



## Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



### Trying out the wine in the Hunter Valley

by Amaru & Suzanne, October 15th 2006

To celebrate our one year anniversary we decided to have a weekend away, and what better place than the Hunter Valley!

I had never been there before (well, I had actually never been north of Sydney before to be honest) and Suz had only been there once so it seemed like a good idea to explore the area.

After looking for accommodation online we realized that most of the resorts make you book both nights during the weekend and it's also quite expensive. We ended up booking accommodation for only one night, a Sunday night. Suz had to take the next day off from work but it wasn't really a problem.

On Sunday morning we got up early and left home around 8.30. Traffic wasn't really a problem at that time of the morning but we wanted to start early since today was the last day of the school holidays and there might be some traffic later on during the day.

The car ride was very smooth, we borrowed Julia's car for the trip since it's a bit bigger than ours and more comfortable on a long journey (the fact that the car has a cd player that also plays MP3 also helped). After singing and driving for around 2½ hours we arrived in the region and stopped in Cessnock for some supplies.



**Bluetongue Brewery**  
We started our tour with some beers



**Bluetongue Brewery**  
Even Suz tried some of the beers

We knew that we had a small kitchenette in the unit we were renting for the night so we bought some breakfast for the next morning, we got some crackers (to use with the cheese we would pick up later) and some other snacks. Once all of this was done we drove a bit more and ended up at the information center just in the beginning of Pokolbin.

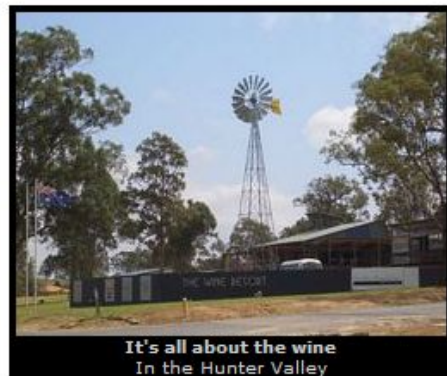
Here we managed to pick up a free copy of the "Hunter Valley Wine Country - Visitors Guide" which pretty much tells you everything that you need to know about the Hunter Valley.....and then some. And the best thing about it, it came with a good map. Now we would be able to track down all the wineries that we were interested in!

Since lunch time was coming up we decided to get some food in us before hitting the wineries....

Looking at the map we saw that the "Bluetongue Brewery" was located in this area and made our way over there. Here we managed to find (besides beer of course) some food for us. Together with lunch I also decided to try out their sampling tray which contained six different kinds of Bluetongue beers. They had a dark, draught, pilsner, premium, premium light and interestingly also a ginger beer....with alcohol!

My favorite was the pilsner....the ginger beer was a bit too strange for my liking, Suz kind of liked it though.

It was now time to start exploring the wineries, Suz remembered one that she had visited the last time she had been here so we set off in that direction. We reached the "Tintilla Estate Vineyard" which is a very small but beautiful vineyard.



**It's all about the wine**  
In the Hunter Valley

We saw that there was a group of 4 people before us sampling the wines, since we couldn't get to the wine we decided to try out everything else that the Vineyard offered....which is Olives! They had lots of different olives and also a good range of olive oil, with everything from the standard one to ones flavoured with chili, garlic etc. We tried them all with pieces of bread and they were all great (our favorite though was the garlic.....Mmmmmmm!!).



**Suz and I**  
In front of the vines

Our time had now come to start sampling the wines and we jumped straight into it....neither of us are into white wines so we started with a nice Rose and then worked our way through to the Sangiovese, Merlot, Shiraz and even got to try a Pinot Noir. Since the Pinot Noir grape is a delicate and difficult grape to grow (and also thrives in colder climates) not many wineries in NSW has them. We bought a nice bottle of Shiraz and some olives and moved on towards the next winery.

Our next destination was "Bimbadgen Estate" but on our way there we saw on the map that the Binnorie Dairy was on the way so we decided to pay them short visit to see if they had any nice cheeses. Unfortunately they didn't provide tastings of their products. Well, then we'd just find another cheese place who does.... While we were at the same place we found another winery, "Simon Pemberton Pearce Wine Cellar", and decided

to see if they had anything to offer.

After sampling 2-3 different wines, including a Tempranillo, we sneaked out while the attendant was in another part of the store helping other customers out. That's the annoying part about wine tastings, you always feel so guilty walking out without buying something, specially if you haven't done it all that often.

We reached the "Bimbadgen Estate" and sampled a few wines, here we actually bought a bottle of dessert wine for Julia and a bottle of Shiraz/Merlot/Cabernet. It sounds like a mix of too many but it really was an awesome wine.

While we were sampling the wines we asked the attendant about the helicopter we had seen on the field just outside of the building. We thought it might be for sightseeing or something similar but she told us that it was just for guests that had come in for lunch (they have a restaurant in the upper floor).

We had seen a few Porsches parked outside the estate and thought those people had a lot of money, now we realized that they are only semi-rich. If you are rich you take a plane to the local airport and then helicopter your way around the area....nice!



**Suz and I**  
In front of the vines



**Suz trying out some wines**  
Simon Pemberton Pearce Wine Cellar

On our way to the next winery we checked into our accommodation, we had a very nice chalet with a livingroom, small kitchen, bedroom and a bathroom with a Jacuzzi!!! Almost felt like jumping in straight away but since we still have plenty of wines to sample we moved on...

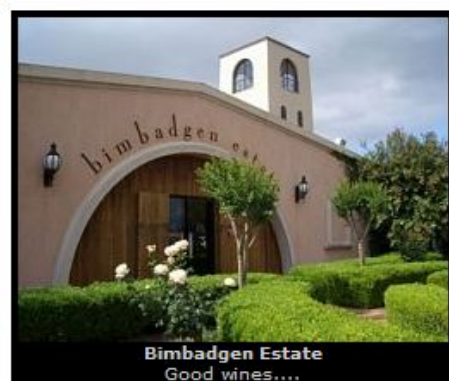
Before we hit the next winery we went to a place called "Smelly Cheese Shop", here we sampled lots of nice cheeses, among others a "Double King Island Brie" and a "Tripple Cream Brie". We bought a jar of "Labna", which is a very yummi yoghurt cheese, and one "Double King Island Brie" since it was great. We now had wine, crackers and cheese for later on... we were only missing one small thing... and the store next door took care of that for us, chocolate!!

After settling our snacks for later it was time to keep moving and next on the list was "Tempus Two", one of the biggest and most famous vineyards in the area. We saw flyers that said Diana Ross would be there in about a month to perform.....that's how big it is!

It was now getting quite late in the afternoon and since it was Sunday most people were leaving the area to go back home, perfect for us! We didn't have to wait to sample the wines here, but the personel told us that they had been really busy that weekend.

We sampled some very nice wines, even a \$40 Shiraz that was beautiful....but way out of our price range so we bought a nice Cabernet/Merlot to take with us.

From here we got back into the car and drove about 250m to the next winery, "McGuigan Cellars", by this time Suz was driving since it was a few wineries back that she started sipping the wines while I wanted a full taste of most of them =)



**Bimbadgen Estate**  
Good wines....



**"Just dropping by for some lunch"**  
Getting to the winery by chopper....nice!

Walking out of here we saw the *"Pokolbin Estate Vineyard"* just there so we figured why not! We said we weren't going to buy anything here, just sampling. The wines were nice, but nothing spectacular....until the dessert wines came out. I tried their Verdelho Solera and I was hooked. I'm not usually that much into dessert wines but this one had a subtle taste of Brandy. I loved it and just had to get it.....well, at least I didn't get a bottle of red =))

After our first day we managed to visit 6 different wineries, all of this without really stressing out about it.

We were quite tired by now so we went to our chalet to rest for a little while before heading out for dinner at the Irish pub, *"Harrigans Pub"*. On the way there we saw a kangaroo jumping along the side of the road. It

was the first time that I actually saw a living kangaroo in the wild.

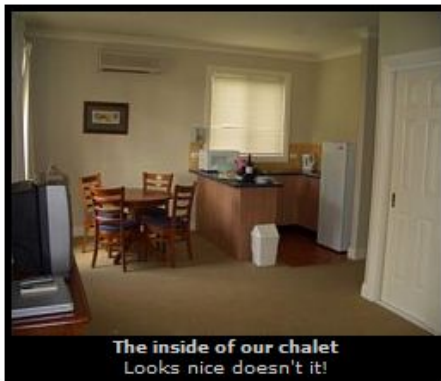
*"Harrigans Pub"* was a good place to end our day...well, it wasn't quite over after all, we had lots of nice snacks back at the chalet so we only had a main course each and later on that evening (after we used the jacuzzi) we finished up our day with some good wine and awesome cheeses.

The next day we slept in, had a good breakfast, checked out and got ready to tackle a few more wineries.

After having the necessary coffee we made our way towards *"Audrey Wilkinson Vineyard"*, most of all for the views over the Hunter Valley that the winery offers. On the way there we saw another Kangaroo grazing a few metres of the road. I stopped the car and tried to get a few photos of him, unfortunately I had to zoom in to even get a good shot so the quality wasn't all that good. I now wanted to see him in motion so I got out of the car and started walking towards him, he saw me and jumped away.....it's almost a bit childish but I loved it!!



**Our chalet**  
This is where we stayed!



**The inside of our chalet**  
Looks nice doesn't it!

Eventually we made it up to the hill to *"Audrey Wilkinson Vineyard"*, the view from here is great, just great!

Since we were here we entered to have a quick look and sample the wines and actually learned that the winery was named after a man, we were very sure it was a woman =) After sampling the wines we just said thank you and sneaked out. It worked perfectly since there was another couple that arrived to sample the wines and during that time we left (yeah, yeah, we know...we should just walk right out without worrying about it).

After this we found *"Lindemans Wines"* and outside of the building there were lots of cars so we figured that this would be an easy place to sample some wines and then just leave. Well, we entered the building

and ended up being the only ones in there....figures!

We actually got a bottle with us from here, but not because we couldn't just walk out. We really liked that wine and it was one that you can't get in the normal stores.

Anyway, we kept this up during the day and visited *"Rosemount Estate"*, *"Ivanhoe Wines"*, *"Hungerford Hill"* and ended up our day at *"Petersons Champagne House"* where we had the opportunity to sample some great sparkling merlots.

Driving home we ended up in rush-hour traffic so it took us a bit longer than we expected. But once we were home we cooked a nice dinner and had some of our Hunter Valley wine with it.

An awesome trip.....



**"Say Cheese!!"**  
Lots of different cheeses for us to try!



**At Tempus Two**  
One of the bigger wineries in the area



**At Tempus Two**  
Very empty on a Sunday afternoon!



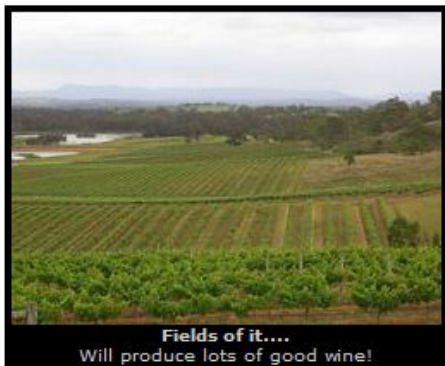
**Dinner at an Irish Pub**  
Guinness and Oysters....Mmmmm!!



**Suz and a Magners**  
Nice Irish Cider!



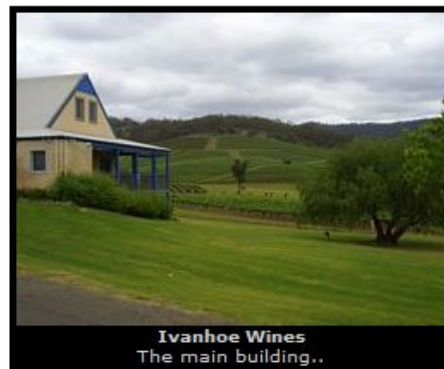
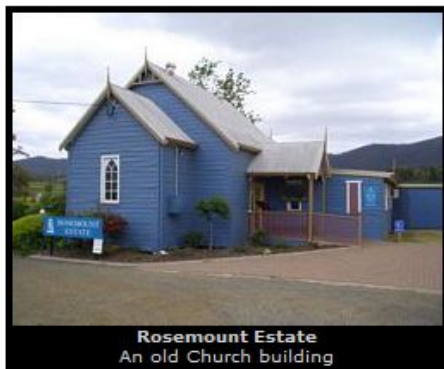
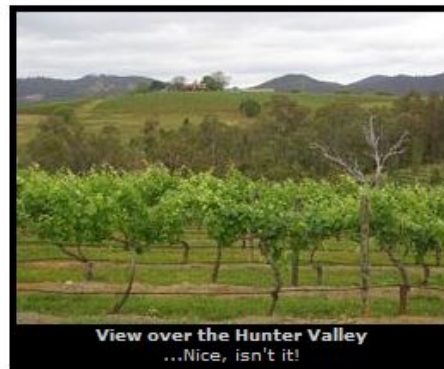
**Skippy!**  
My first Kangaroo in the wild!



**Fields of it....**  
Will produce lots of good wine!



**Fields of it....**  
Will produce lots of good wine!





**Ivanhoe Wines**

The view from the back of the building!



**Our wines**

The collection we brought home with us!

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