

Hidden treasures

ON THE road

IT'S understandable that Tasmanian tourism promotions are built around our so-called icon attractions such as Cradle Mountain, Strahan, Freycinet and so on.

As beautiful and deserving as these places are, one of the less fortunate effects of their constant exposure is that they become for many tourists a ready-made, hit-and-miss itinerary — hit the high spots, miss the bits in between.

And yet, so often, it's the missed bits in between that are the true Tasmania — the smaller places, the people doing interesting things in tucked-away corners, the out-of-the-way wineries and eateries, and the unspoilt beauty of many parts of the island that never make the tourist brochures.

If only visitors could be encouraged to slow down, turn left or right instead of driving straight ahead, and take time, as it were, to smell our roses, the rosier Tasmania's tourism picture would be.

There's nothing new in these thoughts, of course, but they were driven home to me recently after a few days' meandering round the country behind Devonport, the area visitors too often race through, only stopping perhaps for a coffee and a smile at the murals in Sheffield on their way to Cradle Mountain.

But in the Kent County countryside, tucked under moody, magical Mount Roland and scattered around Lake Barrington, is one of the richest and most varied array of small food and wine producers in the state.

And here, quite literally, is this closest most of us will ever come to Paradise — a hamlet just off to the east.

The place to prop for a night or two, or just for coffee or lunch, is Remi and Ginette Bancal's Glencoe Rural Retreat, a few minutes outside Sheffield.

Formerly the long-time manager of Calstock in Deloraine, Remi was before that maitre d' at the Ritz in Paris for 10 years, at Mietta's in Melbourne and then at Banc in Sydney. And it's that sort of refined experience that makes Glencoe, with its delightful grounds, large kitchen garden and four beautiful rooms, such a gem.

Ginette is chatelaine and gardener, Remi the chef and the menu is composed of the simple,



THE BIG CHEESE: Joe and Antonia Gretschnann's Elgaar Farm cheeses age and naturally mature in their underground cellar.

comforting dishes of rural France with everything from the bread to the petit pots de creme made fresh in-house.

The potatoes and carrots at lunch, for example, had half an hour before still had the dirt of the garden on them and Ginette plucked the leaves and herbs for our salad to order. In all respects, Glencoe is very much a French recipe for living well.



HAUTE CUISINE: Dine on the freshest French fare in sublime surrounds at Glencoe Retreat.

a pale green, Italian-inspired basilicato — spirit infused with fresh basil, slightly sweetened and spiked with lemon zest. It's totally fabulous and addictive, even at ten in the morning.

Then, back at lake level, there are the Lake Barrington and Barringwood Park vineyards, the former producing some of our best sparkling wines, the latter the highly acclaimed producer of rich, velvety, multi-award-winning pinot noirs.

And now, at Railton, you can taste Seven Sheds Kentish Ale, a flavour-packed beer brewed by Willie Simpson, Australia's leading beer writer, from fuggle and golding hops grown on-site, maris otter and local pale malted barley.

Made in his and partner Kath Stark's newly opened Seven Sheds Brewery and Meadery, you can now tour the small brewery and hop garden and taste Willie's equally flavoursome, sweetly honeyed, sparkling mead, a medal-winner at the 2008 Australian Fruit Wine Show.

A little further east, behind Elizabeth Town, you have Joe and Antonia Gretschnann's organic Elgaar Farm, where their cows graze on a salad of mixed grasses, the butter is made in an old hand churn and the wonderful cheeses age and naturally mature in their underground cellar.

Plus, of course, there's their "real" milk, quark (a type of cream cheese), yoghurt and other organic dairy goodies.

Then a coffee and snack at ETC in Elizabeth Town, sample some of Ashgrove Farm cheeses, complete the circuit with some artisan confectionary and a fabulous chilli-spiked hot chocolate at the House of Anvers and then — and only then — should visitors be allowed to drive up to Cradle. **GP**



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