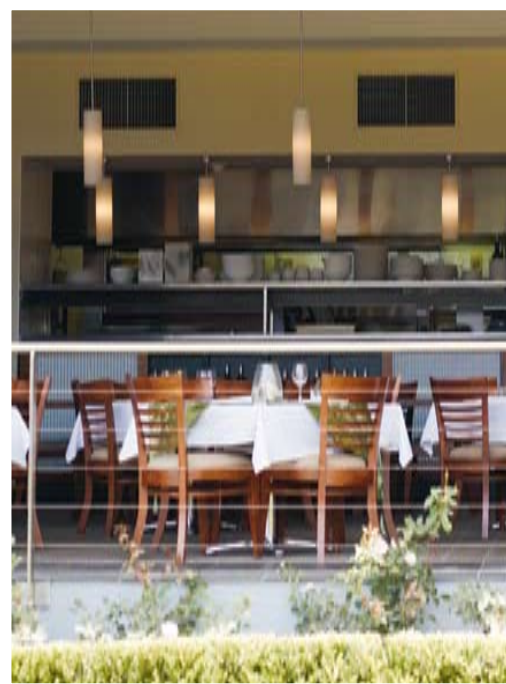
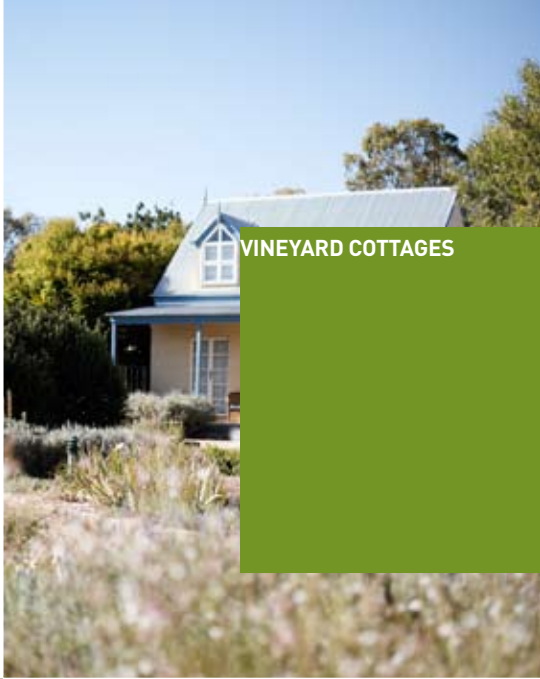


the guide.

the granite belt and beyond



Clockwise from far left: The view of the Scenic Rim from Spicers Peak Lodge, Maryvale; Gip's Restaurant, Toowoomba; Symphony Hill, Ballandean; carpaccio of swordfish at Shiraz, Ballandean; Vineyard Cottages, Ballandean; the baby grand in the lounge at Spicers Peak Lodge, Swish Wine Bar, Toowoomba; Encores, Toowoomba; Symphony Hill Wines.

Lizzie Loel heads away from the coast and discovers the highlights of Queensland's high country, from the Granite Belt's great wineries and produce to Toowoomba's historic charm.

WORDS LIZZIE LOEL PHOTOGRAPHY JARED FOWLER

Blessed with a quintessential bush beauty, sweeping views and an abundance of wildlife, it's little wonder Queensland's Granite Belt is a thriving culinary destination and home to the state's best vineyards. Less than three hours from Brisbane, it's also Queensland's so-called 'brass monkey' region – much of it sits at around 800 metres above sea level, making it one of the state's coldest areas.

It was tin mining that originally attracted migrant workers to the area in the 1870s, giving the region's hub, Stanthorpe, its name (*stannum* is Latin for tin). The largely Italian population established farms and orchards, and the region soon became the state's plentiful fruit bowl. Grapes and apples were popular crops and settlers also began to make wine, largely for their own consumption.

Today, Stanthorpe is surrounded by the townships of Ballandean, Applethorpe, Glen Aplin and Thulimbah, which are all home to impressive new wineries. And with wine comes food, here in the form of delis, cafes, restaurants and producers.

About an hour north is Toowoomba, a booming rural city that boasts a plethora of dining options set among historic buildings, landmarks and lush gardens.

where to eat in toowoomba

GIP'S RESTAURANT

The grand setting for Gip's Restaurant is Clifford House, a stately sandstone building once intended to be a gentlemen's club for visiting graziers. The restaurant, situated in the old billiard room, is named after original owner James Taylor's beloved Jack Russell, Gip. The menu focuses on the use of spices, borrowing from different cultures to present dishes with a contemporary twist; think fragrant duck curry or Moreton Bay bug ravioli. With seating inside along striped banquettes or outside in the

enclosed courtyard, it's a pretty spot for a sunny lunch or candlelit dinner. **120 Russell St, Toowoomba, (07) 4638 3588.**

ENCORES

An atrium-like addition to the historic Empire Theatre, Encores is ideal for a lazy lunch in the warmer months as the wall of windows folds back to bring the garden inside. Affordable set menus ensure that Encores is a popular pre-show venue – perhaps a seasonal soup, followed by chicken stuffed with sage and bacon, and a passionfruit creme brulee for dessert. **54-56 Neil St, Toowoomba, (07) 4639 6900.**

VERAISON

As the name (a French term describing the ripening of grapes) implies, it's all about wine at this main street restaurant, which boasts myriad dining areas including a comfortable, club lounge-like cellar. The menu treads the bistro path, offering drink-friendly dishes such as organic duck Maryland with fennel and cherry compote, and Puy-style lentil salad with Persian feta and smoked tomatoes. However, it's the wine list that's the real star, with hundreds of quality labels amassed from all over Australia and around the globe. **205 Margaret St, Toowoomba, (07) 4638 5909.**

the guide.

SWISH WINE BAR

By far the most modern fitout in Toowoomba, Swish has undergone recent changes to both the management and kitchen team. Clean lines and latte, taupe and chocolate tones give the room a contemporary feel, while floor-to-ceiling wine cabinets enclose the stylish bar area. The result is a cohesive package that is complemented by tapas-style options, such as baked chorizo with olives, cherry tomato, baby spinach and feta, and chicken tenderloins with saffron and almond sauce. **532 Ruthven St, Toowoomba, (07) 4613 1200.**

THE SPOTTED COW HOTEL

A firm favourite among locals, 'The Cow', is run by two generations of the Coorey family and boasts some of the town's best comfort food. Matriarch Dianne runs the kitchen, which is renowned for its kilo pots of mussels, and prime Darling Downs beef. Local knowledge suggests the mezza plate is a must, as the family's Lebanese origins give authenticity to the colourful medley of flavours. Beer is the other major attraction here, with more than 85 kinds listed and 15 offered on tap. Can't decide? Ask son Phillip Coorey or one of his helpful beer guides for their tip. **296 Ruthven St, Toowoomba, (07) 4639 3264.**

where to eat in the granite belt

SHIRAZ RESTAURANT

Ultra-fresh produce, consummate regional wine matches and simple but deft handling of great ingredients set this little restaurant apart. Chef/owner John Rogers loves seafood and that's evident on his regularly changing menus, with a simple reef fish dish a typical addition – maybe a North Queensland barramundi with prawns and a macadamia and citrus beurre blanc. In the cooler months, locally reared game makes frequent appearances in dishes such as venison fillet with roast organic baby beetroot, horseradish cream and blueberry jus. Surrounding vineyards grace the wine list alongside drops from across Australia and New Zealand. **28200 New England Hwy, Ballandean, (07) 4684 1000.**

BANCA RIDGE

Banca Ridge makes a variety of wines for its cellar door, acts as a learning facility for those entering both the hospitality and wine industries, and operates a casual bistro that's well patronised by locals and tourists alike. The menu represents very good value, reflecting the training element at work, but that doesn't mean compromise when it comes to the quality of the ingredients. **22 Caves Rd, Stanthorpe, (07) 4685 5050.**

SPRING CREEK MOUNTAIN CAFE & COTTAGES

Nestled into the side of a mountain and enjoying sweeping views of Wilsons Peak, the Condamine Gorge and the Border Ranges, this inviting cafe feels as if it's suspended above the gorgeous expanse of rainforest below. Owner Bev Ruskey makes regular trips down the mountain for supplies of Killarney beef and lamb, organic fruit and veg, and wines to add to her broad list. The seasonally inspired menu reveals a colourful, laidback style – think Killarney eye-fillet with creamy mash and mixed mushroom jus. Spring Creek's weekly cooking classes are popular, too. **1503 Spring Creek Rd, Killarney, (07) 4664 7101.**

ROBERT CHANNON WINES & SINGING LAKE CAFE

To enter the cafe here, you first have to pass the deli counters that are stocked with tempting housemade cakes and desserts. Inside, the fare is casually eclectic with specials that reflect chef Tony Southgate's experience working in exotic locations throughout Asia, such as his popular Singapore chicken curry. The winery has notched up eight successful years, after overcoming a rocky start when the famous French Champagne house Moët & Chandon objected to the winery's use of the name Channon Estate. Fortunately the matter was resolved and now, partly thanks to an elevation of 950 metres, the medals and accolades are flowing in. Ask about the monthly concerts in Swigmore Hall. **Amiens Rd, Stanthorpe, (07) 4683 3260.**

where to drink

HERITAGE ESTATE WINES

The Heritage Estate cellar door is housed inside a vast room filled with antiques and curios collected by owners Paddy and Bryce Kassulke. Tastings are conducted at the wraparound, oak-panelled bar, where you can sample award-winning wines made by the owners' son, John Handy, whose chardonnay was declared *Winestate's* Chardonnay of the Year and the coveted Wine of the Year for 2008. **Granite Belt Dr, Cottonvale, (07) 4685 2197.**

RIDGEMILL WINES

This cellar door sells everything from deli goods to Riedel glassware and, of course, the estate's wines including tempranillo and chardonnay. It's a picturesque location and now you can enjoy it by night, too, with the recent addition of four corrugated iron cabins that are fully equipped with all the creature comforts. From \$130 per double per night, including a breakfast basket, cheese platter and a bottle of wine. **218 Donges Rd, Severnlea, (07) 4683 5211.**

RUMBALARA ESTATE WINES

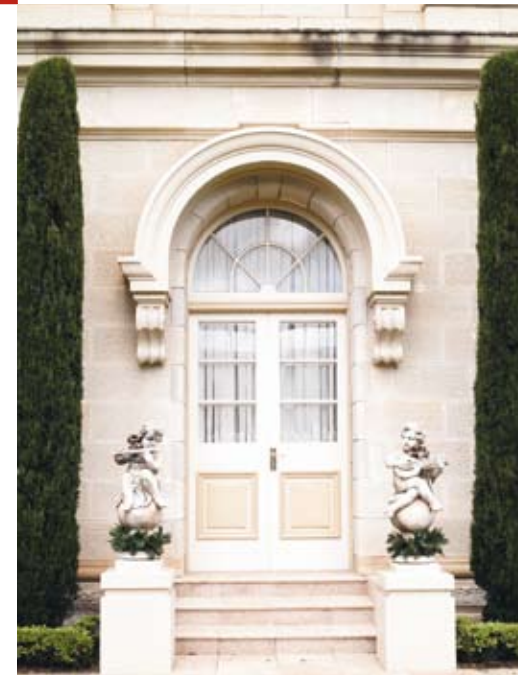
Mike and Bobbi Cragg, both African-born Australians, have incorporated much of the history of both countries into their cellar door, not to mention the labels of their wines such as The Leopard shiraz merlot and The Buffalo unwooded chardonnay. The result is exotic and colourful; and the annual African Rhythm and Reds on Tap event adds even more energy to the place. **137 Fletcher Rd, Glen Aplin (07) 4684 1206.**

BALLANDEAN ESTATE

Jazz, opera and many more events held in the vineyards are sprinkled across the calendar of this long-established vineyard. The first vines were planted in 1931, and the winery remains a family-run affair today. The Puglisis' Italian origins are evident in the food served in the cosy barrel room cafe, with pasta and antipasto mainstays of the menu. The housemade range of Greedy Me Gourmet comestibles is also available at the cellar door. **354 Sundown Rd, Ballandean, (07) 4684 1226.**



Clockwise from left: Veraison, Toowoomba; Toowoomba's Cube Hotel; a kilo pot of mussels at The Spotted Cow, Toowoomba; the city's heritage-listed courthouse; the cooler climate of the Granite Belt produces some top-notch wines.



the guide.



Left to right: Hot chilli oil from The Bramble Patch, Glen Aplin; the lake at Girraween Environmental Lodge, Wyberba. Olga & Agnes Fine Foods, Stanthorpe.

SYMPHONY HILL WINES

This is one well organised winery, boasting state-of-the-art facilities, a laboratory and separate bottling room. Ewen and Elissa Macpherson bought the property in 1996 and have set about creating a range of ultra-premium wines that are some of the most sought-after in the region. Third-generation winemaker Mike Hayes has ties to the property that go back to his teenage years, but his finest moment to date was winning Queensland's first-ever gold medal at the 2005 Sydney Royal Wine show for his 2003 Reserve Shiraz. Watch out for his pinot gris, tempranillo and 2005 Danying shiraz cabernet blend, which is named after Elissa and Ewen's daughter. **2017 Eukey Rd, Ballandean, (07) 4684 1388.**

BOIREANN WINES

Widely regarded as some of the best wines to come from the region, the high-altitude vineyards of Boireann produce small quantities of premium reds, which include straight cabernets, shiraz and merlot as well as blends including mourvèdre and also plantings of nebbiolo and barbera. It's a rustic and simple cellar door set amid the vines and is usually open most days until stocks sell out. **26 Donnelly's Castle Rd, The Summit, (07) 4683 2194.**

For a drink in Toowoomba, the **Cube Hotel** (169 Margaret St, Toowoomba, (07) 4632 4747) has just undergone a stylish renovation and offers great views. And if you're on the hunt for wines with a difference, download the map for the

Strange Bird Alternative Wine Trail (visit: granitebeltwinecountry.com.au), so you can discover some of the rarer grapes this cool-climate region has to offer, such as tempranillo, viognier and gewurztraminer.

where to shop

WENDLAND OLIVES FINE FOODS

Originally established as an outlet for Wendland's own range of extra virgin olive oils, which includes lime- and orange-infused varieties, this deli and cafe has since expanded to include high-end products such as Carême pastry, a European and Australian cheeses, sourdough breads and, of course, olives in all their forms. For a quick lunch, pick up one of their housemade salads, rolls or soups. **76 Bridge St (entrance via Mary St), Toowoomba, (07) 4638 8899.**

OLGA & AGNES FINE FOOD

This charming little deli sources products from all over the world, as well as supporting locally grown produce and artisan foods. A mismatch of brightly painted chairs, tables and stools is dotted between rows of staples such as pasta, oils, jams and chutneys, as well as kitchenware and cookbooks. Campos coffee and a variety of cafe-style foods are served daily. **149 High St, Stanthorpe, (07) 4681 2247.**

THE BRAMBLE PATCH

Family owned and operated, this berry farm's store sells berry liqueur and fortified wines, which offer a refreshingly sweet

change from the region's regular wine tastings. The Stirling family grows berries on their property, but demand for their extensive product range sees them source from other local farms, too. Fresh berries are available from October until April, and you can also taste the sweet and savoury bottled goods on display. Their yoghurts and ice creams are best enjoyed in the shady picnic area between the shop and the strawberry fields. **381 Townsend Rd, Glen Aplin, (07) 4683 4205.**

where to stay

PEPPERS SPICERS PEAK LODGE

It's a steep and winding 12 kilometres from the turnoff on the main highway, but Spicers Peak, perched on a grassy plateau overlooking the Scenic Rim, seems to be a place very close to heaven. The rooms are all lavishly appointed, with some even including crackling fireplaces and massive spas. Terraces lead to the vast sloping lawns, infinity pool and tennis court. Expect the pampering to continue inside the main lodge, where there's an open bar and daily-devised degustation dinners that match elegant fare to wines from the impressive cellar. And if you just can't do that driveway, helicopter transfers are available. Now that's an entrance! From \$890 per double per night, including breakfast, morning and afternoon tea, three-course gourmet lunch, seven-course degustation dinner, and all drinks during your stay. **Wilkinson Rd, Maryvale, (07) 4666 1083, spicerspeaklodge.com.au.**

the guide.



map key

Alure Boutique Villas.....	7
Ballandean Estate	11
Banca Ridge.....	7
Boireann Wines	6
Cube Hotel.....	1
Encores.....	1
Gip's Restaurant	1
Girraween Environmental Lodge	11
Heritage Estate Wines	4
Olga & Agnes Fine Food	7
Peppers Spicers Peak Lodge.....	2
Ridgemill Wines	8
Robert Channon Wines and Singing Lake Café.....	7
Rumbalara Estate Wines	9
Shriaz Restaurant	10
Spring Creek Mountain Cafe & Cottages.....	3
Swish Wine Bar	1
Symphony Hill Wines.....	10
The Spotted Cow.....	1
Veraison.....	1
Vineyard Cottages.....	11
Wendland Olives Fine Foods	1

VINEYARD COTTAGES

The intoxicating scent from tangles of David Austin roses and walls of jasmine waft through the rooms at Vineyard Cottages. The restaurant is housed in an old church, and its deceptive size can easily cater for large groups. Janine Cumming is a highly respected chef in the region, blending European techniques with the odd Asian flavour. The wine list is carefully selected from within the Granite Belt, rounded out with inclusions from other parts of Australia and New Zealand. The cottages are cosy and charming, and breakfast, lunch and dinner are available to in-house guests. From \$175 per double. **New England Hwy, Ballandean, (07) 4684 1270, vineyardcottages.com.au.**

GIRRAWEE ENVIRONMENTAL LODGE

Set amid 160 hectares acres of bushland, it's hard to think of a more tranquil place than this lodge. Girraween, which means 'place of flowers', is a natural sanctuary for native birdlife. There are plunge pools and heated outdoor spas to relax in after a hike in the national park, and each cabin has a spacious balcony equipped with barbecue, full cooking facilities and striking views into the surrounds. From \$220 per double. **Pyramids Rd, Wyberba, (07) 4684 5138, girraweenlodge.com.au.**

ALURE BOUTIQUE VILLAS

Located in the heart of the wine region, Alure Villas offers true convenience; you can cook up a storm in the fully equipped

kitchen or head out to one of several restaurant or cafe choices nearby. The split-level villas are spacious and stylish. Full-length windows bring the 20 hectares of untouched bushland inside and a wood fire and in-house entertainment centre make it hard to leave. From \$265 per double per night (minimum two-night stay) including breakfast basket. **280 Mt Tully Rd, Stanthorpe, (07) 4681 4476, alurestanthorpe.com.au.**

Another handy accommodation option is **Spring Creek Cottages** (see Where to Eat), which offers value from \$190 per double including à la carte breakfast.

Thanks to Tourism Queensland for assistance with this story. For more information, visit: southeastqueenslandcountry.com.au **d.**