

a fine balance

COMBINING COUNTRY CHARM AND WORLD-CLASS
ATTRACTIONS, CANBERRA IS FULL OF SURPRISES.

WORDS HANNAH JAMES PHOTOGRAPHY ABBIE MELLE



COOL, CRISP AIR, WIDE BLUE SKIES and trees turning red, orange and russet: autumn may be the best time to visit Canberra. And it's no accident that the seasons play such a starring role in travellers' experience of the city – it's a place uniquely in touch with the land it occupies. The wide, tree-lined streets, much-loved lake paths and myriad ways to get close to nature means it's as close to a country town as a city can be.

"I walk around the lake every night," says Bianca Board, the marketing manager at Pialligo Estate, an urban farm, restaurant and winery. "I feel so safe. It's easy to get around as nothing's more than 15 minutes away. And you're surrounded by lakes and trees, but you've also got all the things you expect in a city, like wine bars and great food and microbreweries."

Bianca moved to Canberra fairly recently after a stint living in Melbourne, and sees it as the perfect balance between city and country. "I grew up in the country, in Wagga, and when COVID hit I started to spend a lot more time there," she explains. "I got really attached to the slower pace of life, putting family first. People in Canberra just seem to have got that balance right."

Pialligo Estate is a good example of that. At 22 hectares, it's bigger than many an out-of-town winery – but it's just 10 minutes from the city. "We're a full working farm and we grow 95 per cent of the produce we serve in our restaurant," says Bianca. With an olive grove, smokehouse, vineyard and farm tours, plus a farm shop cafe, grocer and collection of homewares stores down the road at The Plot, you'd expect visitors to list sipping a glass of wine amid the vines as the highlight of their trip to the estate, or eating

vegies fresh from the ground in the restaurant. But Bianca says it's the rural surroundings that people love the most. "Everybody says the gardens are spectacular. We've got lavender and roses everywhere, and you look out over the vineyard and the orchard. We're right by the river, as well. People love this spectacular playground we have so close to the city," she says.

It's a good example of the way Canberrans take their food and wine seriously, too. Not long ago Bar Rochford, in the historic Melbourne Building, was named Australia's Best Bar in the *Gourmet Traveller* Restaurant Guide Awards, also earning a chef's hat from the *Australian Good Food Guide* for its food. The city has no fewer than 17 other hatted restaurants, with Aubergine, The Boat House and Italian and Sons all reliably excellent.

Canberra's other crowning glory is its arts scene. We know about the giants – the National Gallery of Australia, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Film & Sound Archive, the National Archives of Australia – and there's no question that they're worth a visit. But Canberra's also rich in more unusual creative endeavours. Under the soaring roofline of the historic Kingston Power House, glassblowers are hard at work in the Canberra Glassworks. Printmakers and lithographers learn their trade and display their creations at Megalo Print Studio + Gallery in Kingston.

And in a laundry room in a modest house in the north Canberra suburb of Watson, Anne Masters surveys her tiny artistic fiefdom. The owner of the Gallery of Small Things, or GOST, believes her space is unique. "I don't think many walk-in galleries can say they're the size of a bathroom," she says, smiling. At less than six metres >



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT

With concrete pillars and timber cross beams on the ceiling, Acton haunt Rebel Rebel is an edgy place to dine with friends. Enjoy tasty meals with global flavours, along with a range of excellent drops from several major wine regions; soak in the peace and quiet with a nature trail on Mount Ainslie; tea is served at popular city brunch spot Močan & Green Groat; autumn puts on a show outside the stately High Court of Australia; sip crisp wines at Mount Majura Vineyard; serene views await at Cubby and Co's delightful tiny house; book a GoBoat and coast around Lake Burley Griffin with a savoury grazing platter from Bean & Table; view the latest art exhibitions at the National Gallery of Australia. **FACING PAGE** A glimpse of the imposing Parliament House from nearby Lake Burley Griffin.



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT The city's wide streets and lakeside paths make cycling an easy option; the vineyards of Mount Majura; Cubby and Co's tiny house and cosy tents offer comfort in a countryside setting. **FACING PAGE** Head to one of many hillside lookouts in Canberra and soak up the sweeping scenery and iconic landmarks.



square, GOST is the polar opposite of the grand galleries, with their international exhibitions – but it proudly claims its place in the city's artistic landscape. “I didn't want to compete with the galleries in Canberra, because they offer a back-to-back exhibition program,” says Anne. “What I do is a bit different: for 10 months of the year, I show a regular stable of artists in a seasonal, curated concept. I only have two shows a year and they're by invite only. It's actually quite innovative.”

Inspired by the desire to provide a space for recently graduated artists to exhibit, as well as helping art-lovers begin their own collections in an affordable fashion (everything is under A3 size and less than \$500), Anne displays paintings, photo media, ceramics, textiles, print media and wooden objects created by her regular stable of 44 artists (soon to be 49), some of whom are rural and regional. She's also a ceramic artist herself, and her laundry room-turned-tiny art gallery is next to her own studio, which visitors are also welcome to explore.

To recharge her own artistic batteries, Anne loves visiting Megalo, or PhotoAccess, a photography gallery and workshop. A Canberra resident for several decades, who returned there after living in London, Anne sums up the attractions of the capital: “Canberra's a great country town with a city edge.” Buzzing but without the hustle and bustle; sophisticated but relaxing: it certainly is the perfect blend. *CS*

For more information, go to visitcanberra.com.au

THE FACTS

GETTING THERE

CAR Canberra is a three-hour drive from Sydney, and seven hours from Melbourne.

FLY Qantas, Virgin, Rex Airlines, Fly Pelican and Link Airways all fly to Canberra, which is less than two hours flight time from eastern cities and from Hobart; an hour from Melbourne; around 90 minutes from Adelaide; four hours from Perth; and four and a half hours from Darwin.

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

VERITY LANE MARKET Bringing together top chefs in a very superior version of a food hall, Verity Lane Market is also home to several cocktail bars, a tapas bar and craft beer venue. *Sydney Building, 50 Northbourne Ave, Canberra; veritylanemarket.com.au*

MOČAN & GREEN GROUT

Head to this stylish spot in New Acton for a topnotch breakfast or brunch. *19 Marcus Clarke St, New Acton, (02) 6162 2909; mocanandgreengrout.net*

LAMSHED'S FOOD + WINE

A considered wine list accompanies the varied selection of small plates at this chic eatery. *27 Bentham St, Yarralumla, (02) 5100 9058; lamsheds.com.au*

ONZIEME

A bistro and wine bar from hatted chef Louis Coultoupe is as inventive and interesting as you could wish, with an ever-changing

seasonal menu and natural wines. *39 Kennedy St, Kingston, 0424 894 763; onzieme.com.au*

SANDOOCHIE

Sandoochie's varying menu of superb sandwiches made with Under Bakery bread by a trained chef was a smash success as a pop-up, and now has a permanent home. *Shop 8, 40 Marcus Clarke St, Canberra; sandoochie.com.au*

BARRIO COLLECTIVE COFFEE

It's hard to find a better coffee in Canberra than Barrio, so squeeze into this 20-seater, if you can, for a great brew plus delicious bites. *59/30 Lonsdale St, Braddon; barriocollective.com*

PIALLIGO ESTATE

More than a winery, Pialligo Estate is also home to an olive grove, orchard, market garden, a farm shop complete with cafe and the Pavilion Dining restaurant. *18 Kallaroo Rd, Pialligo, (02) 6247 6060; thepialligoestate.com.au*

LAKE GEORGE WINERY

Award-winning cool-climate wines that scored five stars from *Halliday Wine Companion*, plus a beautiful restaurant amid the vines – perfect. *Federal Highway, Lake George, Collector, (02) 4848 0182; lakegeorgewinery.com.au*

PARLOUR

An Art Deco-styled bar in the historic Acton House, Parlour serves up superb cocktails, delicious tapas and sophisticated desserts. *16 Kendall Lane, New Acton, (02) 6257 7325; parlour.net.au*

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

The gallery's artistic catalogue of the great and the good is currently supplemented by works from its British counterpart, in the exhibition *Shakespeare to Winehouse: Icons from the National Portrait Gallery London*, running until July 17.

King Edward Tce, Parkes, (02) 6102 7000; portrait.gov.au

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA

Home of the national collection of more than 155,000 works of art, the NGA's current exhibition, *Know My Name: Australian Women Artists 1900 to Now*, shines a light on female talent too often forgotten.

Until June 26. *Parkes Place East, Parkes, (02) 6240 6411; nga.gov.au*

THE TRUFFLE FARM

Visit the pretty Majura Valley to hunt for truffles amid the oak trees, then sit down to a six-course truffle degustation. *23 Mount Majura Rd, Majura; thetrufflefarm.com.au*

GALLERY OF SMALL THINGS

At less than six metres square, GOST is probably Australia's

smallest gallery – but it's making quite the impression on the local art scene. *27 Wade St, Watson, 0422 263 533; galleryofsmallthings.com*

WHERE TO STAY

LITTLE NATIONAL HOTEL

The smartly designed rooms at Little National may be tiny but they pack in a lot of luxury, with super king-size beds, and big bathrooms

with rain showers. *21 National Circuit, Barton, (02) 6185 1988; littlenationalhotel.com.au*

OVOLO NISHI

A boutique hotel in the heart of the city with an artistic theme, Ovolo Nishi offers stylish rooms with plenty of perks, including complimentary breakfast.

25 Edinburgh Ave, Canberra, (02) 6287 6287; ovolohotels.com

CUBBY AND CO

For something a little different, opt for glamorous bell tents set in a vineyard and luxuriously kitted out with homewares from local businesses. *Mount Majura Vineyard, 88 Lime Kiln Rd, Majura; nakedcubbycollective.com*

WHERE TO SHOP

HAIG PARK VILLAGE MARKETS

Every Sunday morning, you can stroll Haig Park and sample the best of its fresh produce, bakery treats and diverse cuisines, plus pick up everything from fresh flowers to handmade jewellery or naturopathic skincare. *Haig Park, Braddon; haigparkvillagemarkets.com.au*

SHOP GIRL FLOWER GIRL

A florist, a fashion boutique and a homewares store all in one. *1/13 Edgar St, Ainslie, (02) 6156 3559; @shopgirlflowergirl*

BISON

Browse classic ceramics and glassware in a range of gorgeous shades. *Shop G14/27 Lonsdale St, Braddon, (02) 6128 0788; bisonhome.com*