



TOUTED as Melbourne’s best-kept secret, the King Valley is the epitome of #getawaygoals. Only a two-hour drive from Melbourne’s northern suburbs, the lush greenery, crystal-clear rivers and jaw-dropping landscape is enough to transport you to a world far away from the big smoke of city living. I set off on my journey armed with a vague geographical direction and images of wineries in mind. What I found was much more than that.

Once a tobacco hub, the King Valley is now home to award-winning wineries, pubs and fine dining restaurants. When the tobacco industry slowed, the Italian immigrant tobacco farmers turned to wine and food from their homeland, and helped propel the valley into the thriving gourmet destination that is it today.

1. KING VALLEY DAIRY

Founded in 2010, King Valley Dairy began in an old butter factory in the Victorian Alpine town of Myrtleford. The dairy soon outgrew its capacity and founder Naomi Ingleton moved it to the nearby town of Moyhu. Set on a 6.5-acre permaculture farm, King Valley Dairy has a restaurant, extensive food gardens and a tasting area. Naomi does tours, gourmet butter tastings (that are as delicious as they sound), and has an array of other homemade products including chutneys and jams, spice mixes and soaps. My recommendation? Take home a slab of the garlic confit butter – made with homegrown garlic, of course.

2. DAL ZOTTO WINES

The first on the winery hit list, Dal Zotto is the region’s prosecco leader. Patriarch Otto Dal Zotto was born in the Veneto region of Italy, the home of prosecco, so it comes as no surprise that the clever folk at Dal Zotto would help pioneer the prosecco grape in Australia. Otto’s son Michael takes me through a prosecco tasting, highlighting the fresh, fruity flavours of the Col Fondo 2016, and the award-winning Pucino Vintage Prosecco 2016. Besides prosecco, Dal Zotto also produces a range of Italian varieties, including pinot grigio, barbera and sangiovese. If you’re feeling peckish after all that bubbly, Dal Zotto’s trattoria is next door and offers an Italian-inspired menu featuring seasonal produce.

3. CHRISMONT WINES

Set on an architecturally awarded site, with 360-degree views of the King Valley region, lunch at Chrismont is an experience that cannot be missed. Owner Arnie Pizzini and his wife Jo dish out a Sicilian-inspired menu, inspired by Jo’s southern roots. With an emphasis on fresh produce and homestyle cooking techniques, the fare at Chrismont is set to impress. You can’t go past the sardines beccafico, cured kalamata olives, oven-baked quail with cauliflower mash, pinenuts and raisins, and orecchiette with mushrooms. Wash it all down with a glass of Chrismont’s own King Valley Riesling 2016 and you’ve got yourself a meal fit for a king (all puns intended).

4. PIZZINI WINES

Like their vino-inspired cousins, the Pizzini family started out in the tobacco industry. When that didn’t work out, Pizzini Wines was born out of the need to diversify – and we’re glad they did. Alfredo ‘Fred’ Pizzini is now the patriarch of the family, while his wife Katrina runs the excellent cooking classes, and children Natalie, Joel, Nicole and Carlos handle the day-to-day running of this quintessential ‘do it all’ winery. Cellar door manager Rob Wellard rattles off wine varieties like he’s reciting his ABCs. “Nebbiolo, chianti, rubacuori, these are all the wines we’re famous for,” he says. I taste some divine reds that leave me wondering why I took so long to discover Italian wines before I’m distracted by the smorgasbord of homemade products that Katrina has whipped up in-house, like her fabulous salted caramel popcorn, passata sauce, and prosecco and raspberry jam. Luckily, the neighbouring Mountain View Hotel provides accommodation within easy reach of the winery, and I make a pit stop at the adjoining gastropub to sample some gourmet pub fare and sensational wines.

4. A TAVOLA COOKING SCHOOL (PIZZINI WINES)

Next to the Pizzini cellar door, is the A Tavola cooking school. As a 17-year-old bride, Katrina Pizzini learned age-old Italian recipes from her mother-in-law Rosa Pizzini, who shared her secrets to home-style Italian food. “Time is key,” Katrina explains. “You have to give your food time, so the flavours can emerge.” I note that it’s a good metaphor for the



Chrismont Wines



Brookfield Maze



A Tavola Cooking School



Chrismont Wines

harried lives we normally lead. Her other tip is using a healthy dose of oil and butter. “My kids used to always tell me that Nonna’s bolognese tasted better than mine and I was always confused because we used the same ingredients,” she recalls.

We knead the dough and roll out lasagne sheets and manoeuvre the levels on the pasta maker to make tagliatelle and spaghetti. Katrina takes us through the basics of making bolognese and pepperonata sauces, filling the air with a mouth-watering mix of garlic, onion, herbs and spices. Naturally, wine plays an important role in home cooking, with an “Italian splash” (equating to about two cups) being an essential part of the recipes. Risotto with pork sausages is up next, and we discover another cooking secret. “Fill the pan up with the stock until it sits just above the rice,” Katrina

says. “Put it on a low fire and let it cook slowly.” Which leaves us just enough time to start working on the gnocchi.

Potatoes are the base, and we knead them into little doughy balls before lightly flicking them onto a gnocchi board. Katrina whizzes about the kitchen like a pro, noting everyone’s progress. We finally sit down to enjoy the fruits of our labour, with some Pizzini wines of course.

5. POWERS LOOKOUT

After all that pasta and wine, a little exercise is a good idea so we head out to Powers Lookout for some fresh air and epic scenery. Powers Lookout is well worth the drive just to experience the spectacular views across the King Valley. Named after one of Victoria’s most infamous bushrangers, Harry Power (a mentor of that other bushranger,



Ned Kelly), this location provides a comprehensive view of the valley and landscape. We head up some steps to Lookout Point 2 that’s easily accessible for most and only metres from the car park and are greeted with jaw-dropping views of the lush, green landscape. A word of advice: don’t drop your cameras as there’s no way of ever getting them back.

6. BROOKFIELD MAZE

My final stop is the Brookfield Maze, one of the largest hedge mazes in Australia. Established in 2010, the maze’s challenge factor is to find its central viewing platform. Along the way, keep your eyes peeled for hidden koalas and four number clues that add up to the number of trees used to plant the maze. Owner Eryl Neil shows me around Brookfield’s extensive landscaped gardens that also include an ancient labyrinth, bocce, giant chess and checkers board, and a creek walk. “There’s something for the whole family to enjoy,” she says. ■

FAST FACTS: KING VALLEY, VICTORIA

POPULATION

1771

BUDGET:

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GREAT FOR:

FAMILIES, COUPLES,
GIRLS WEEKEND

HIGHLIGHTS:

KING VALLEY DAIRY
kingvalleydairy.com.au

DAL ZOTTO WINES
dalzotto.com.au

CHRISMONT WINES
chrismont.com.au

PIZZINI WINES
pizzini.com.au

BROOKFIELD MAZE
brookfieldmaze.com.au

PARADISE FALLS,
POWERS LOOKOUT &
LAKE WILLIAM HOVELL
visitingvalley.com.au

UPCOMING EVENTS:

The Victorian Salam Festival
(Dal Zotto Wines)
October 7
victoriansalamfestival.com.au

La Dolce Vita Wine & Food
Festival (including Gnocchi
Carnevale by Pizzini Wines and
Primavera del Prosecco by
Dal Zotto Wines)
November 18 & 19
winesofthekingvalley.
com.au/events/la-dolce-vita

HOW TO GET THERE

The King Valley is a two-hour drive from the northern estates (Kalkallo, Wollert, Roxburgh Park, Donnybrook, Mernda).

It is a three-hour train ride from Southern Cross to Wangaratta station, which is a 35-minute drive to Whitfield in the heart of the King Valley.