perfect for exploring the town's charming boutiques, galleries, cafes, wineries and

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farm gates. But my fondest memories involved sitting around the campfire at Mirumiru, with a glass of local red in hand, and our bubbletent behind us, emitting a warm glowing light.

In the west, the sun was setting in spectacular fashion, lighting up the hills with golden hues, before deepening to shades of purple and finally dissolving into an inky night.

We sat for hours, mesmerised, as the black canvas above gradually lit up with glittering constellations that can't be seen in the city. Later, tucked up in bed with the electric blanket on, I lay awake spotting shooting stars.

Tenterfield's charm, both old and new, had worked its magic on me. ■

The writer travelled as a guest of Mirumiru Bubbletents.



Kids camping at Mirumiru. Photo: Krista Eppelstun.



The Tenterfield Saddlery. Photo: Cath Johnsen.

