

# A feast of Peninsula produce

The Bellarine is musseling in on its food-focused cousins across the bay, writes

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**F**OR too long, the Bellarine has played second fiddle to that other (Mornington) peninsula. While the region has none of the celebrity beach homes, Toorak-style interiors stores or surfeit of organic groceries of its upmarket cousin across Port Phillip Bay, the Bellarine can more than hold its own when it comes to its produce and local restaurants.

And at just 90 minutes from Melbourne, it is well within the reach of stressed-out city workers in dire need of fresh coastal air, along with a take-home bag of olive oil and homemade chutney.

The first place to angle for on your weekend getaway is the Bellarine Brewery, which begs the question: "How early can one respectably drink beer on a Saturday morning?"

Not wanting to seem rude, we submit to host Tim Page-Walker's arm-twisting and sample some of the micro-brewery's famed beers, including the Ginja Beer from the craft beer range and the signature brew, Mussel Stout, which features — you guessed it — mussels fresh off the boat from nearby Portarlington.

As someone who has never been a big appreciator of beers, but a lover of all things salty, the Mussel Stout is a revelation. It's a delicious, complex brew that retains the fresh tang of the mussels without crowding out the other flavours.

The Bellarine Brewing Company produces about 50,000 litres a year in the form of lagers, pilsners and stouts. It dedicates 0.2ha of the estate to hops, with the remaining land used to grow grapes for sister winery Bellarine Estate. Visitors keen to iron out deficiencies in their own home brew can even book in a tour and tasting of the brewery with Tim, whose knowledge of the brewery process is nothing short of encyclopedic.

No weekend visit to the Bellarine qualifies as legitimate unless it is punctuated by a long lunch at a local winery, and at this point we pulled into the beautiful grounds of nearby Terindah Estate.

The lunch at Terindah's The Shed is first-class fare: fresh local produce done simply and confidently, without any ridiculous foam or extravagant food smears. The Shed has been renovated to take in views, and on clear days visitors can see across the bay to Melbourne.

The service, too, is second to none, with wait staff in possession of that most rare of hospitality attributes: knowing when to interrupt and when to leave you alone.

After gorging ourselves on wonderful duck and fresh fish, we decided the next most logical step on a

food trail was to keep feasting, which is how we ended up at Drysdale Cheeses, the first commercial goat cheese manufacturer on the Bellarine.

Owners Corinne and Peter Blacket lovingly rear their 50 or so Saanen dairy goats according to permaculture farming principles to produce a range of tasty yoghurts and cheeses — from a chilli chive and garlic shev to a firm haloumi that isn't overly salty. These are happy, delightful goats, and it isn't hard to see why their cheese tastes so fresh compared to their commercially reared counterparts. Personal favourites are the Moroccan fettina and the silky goat curd.

Another stalwart of the local food supply chain is the nearby Lighthouse Olive Grove, which offers tastings of its range of silky olive oils at its Drysdale property. About 10,000 olive trees offer 12 different varieties of olive oils from across the globe. Don't go past the delicious lemon-infused olive oil.

With hours of solid taste-testing behind us, it was time to head for our overnight digs, the delightful Pelican Sands Bed and Breakfast at Portarlington. Mick and Susan Moro have done a wonderful job — the Edwardian-era house was transported from Surrey Hills to its more tranquil setting two minutes from the beach about 10 years ago.

It has lost none of its charm in the move, offering high ceilings, beautiful period flourishes and a wide hallway with gorgeously designed rooms running off it. We scored the Romantic Room (other themed rooms include Arabian Nights and Moulin Rouge), which featured a decadent spa and an extremely comfortable bed.

After a few hours of relaxation and respite, it was time to head back on to the foodie trail and we were in for a treat at Oakdene Vineyards and Restaurant in Wallington. The cellar door is open for tastings, sales and tours seven days a week, but the real treat is the restaurant dinner, which is ambitious and fresh.

The soft shell crab, beef carpaccio and lamb neck pasta were all standouts. Special mention must go to my dessert, however: a rich hazelnut mousse with a wafer filled with a rich chocolate sauce that I was still thinking about on the drive home the next morning. Which brings me to Lonsdale Hydroponics, the perfect pit-stop to break up the trip back to Melbourne.

With its vine-ripened hydroponic tomatoes and other fresh produce in the front-of-house fruit stall, bring a bag and stock up — ready for when you feel hungry again in a few days' time.