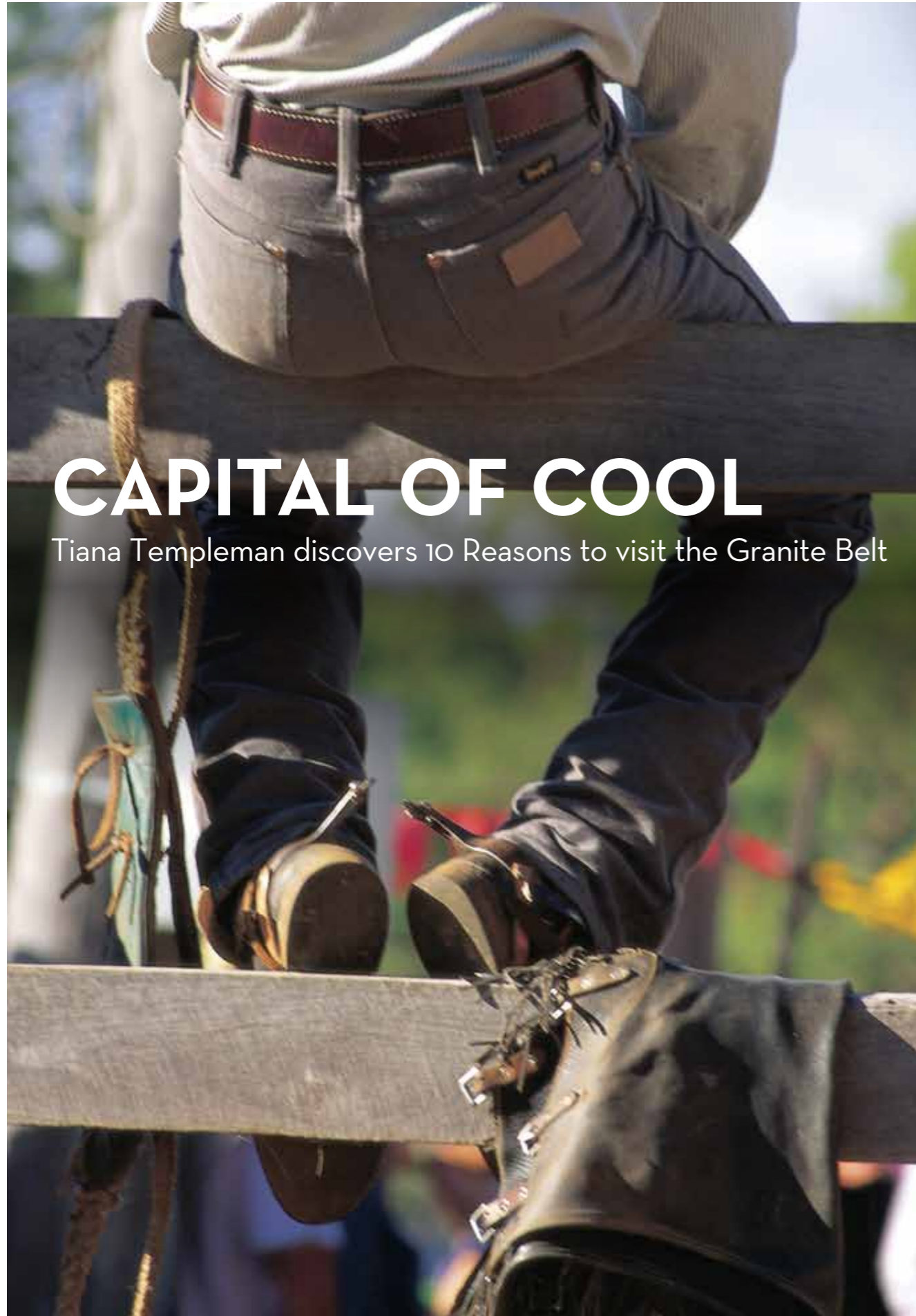


Image: Tourism Queensland



CAPITAL OF COOL

Tiana Templeman discovers 10 Reasons to visit the Granite Belt



31 The Rocks Villa

The Granite Belt used to be a bit of a hidden secret, a favourite weekend getaway for those in the know ... but it seems the word is out. This pretty rural spot, located 3 hours drive from Brisbane, is fast becoming the new 'Capital of Cool', and not just because it can get a little chilly. With a burgeoning reputation for world-class wines and stellar dining at country prices, there are plenty of reasons to check-in and check it out.

Seek out a strange bird

Strange birds have no feathers, don't know how to fly, only come in two colours – red or white – and live in a bottle. Confused? Don't be. These strange birds are Granite Belt wines made from alternative grape varieties. If you've ever wanted to try unusual varieties like durif (similar to shiraz), tempranillo (cherry-luscious) or colombard (great with seafood) this is your chance. The Strange Bird Wine Trail is one of the most unique wine routes in Australia, taking visitors on a journey of discovery along the vinous road less travelled. Pick up a free brochure for directions. Most visitors can't resist adopting a strange bird to take home.

Art in a bottle

Winemaker Adrian Tobin is an artist at heart - something that's reflected in the beautiful labels on his individually numbered bottles of wine. 'I'm not here to make money,' says the spritely 70 year old, 'but I am passionate about making good wine.' His dedication is immediately apparent in the neatly turned out vineyard encircled by a hand-built dry stone wall – known as Adrian's Wall by the locals - and a cellar door where each tasting comes in a fresh Riedel-style glass. Most of the wines have taken out numerous awards; you're unlikely to leave here empty



Adrian from Tobin Wines



Image: Tiana Templeman

Image: Tiana Templeman



FACTS:

Strange Bird & Nude Food Trails

Stanthorpe Visitor Information Centre, 28 Leslie Parade, Stanthorpe, Ph: +61 7 4681 0411, www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au

Tobin Wines

34 Ricca Road, Ballandean, T: +61 7 4684 1235, www.tobinwines.com.au

Suttons Juice Factory and Cidery

10 Halloran Drive, Thulimbah, T: +61 7 4685 2464, www.suttonsfarm.com.au

31 the rocks

31 Brunckhorst Avenue, Stanthorpe, T: +61 7 4681 2726, www.31therocks.com

The Bramble Patch

381 Townsend Road, Glen Aplin, T: +61 7 4683 4205, www.bramblepatch.com.au

Mt Stirling Olives

Collins Road, Glen Aplin, T: +61 7 4683 4270, www.mtstirlingolives.com.au

Winemaker for a Weekend

22 Caves Road, Stanthorpe, T: +61 7 4685 5050, www.usq.edu.au/qcwt

Shiraz Bistro & Wine Bar

28200 New England Highway, Ballandean, T: 61 7 4684 1000

Granite Belt Events Calendar

www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au

Granite Belt Holiday Packages

www.queenslandholidays.com.au

handed. There's a medal winning strange bird currently roosting at Tobin Wines.

How do you like them apples?

Suttons Juice Factory and Cidery is exactly that, an unassuming shed filled with some of the most delicious apple goodies you've ever tasted. 'Some people drive from Brisbane just for the pie,' confides one of the girls behind the counter. No surprise really, once you've laid eyes on the deep-dish showstopper filled with 22 apples from the orchard outside; each enormous wedge of pie comes with apple cider ice-cream. Bottles of fine varietal apple juice are offered for tasting like wine; not surprising when you consider they're the fruity equivalent of a Grand Cru. Allow time to pick apples in the orchard - it's loads of fun even if you're a grown up.

Nude food

Nude Food isn't a cooking course for naturists - it's a self-guided food trail linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to the local community and natural environment. Pick up a brochure at the Visitor Centre in Stanthorpe then hit the road in search of tasty treats like farmhouse cheeses, fresh strawberries, award winning jams and handmade chocolates. Chat with local producers and try some delicious produce along the way. Strange birds go down very nicely with a platter of nude food!

Cute or contemporary - the choice is yours

The Granite Belt has some beautiful B&Bs, but if you prefer more contemporary accommodation then '31 the rocks' is for you. Each villa comes with classy furnishings and charming rural views from the veranda which features a swanky hooded BBQ. Pour yourself a glass of local wine and cook up some nude food as the sun goes down. Owners Phil and Beryl Moye are charming and well travelled, not to mention excellent company if you fancy a chat. They consider things like the complimentary in-room liqueur served with pretty handmade chocolates as 'standard', but this place is anything but standard.

The Bramble Patch

Everyone - whether they're seven or 77 - raves about this berry farm located at the end of a winding country road in Glen Aplin. Taste your way through the range of over 50 gourmet products or indulge in a decadent berry dessert. If you're up for a challenge, take on the Awesome Ice Burger, an ice-cream and sorbet filled chocolate sponge. Order one each at your peril. The Bramble Patch is filled to bursting with nude food.

Mt Stirling Olives

'The best thing you can have in an olive grove is the shadow of the owner,' says Jim Miller, who lovingly tends over 3,500 trees. Each olive is processed within 24 hours of picking and everything is produced on the farm. Olive aficionados will appreciate the vast array of products - Mt Stirling is one of the few places outside Europe you can buy (and try) traditional salt dried olives. If you prefer to indulge in something sweet, there's also a fudge cottage on-site.

Indulge with some fine shiraz

Shiraz Bistro & Wine Bar is more 'city fine dining' than 'country bistro' except for one thing - the prices listed on the menu, which is very smart indeed. Black Angus rib fillet served with grilled bacon, roasted Sebago potatoes, seasoned beans, three mustards and thyme jus costs a lot more than A\$34 in the big smoke. A sensibly priced wine list rounds things out nicely and includes half-pours which is great for designated drivers and those who enjoy wine matching.

Winemaker for a Weekend

'Modern wine production isn't voodoo practiced in dark and musty cellars hidden from the public eye,' chuckles local winemaker Peter Orr. Especially not at the Queensland College of Wine Tourism which runs an interactive Winemaker for a Weekend course. Participants try everything from picking to pressing and are treated to a private Masterclass with a much-awarded local winemaker. The two day program includes training, meals, wine and bus transfers to and from your accommodation, so there's no need to drive.

Celebrate, participate

Granite Belt locals love a celebration! Whether you're into food, wine, music, art, culture or sport there's sure to be an event to suit. Check out the excitement of the Stanthorpe Rodeo or get your culture fix at Opera in the Vineyard at Ballandean Estate. Ballandean also host Pranzo Italiano four times a year - a five course, long table lunch which is an absolute steal at A\$40 a head (including wine!). Great food, great fun! 🍷



Image: Tiana Templeman



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