

On the Go.

We explore the Hunter Valley by bicycle, horse-drawn carriage, Cadillac, tram and hot-air balloon

WORDS ROBERTA MUIR

1

Cloud 9 Balloons conduct hot-air balloon flights over the Hunter Valley. Guests meet at the Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley at dawn, celebrate take-off with a glass of local bubbles, glide over the landscape for about 45 minutes and come to land where the wind carries them. From AU\$290/person. Tel: + 61 (2) 9679 2899.



2

The Hunter Valley Cycling's Wine and Wilderness Self-guided Bicycle Tour includes luggage transfers and one night's accommodation with breakfast and a three-course dinner. From AU\$30 for one-day mountain bike hire or AU\$45 for two days, including bike delivery to your Hunter Valley accommodation. Tel: +61 (0) 418 281 480.



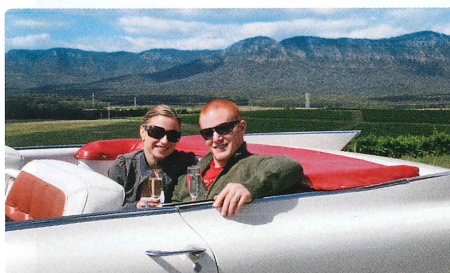
3

Enjoy the vineyards at a leisurely pace in one of Hunter Valley Carriages' horse-drawn coaches. Your trusty steed allows time at each vineyard for wine tasting, a leisurely lunch and the chance to sample other Hunter produce, such as cheese and olives. From AU\$75 per person. Tel: +61 (0) 431 337 367.



4

Leave the driving to someone else with chauffeur-driven Hunter Valley Cadillacs. Itineraries can be tailor-made to take in the vineyards of your choice, with lunch at the Hunter's great restaurants, cafés or a picnic among the vines. Half-day tours AU\$330, full day AU\$590. Tel: +61 (2) 4996 4059.



5

Newcastle's Famous Tram, an authentic replica of the original 1920s Newcastle working tram, runs regular weekend Hunter tours, with visits to a range of wineries, Hunter Olive Centre, Hunter Valley Chocolates and the Hunter Valley Cheese Company, finishing with a liqueur tasting. From AU\$75 per person. Tel: +61 (2) 4977 2270.



HIGH AS A KITE OVER THE HUNTER

Clare Dean from Cloud 9 says balloon flights are a popular way to celebrate special occasions, such as Mother's Day and birthdays.

Do you find that it's mainly young people who join your flights?

Not at all, ballooning is the ultimate in mystery escapes, as we never know exactly where we're going to land — we simply drift with the wind. It's popular with everyone from the very young to the very young at heart.

What sort of occasions do people book your flights for?

Proposals are very popular; we have a small balloon for private charters and no one's said no so far! Plus our new inflight camera and video system captures every moment.

What about for family groups or groups of friends?

We have three balloons in different sizes — from a small two-person one, up to one that holds 18 people.

What happens after the flight?

We return guests to the Crowne Plaza, where they can head out for a day of wine tasting, or visit the Hotel's Redsalt Restaurant for a hot buffet breakfast, which is a great way to continue the celebration. The restaurant can even arrange birthday or other celebration cakes with prior notice.

