

# EMIRATES ONE&ONLY WOLGAN VALLEY

*At this luxury, globally certified carbon-neutral conservation resort, you can escape to nature and help to protect it at the same time, writes KATRINA HOLDEN.*

Arms outstretched from an open-air safari vehicle, I’m encouraged by my field guide, Nick McGregor, to pluck leaves from the shrub we are next to and crunch them between my fingertips.

“Can you guess what it is?” asks Nick. “Lemon myrtle!” I blurt out, with childlike enthusiasm, as the unmistakable scent emanates from my hands.

I’m on the wildlife and sundowners tour at the luxury conservation resort, Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley, deep in the heart of the World Heritage-listed Greater Blue Mountains National Park.

Earlier that day, I had arrived after a three-hour drive from Sydney, feeling a sense of discovery and escapism as I’m greeted at the entrance. I leave my car behind, my luggage is removed, and I’m handed a refresher towel and a glass of sparkling wine as a welcome.

To check in, I’m driven by luxury 4WD through the property, passing over Carne Creek, wheels splashing through a crossing of one of the most pristine waterways in Australia.

At the main homestead, I’m invited to take part in an Aboriginal smoking ritual, placing strawberry gum leaves onto a flame to cleanse energies. Later, I sip on a Wolgan Tonic drink, made from the resort’s 1832 Wolgan Gin, distilled from the

pure waters of Carne Creek and infused with seven native botanicals found on site.

I’m staying in a Heritage King Villa, one of 41 villas, each with bikes for exploring, a heated plunge pool, gas fireplace, and bathrooms where you can stand beneath a rain shower head and gaze through a glass ceiling – or bathe in a soaking tub, opening the windows to watch kangaroos grazing.

### AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

On the signature wildlife and sundowners tour with Nick, we drive to open fields where valley vistas are framed by dramatic escarpments of Narrabeen sandstone, dating more than 300 million years. Some 5000 eastern grey kangaroos reside in the area, not threatened by our presence as we pass mobs of up to 70-strong. We drive by the fully restored 1832 Heritage Homestead, where 22 convicts lived in a hut during the 1820s.

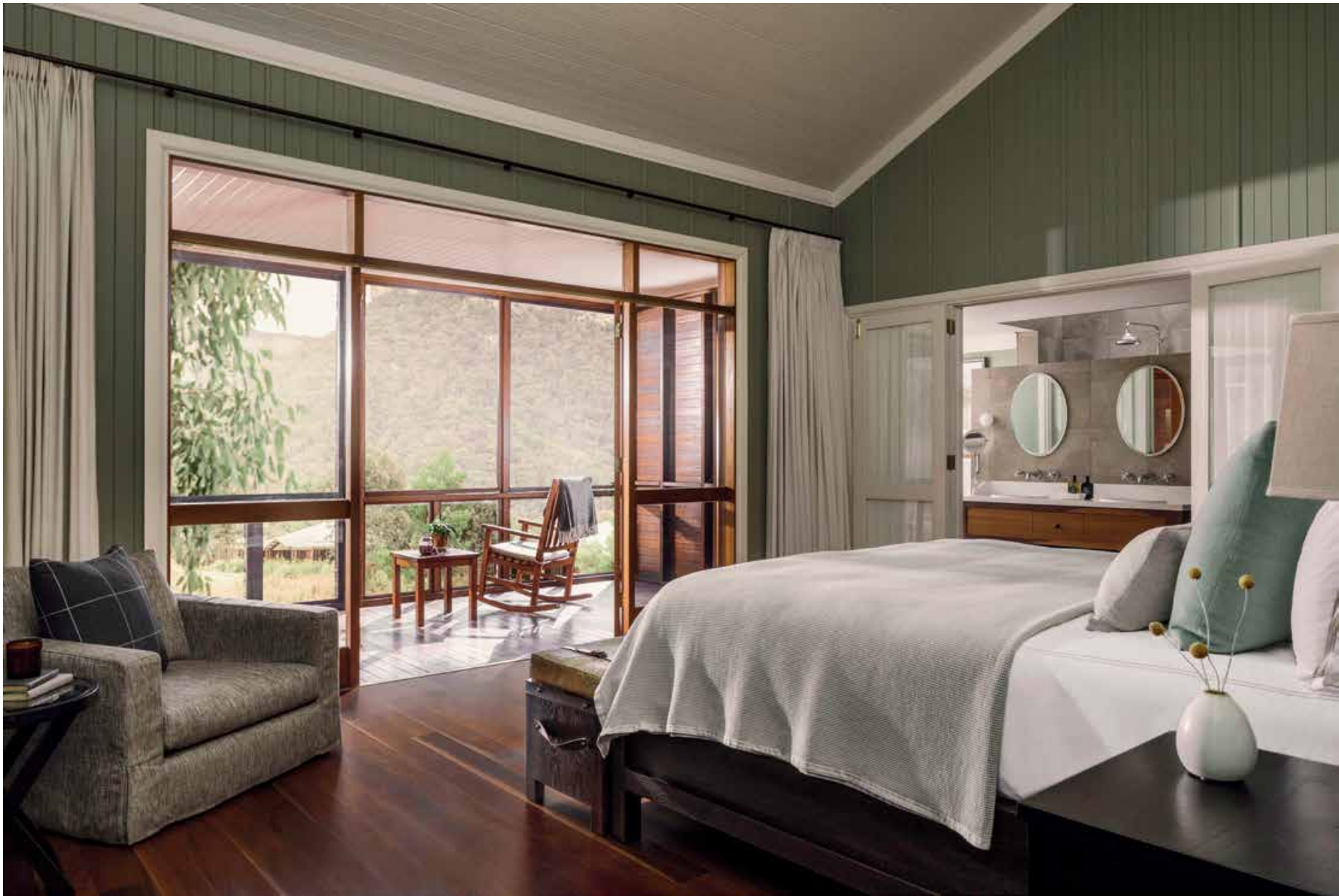
Nick points out a 400-year-old Eucalypt tree standing singularly, fondly named ‘the home tree’, eastern wallaroos and Blakely’s red gum trees, before arriving at the Blue Teapot picnic site where he sets up sundowner beverages, a cheese and charcuterie plate and brownies that we feast on as the sun descends behind Donkey Mountain.

Taking a guided nature walk one morning sees me following a stretch of

**BELOW** The ecologically built villas at this carbon-neutral luxury resort are framed by dramatic escarpments of the Greater Blue Mountains National Park, NSW.







*“Since the founding of the resort, more than 300,000 plants and trees have been planted, reversing earlier threats to the natural ecology.”*

Carne Creek with Conservation Manager, Michael Yaravoy. We pass fern leaf wattle trees and a water dragon discretely sunning himself on a log, as Michael talks of the extensive conservation work undertaken to ensure a healthy riparian zone for the ecosystem.

Erosion damage had occurred after more than 100 years of grazing and farming on the land, but since the founding of the resort, more than 300,000 plants and trees have been planted, reversing earlier threats to the natural ecology.

There’s a multitude of experiences to join in – a three-night stay will allow for a comfortable mix of action and relaxation. You’ll be nourished on authentic Australian cuisine at Wolgan by Bentley and The Country Kitchen, ready to take a guided horse trail ride perhaps; sip on mulled wine during the 1832 campfire and stargazing experience; test your precision at the archery range; or indulge in a rejuvenating treatment at One&Only Spa.

My favourite activity was actively participating in one of the resort’s conservation and regenerative experiences. I meet field guide Rachel Cook, who admits she’s become “obsessed” with wombats. Of the bear-nosed wombats on site, roughly 70 per cent have been afflicted with mange, caused by a mite introduced by European red foxes. The resort’s conservation staff works with the team at Kanimbla Wombats that GPS maps and tracks every wombat burrow. Progressively, the team is marking wombats with a colour-dyed blue solution of Cydectin that tips onto their skin, from a foam board and cup as they enter the burrow, to stop the host of the parasite.

We create foam board flaps with a slot

for a cup of solution, which suspends on steel prongs we position at burrow entrances. I write poison warning signage on some of the flaps – others have been created by children in the Wolgan Rangers sessions, cutely adorned with hearts and handwritten ‘wombat lives here’. We set forth installing the flaps. Wearing protective gloves, I pour the blue liquid in the cup while Rachel records details. All up, it takes just 90 minutes, but I leave satisfied that I’ve done something truly worthwhile during my stay.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

The resort, a member of Luxury Lodges of Australia, occupies just one per cent of a 2,832ha wilderness reserve and is considered a global leading example of carbon-neutral conservation and sustainable tourism.

In 2019, it celebrated its 10th consecutive year of carbon-neutral certification. When it opened in 2009, it was the first resort in the world to achieve internationally accredited carbon-neutral status.

The villas and homestead were built with green principles, using locally sourced, natural, and recycled materials. All water used at the resort is captured onsite from both rainwater and Carne Creek, and is recycled to irrigate gardens.

Rates at One&Only Wolgan Valley Resort start from AUD \$3,100 per room, per night for a Heritage Villa.

[oneandonlyresorts.com/wolgan-valley](https://oneandonlyresorts.com/wolgan-valley)



**LEFT, TOP** The master bedroom of a two-bedroom villa.

**FAR LEFT** Sweeping views from the private pool of the villa.

**LEFT** Relaxation spaces at the One&Only Spa.

**ABOVE** Chefs utilise fresh produce grown on site in the resort’s own kitchen garden.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY EMIRATES ONE&ONLY WOLGAN VALLEY