

# TAKE YOUR TIME IN JINDABYNE

Make a break for the Snowy Mountains and see what the warmer weather has to offer

WORDS IVY CARRUTH

**THE DAY IS** an absolute diamond, one of those that crack open on the sunny side but don't beat you down with oppressive heat. It's road trip weather. The music is queued up on my 'Driving to Jindy' playlist, the GPS is programmed and, best of all, we're going topless... convertible style.

Driving to the Snowy Mountains town of Jindabyne from Sydney takes about five hours, but in a car with no roof and a blue-sky day above us, the journey itself is what has us eager to get moving. We're not even feeling irked about the tangle of traffic we must sort through before putting Sydney proper in our rear-view mirror. Once we leave the big smoke, it's smooth sailing to the soundtrack of '80s big hair bands.

My friend Lena and I head south, down through NSW along the M5. We've decided to go the inland route, along the 'Remembrance Driveway' or M31 (such a grand name for a motorway, no?) instead of the M1, because we can save an hour's travel time even though the distance is about the same as going the more coastal path. The Nepean River, steel grey and steady, keeps us company as we head towards the Southern Highlands and pass the dam.

We cross into Bowral and resist the urge to stop there; we're concerned we'll get distracted to our detriment by the boutiques

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(I'm talking to you, Dirty Jane's) and achingly charming wine bars (hello, Harry's on Green Lane), thus losing the hour we've gained. Instead, we decide right then and there we'll make a quick stop in an hour when we get to Goulburn. A glimpse of the kitschy Big Merino (Lena has a thing about Australia's 'Big Things') gives us a chance to stretch our legs, and what's better than a giant wrinkly-necked ram called Rambo? At 15 metres tall, he houses a gift shop and a wool display in his belly; arrive before 4pm if you want to go inside. A quick clickety-snap and off we go.

The kilometres stream by as we border hop into the ACT, then just as quickly are returned to the Hume Highway. A further half-hour along, we need a comfort break, so we stop at the Weereewa Lookout at Lake George. As an endorheic or terminal (no rivers flowing out) lake, it's famous for regularly disappearing and reappearing again. Shallow and wide, it can be bone dry and fill quickly if the weather has been particularly

wet. It's a pretty little spot and, on a clear day, you can see the wind turbines in the distance and the cloud's reflections in the exceptionally salty water. Definitely not fit for drinking (Weereewa in the local Ngunnawal language means 'bad water'), it makes for some stunning photography, no matter if it's full or not. Keen twitchers find this a must-see place to stop and observe the birdlife that revolves around the cycle of drought and plenty. Pipits, masked lapwings and black swans appear regularly and search in the grass for protein-rich insects. After a quick visit to the squeaky-clean toilet block lying just below the lookout, we slop on more sunscreen, buckle up and point ourselves southward. It's an easy out and in for getting back on the motorway.

We pass Canberra (again, no time to stop), then Cooma, and the temperature cools as we roll towards the Snowy Mountains and Kosciuszko National Park. It's delightful being here in the spring with no skiers or snowboarders, though we do share the road with towed boats and campervans aplenty. Wildflowers dot the roadside and the local fauna is out in abundance. Driving along at sunset, we spot hares, roos, an echidna and a wombat, all very much unbothered by our presence. This is a place to drive with caution.

## JUMP IN A LAKE

Fed by the snowmelt from the Thredbo, Snowy and Eucumbene rivers, Lake Jindabyne (above) is one of the largest freshwater reservoirs in NSW. Clay Pits is the best spot for soaking up the sun and swimming to Lion or Cub Island. Getting on the water is easy, be it on a paddleboard, kayak or something more razzmatazz like a pedal-assisted water e-bike or Waydoo eFoil board. The water is clean, with lots of lovely sand and shade areas for a picnic.

It's been a few seasons since we've visited Jindabyne - the last time was before the pandemic, and we're thrilled to see this hardy little regional town is pumping with life. We've decided not to cram in too much this trip; we're going to savour the slowness of the days here. Life has been busy lately and we're looking forward to unplugging from the grind.

We drop off our things at our NRMA Jindabyne Holiday Park accommodation for the night, where we've been lucky enough to snag one of the new glamtainers (see 'Glorious Glamtainers'), before putting our car's top up and driving 11km to one of my





## GLORIOUS GLAMTAINERS

The glamtainers at NRMA Jindabyne Holiday Park deliver open-plan comfort wrapped inside two repurposed shipping containers. A definite step above glamping, we loved our electric fireplace, floor-to-ceiling windows, enormous front patio and perfect water pressure. The interiors are cosy yet spacious and furnished in a modern style with a nod to the outdoors. Two separate sleeping areas give privacy, but the accommodation is also suitable for four, with one king bed and two singles. Glamtainers are usually in high demand, so book early at [nrmaparksandresorts.com.au/jindabyne](http://nrmaparksandresorts.com.au/jindabyne).

favourite places in the area, Wildbrumby Distillery. We join quite a few others in the gravel car park, fields of bouncing wallabies around us, and one little Jack Russell terrier called Kozzy wagging in welcome. Honestly, it's a postcard come to life, so bring your camera and take the time to wander the sculpture and garden walk. Specialising in all things schnapps, the distillery also dishes up Austrian-inspired food, and I can, with my whole heart, recommend the beef goulash and the apple strudel. If you want to dine, though, make a booking and come Thursday to Monday. The distillery is open daily, and a tasting flight is the best bet for discovering what's going to ring your bell.

We retrace our steps and, after some cuddles from Kozzy, head back down the road to our glamtainer home for the night. It's lakefront, did I mention that? Lake Jindabyne sprawls in front of our panoramic deck and is the perfect venue for our morning coffee. We take it down to the shore and meander along the

edge. It may be early, but the lake is already a hive of activity. Boats are bobbing and swimmers are swimming. This is one of the largest freshwater reservoirs in NSW, and since it's stocked with trout - brown, rainbow and brook, as well as Atlantic salmon - it's an angler's paradise. Bait is sold at most shops, but if you're keen on a casting guide or to hire some gear, go see Brian or Stuart at Lakeside Lures & Tackle. They'll set you up with flies and tell you all the best spots after they swear you to secrecy.

We prefer to have our fish already caught, so after a leisurely morning, we jump back in the car and drive to Jindabyne Brewing. It's a dog- and family-friendly place where visitors arrive thinking they'll pop in for a quick brew or two and end up staying hours. The atmosphere is relaxed and the food is beyond what you'd expect from an alehouse; we order the smoked salmon and wash it down with a Kiandra Golden Ale.

One of my favourite places in Jindy, if not the whole of Australia, is Snowy Wilderness, just 29km south from the centre of town. Here, Delia and Justin Macintosh welcome guests into their 7200-acre oasis of pristine brumby-rich bush wilds for a chance to get off the grid and kick back over multiple pack-and-go horse-trekking days. Even if you prefer just a couple of hours in the saddle, there's something therapeutic about that equine cadence, especially amongst the forest trees. It's a dog-friendly compound, with a choice of accommodation that includes smart one-bedroom lodges, a lakeside apartment, fairy-tale cottage in the woods and the four-bedroom homestead. Staying here is akin to time-travelling when it comes to the wholesome activities and outdoorsy time it affords people for connecting with themselves, nature and one another.

Credit: Getty Images, Wildbrumby Team

From top left to right: walking the path to Mount Kosciuszko; wildflowers in bloom; resident Jindy roos; Brad Spalding from Wildbrumby Distillery; a bird's eye view over the glamtainers at NRMA Jindabyne Holiday Park.



## Count yourself lucky to be under the stars, glass in hand, amidst hinterland heaven

Justin puts on a mean smoky swagman's dinner, burying a cast iron pot of meat and veg and smothering it in coals in the ground. If you happen to be there on a night that he's feeling loquacious, he may even bring out his guitar for you. Count yourself lucky to be under the stars, glass in hand, amidst hinterland heaven.

After seeing a brumby slaughter at Guy Fawkes National Park, Justin and Delia declared Snowy Wilderness a brumby sanctuary, even if there were none there at the time. "So I thought, well, we better get some, and we came to an arrangement with the National Parks, who paid us to trap and relocate them here, which we did for a while, and those horses are the basis of the brumby mobs we have here today," Justin says.

Remember how I said we weren't going to cram activities into this trip and instead enjoy some downtime taking in a go-slow weekend? So far, we've loved it; sleeping in, gawping at the brumbies and sneaking in a few chapters of books we've been meaning to read. But now we're heading to the mountain for some gentle hiking since the weather is so glorious. It'll be our one somewhat strenuous activity before we head back. We've loaded our backpacks with water, summit snacks, a long-sleeved layer, sunscreen and trekking poles, and we've put on our trainers and hats. From Jindy proper, we drive 36km west toward Mount Kosciuszko and the Thredbo chairlift for what



promises to be an iconic day-walk - 13km return on a very doable Grade 3 track. Entering the park is \$17 per car in summer, and it's money well spent.

We follow the signs, park at Thredbo Village and catch the Kosciuszko Express Chairlift to the top. The 360-degree views from here are outstanding, and the ride on the lift without skis and puffy jackets feels so different to the ride in winter. After 15 minutes, we arrive to see a paved footpath awaiting us, easing our minds a bit about the terrain.

We begin walking, the place to ourselves, and are soon in a moving meditation of effort and nature. We pass Eagles Nest Restaurant (check online for operating hours as it isn't always open), eventually ascending a hill that will lead us to a creek bridge, where we join a steel walkway for the rest of the trek. Streams and chirruping birds provide the only noise as we put one foot in front of the other. About an hour in, we're rewarded with lookouts for the Snowy Mountains and Lake Cootapatamba.

Two kilometres further along, we arrive at Australia's highest public toilet. It's a new addition and perfectly placed for both trekkers and mountain bikers. We notice the terrain turns back to gravel as we approach the summit and don't expect to have it to ourselves. People are enjoying the spectacle with cameras and binoculars at 2228 metres above sea level - Australia's highest point - although, technically, Mount McClintock in the Australian Antarctic Territory is higher (3490 metres). The mountain conquered, we turn around and retrace our steps.

Long a jewel of the winter-loving sports crowd, Jindabyne's warm-weather pleasures are every bit as colourful, with more room to roam. Recalibrate with a relaxed retreat or pack it in with something more vigorous; the choice is yours. ☺