

A Weekend In...

The Bellarine Peninsula

Switch off, sleep in and eat up at this romantic destination outside Melbourne, writes **Hana Jo**.



(From left) The foyer of Lon Retreat & Spa; Wagyu bresaola, beetroot and smoked butter from Merne at Lighthouse; Point Lonsdale Lighthouse from the jetty



Friday

PM A cruisy 90-minute drive from the Victorian capital, this pretty hamlet on Port Philip Bay charms with countryside-meets-coast vistas, laid-back seaside towns and a locavore food scene. Base yourself at family-run Lon Retreat & Spa (lonretreat.com.au), a boutique adults-only property set on 80-or-so secluded hectares with private access to the beach at Point Lonsdale. Each of the seven suites is unique and features well-equipped kitchenettes, private outdoor spaces, rain showers and thoughtful touches such as fresh flowers picked on the property. When hunger strikes, head to one of the region's best restaurants, Igni (restaurantigni.com). It's a good 30 minutes away but the eight-course dégustation with standout seafood – sea urchin paired with oyster leaf and kingfish wings chargrilled to smoky perfection – makes it worth the trip.

Saturday

AM Check out harbourside 360Q (360q.com.au) for excellent coffee and breakfast options, from smashed avocado and poached eggs on toast to banh xeo topped

with pork belly, fragrant herbs and nuoc cham dressing. Climb the tower for panoramic views of the whole peninsula then visit The Whiskery (bellarinedistillery.com.au), about 30 minutes north, to sample the distillery's small-batch gin, Teddy & The Fox. Owners Russ Watson and Lorelle Warren encourage visitors to taste it straight but if you prefer something softer, try the Foxy Lady cocktail.

PM For satiation with a side of scenery, climb aboard the First Class dining car of the Q Train (theqtrain.com.au). Enjoy a six-course lunch with matching wines – in the comfort of a private compartment for two – as you travel from Drysdale Station through farmland and vineyards. Watch the wildlife and water at Swan Bay while savouring Sage Farm lamb with a Robin Brockett amphora syrah then stretch your legs at Queenscliff Station as the engine is prepared for the leisurely return journey. Back at the retreat, enjoy the onsite spa's signature Blissful Marma massage, before heading out to Merne at Lighthouse (merne.com.au) for dinner. Chef Josh Smith is at the

stove and the menu is designed to share. Highlights include the pumpkin with blood orange, pine nuts and goat feta and the parsnip with fermented almond, saltbush and a tangy shallot relish. Plan ahead and arrange a pick-up with the local cab company (bellarinepeninsulataxis.com.au).

Sunday

AM Tuck into your Lon breakfast hamper, chock-full of locally sourced goodies – Annie's Kitchen

granola and fresh yoghurt, chia seed pudding with stewed fruit, banana bread and local butter. Go for a wander and explore the beach; a metal sculpture marks the start of the path, which passes the farm's herd of Angus cattle, weaves through the bush and crosses the dunes onto a rugged stretch of sand. Look east to see Point Lonsdale Lighthouse – if you have time, you can stroll there in less than 30 minutes. It's the ideal way to delay the drive home.

