

**ESCAPE** Melawondi Spring Retreat, 149 Melawondi Rd, Imbil | Karen Milliner



**the deal**

**PH** 0408 736 223  
**WEBLINK**  
[www.melawondi-springretreat.com.au](http://www.melawondi-springretreat.com.au)  
**RATES** \$295 per night, minimum two-night stay on weekends; \$250pn Mon-Thurs.

**THE VERDICT**  
 Valley bliss.

**N**ever on a weekend away in tranquil rural surrounds had I harboured murderous intent. But I couldn't help myself after tucking into a very good T-bone at the Kandanga Hotel in the Mary Valley.

Apparently there'd been much partying at the pub after the announcement that the Traveston Crossing dam wouldn't go ahead, but all was quiet on this Saturday night – just a handful of barflies chatting over an ale and the rest of us chowing down. Meal over, a few minutes in the car and we were back at Melawondi Spring Retreat, a modern self-contained studio designed for couples and located at the rear of Tanya and Tony Fisher's undulating 12-hectare property, and out of sight of their residence.

We had left the studio's outside light on, which had attracted a fair few insects (this is the country, after all) and cane toads looking for a bug feed. Toads I loathe at any time, but having earlier heard the glorious chorus of frogs from the dam nearby, I took even greater umbrage at the ugly interlopers. Murder was on my mind but, stepping back inside the well-screened studio, my protect-the-frogs zeal evaporated. There were too many human creature comforts to enjoy.

The Fishers stayed in several B&Bs before establishing theirs, and have clearly taken note of what works and the touches that guests appreciate. The studio is open plan with five-star finishes, including blackout window treatments to keep the sun at bay for a sleep-in. Floors are hardwood, there's a European appliance-equipped kitchen, king bed and cavernous bathroom. Privacy isn't an issue in the walk-in shower (with two rainwater shower heads) but you'll have to cast modesty aside to soak up the valley views while soaking in the free-standing spa near the front window.

A welcome cheese and fruit platter and bottle of bubbles awaited in the fridge, there were home-baked biscuits on the kitchen

counter, an espresso machine and chocolate for dusting your cappuccino. In the morning a fresh loaf of bread, newspaper and an Esky with fruit and fresh juice was delivered, to accompany the stocked provisions of eggs, bacon, cereal, yoghurt and the like.

The timber deck was the perfect spot to breakfast, capturing gentle breezes and affording a pretty bushland and hills vista. Thanks to recent rains, everything was a lush green and it was easy to understand why those who call the valley home fought so hard to keep a big chunk of it from being gobbled up by a dam.

There are plenty of things around the region to see and do – bushwalks, a visit to weekend country markets, wineries, the Kenilworth cheese factory, or a ride on the heritage steam train the Valley Rattler, to name a few.

But this is such a gorgeous, peaceful spot that it's tempting to just bring provisions of your own (or, with notice, the Fishers can provide picnic and barbecue hampers incorporating local produce), settle in and stay put. Mobile phone reception is limited on the property (it depends on your carrier), so you have the perfect excuse to kick back and truly get away from it all.

