

LIFESTYLE

# Romance of times gone by in the Shoalhaven

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Rendall Cottage at the Pioneer Village Museum, Kangaroo Valley, NSW, is typical of the 19th century. Credit: AAP

A ring around the finger has been a symbol of eternal love since Ancient Egyptian times, when couples gave each other braided bands made of hemp or reeds.

The current trend is to give wedding, engagement, eternity or commitment rings that are personal and unique - and if you design and make your own, all the better.

Jeweller Naomi at Appleye, based in the Shoalhaven region of NSW, says she's seeing a huge increase in couples making their own bands.

"Homemade is enjoying such a resurgence, which makes me so happy," says Naomi, who specialises in silver, gold and semi-precious stones.

My partner Michael and I spend a morning in her new studio in Worrigee, near Nowra. We're not married or engaged, so making a ring for each other feels like an exciting (and romantic) step.

The options for designs are virtually endless, but we give each other some direction and set to work, cutting, bending, soldering, hammering and engraving while Naomi offers guidance. Michael has a simple silver ring hammered with strikes he thinks look like rain; mine is a thick band, the silver melted at high heat to create ripples that look like the ocean. When we slide them on, we're beaming.

The Shoalhaven creates the perfect backdrop for a romantic weekend, which started the day before over lunch in Kangaroo Valley.

Hampden Deli Dining is an example of the incredible eateries that are emerging across the region, well supported by a thriving network of quality small-scale farmers and providores. We create our own deli board - there's puff pie with mackerel, capers and anise myrtle, and a selection of local and French cheeses with home-baked sourdough bread.

Kangaroo Valley is a lush place where things just love to grow. It's pretty, too; circled by a wall of mountains it's one of only seven enclosed valleys in the world.

We stroll across Kangaroo River on the medieval tower style Hampden Bridge, which opened in 1898 and today is the second most photographed bridge in Australia. I imagine the early settlers were too busy trying to survive to appreciate its elegant turrets made from locally quarried sandstone: they've left that for us and our romantic selfies.

Pioneer Village Museum, next to the bridge, demonstrates just how tough life was in colonial days. A replica Settler's Cottage, with its homemade furniture made out of tins and piles of hand-worked agricultural machinery, depicts a life of work and little play.

Even during boom time at the end of the century, it sounds like life was tough. In the museum's drab, replica school, a notice of Rules for Teachers 1872 states "men teachers

may take one evening each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they attend church regularly". Women teachers, meanwhile, will be dismissed if they "engage in unseemly conduct".

The pretty weatherboard Rendall Cottage, however, houses a romantic story. Built around 1870, it belonged to Scottish settlers Mr and Mrs Rendall. Dark, wooden dressers and quilted bed clothes show how they created an elegant home in the Australian bush despite few comforts from home. Within seven generations they had almost 200 descendants, many of whom still live in the valley.

We ponder more recent history over a cosy dinner at Queen St Eatery in nearby and Berry. Manager Bec is lamenting the freeway bypass, completed in 2017, that saw the town lose over 90 per cent of its traffic overnight, which has made it tough for small businesses to survive.

"We've been this jewel in the crown for the region for so long, but the council did nothing to weather the blow for us," she says.

Bec is luring people back to Berry through the eatery's chic, French-inspired decor and classic French bistro dishes with a South Coast spin. She's certainly won us over.

A fierce open fireplace awaits us at our accommodation for the night - Yellow Dog Cottage at Jaspers Brush just outside Berry. Owners Anne and David made a tree change from Sydney, where they both worked in different careers, to create a gorgeous weekend sanctuary in this beautiful place.

We don't realise how special our love nest is until the following morning, when we see it in daylight. We're high in the hills with views across green pastures all the way to the ocean.

We return to Berry for lunch and find no end of tasty options, such as The Garden Berry, with its sunny courtyard, and the homely Berry Sourdough Cafe. The bypass gives Berry a relaxed vibe these days as people have time to browse the boutiques, gift shops, galleries and vintage toy and lolly shops.

We dine over flickering candles at the Hungry Duck, an intimate Asian restaurant specialising in share plates featuring South Coast produce, before rolling back to Yellow Dog to snuggle on the sofa and admire the new rings on our fingers. These new bands bind us together, but also to this place, which romance could never bypass.

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE: The Shoalhaven is around two and a half hours south of Sydney by car. For more info visit [shoalhaven.com](http://shoalhaven.com).

**STAYING THERE:** Yellow Dog Cottage overlooks Jaspers Brush, just 10 minutes south of Berry. Visit [yellowdogcottage.com.au](http://yellowdogcottage.com.au).

**PLAYING THERE:** Fire up the blowtorch and get to work on your own handmade ring at Appleye Jewellery Designs, just south of Nowra. Visit [appleye.com.au](http://appleye.com.au).

For a romantic dinner, head to the Queen St Eatery & Wine Bar or Hungry Duck, both situated on Berry's Queen Street. In Kangaroo Valley, Hampden Deli Dining & School offers a wide range of unique and creative cuisine. For more info visit [queensteatery.com.au](http://queensteatery.com.au), [hungryduck.com.au](http://hungryduck.com.au), and [hampdendeli.com.au](http://hampdendeli.com.au).

The writer travelled as a guest of Shoalhaven City Council.

## **'I picked up William Tyrrell': Dying man claimed he drove toddler 300km from home**

He was so distressed following the conversation he placed his head on his carer's shoulder.

**William Tyrrell**

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