

Wild Blue Yonder

I am sitting on the pea-green seats of the train, gazing out into a world vanishing beneath a gauzy, shimmery mist. As we climb two hours west from Central Station, Sydney, the mist cloaks the vast plateaus, it snakes through the dark forests and curls around the cliff tops and canyons that comprise the Blue Mountains. I am in search of the peace and quiet that attracts travellers year round to the one million hectares of New South Wales, named after the blue haze of the eucalyptus oils. As the angry sky darkens and rain thunders down, I confess to feeling slightly fearful, as well as excited, at the prospect of staying alone in a secret eco cottage with acres between myself and the nearest human being. I step out into Katoomba, the tourist hub of the Blue Mountains; it is as if I have stepped into some wonderland at the top of the Magic Faraway Tree. Even the facades of the dinky buildings are shrouded in mist. I shelter in a quaint little cake shop, and even the chocolate fondant I scoff is like something from a fairytale land. The mist clears to reveal the awesome landscape: vast, rugged cliffs, ferns, tall gum trees. Soon we get back on the muddy track. The cottage stands beside a wooden shearing shed isolated amidst acres of countryside. Marion, the owner, and I sip hot sweet tea on the veranda and she tells me about the mountains, before showing me around the property. In the lounge, the huge windows let in the views of the afternoon light leaking over the chalky cliffs. In the loft bedroom, the triangular windows show distant forests. Indeed, this area has some of the most lethal snakes in Australia. The information booklet in the cottage provides further warnings: "Not all horses are approachable and cattle are definitely not 'approachable'. As she leaves me, I almost run after her and beg her to stay, or to take me with her. But soon, I relax and discover what solitude in nature is all about. Horses chomp in the fields. Peewees sing. Great yellow butterflies flutter past.

I walk west from the cottage with the long wet grass tickling my legs, past tall gum trees and along the creek paddock, keeping an eye out for wallabies and kangaroos and wombat holes, and snakes. As I walk towards the blue hills of Oberon and the Jenolan Caves, I feel quite tiny. The sun begins to set, silhouetting the trees, night-time encroaches over the cliffs until the sky is on fire, although I spin around and it is still, broad daylight behind me. It is a little wonder that the Blue Mountains are a favourite haunt of artists. Back in the cottage I play one of the CDs, the multi-volume Complete Classics, and delve into the basket of goodies left for me. The kitchen has a slab timber bench and Australian hardwoods, and soon I have sausages sizzling on the stove. In the airy loft bedroom, I fall asleep to the rain pattering against the windows, the horses whinnying outside. But after a few days of relaxation in my private retreats, I want to explore the nooks and crannies of the Blue Mountains. An obvious place to start is Katoomba, the crowded gateway town to the area, and the region's most visited destination, which has cafes and bars, and adventure operators offering to arrange trips into the bush. Nature spotting bush walks, horse-riding adventures, walking along the famous Six Foot Track footpath to caves and Mega long Valley, a ride on the steep scenic railway and the Skyway cable car can all be arranged here. After all, it is peace and quiet I yearn for, so I set off in search of it. En route the driver points out some lovely places to stay: the Possums Hideaway nestled within gardens, Red leaf Resort, and Bower Cottage, with a blue bird on its sign. I ask him to stop so I can take a peek, and crunch up the gravelly path to a yellow facade.

Q. Write and learn the spellings of the underlined words from the text.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Q. Write the meanings of the following words in the spaces provided.

a. gauzy _____

b. facade _____

c. quaint _____

d. solitude _____

e. encroach _____

f. lethal _____

Q. Answer the following questions based on the text 'Wild Blue Yonder'.

a. Describe the region the writer is in.

b. What is the writer searching for?

c. What does the writer say about 'Katoomba'?

d. How does the writer describe the property Marion introduces him to?

e. How does the writer feel about living alone for a few days in an isolated region?

f. What does the writer decide to do after relaxing for a few days with nature?
