



Casley Mount Hutton Winery is a lovely place to linger

feel like a cool break?

WHEN SUMMER'S HEAT IS JUST TOO MUCH AND THE BEACH IS BURN CITY, **KERRY HEANEY** RECOMMENDS YOU HEAD TO THE GRANITE BELT'S COOLER CLIME.

ACCORDING TO the locals, this is a place where you never head out at night without a coat, even in the peak of summer.

It's an easy three-hour drive from Brisbane to Stanthorpe and you can just about see the stress and tension baggage left along the roadside. Wide open spaces, rolling hills of green, good honest food and plenty of wine make for friendly faces, and you'll find the locals warm and welcoming.

Shaking off its traditional image as a winter destination, the Granite Belt has a whole new range of summer visitor options including a cheese farm and a "Strange Bird" wine tasting trail for those who have ABC (Anything But Chardonnay) days. There are 21 wineries and 16 grape varieties including barbera, chenin blanc, colombard, durif, gewurztraminer, malbec, marsanne, mourvedre, nebbiolo, petit verdot, pinot gris, sylvaner, tannat, tempranillo and viognier.

The winery list is tempting but long. We made it to Jester Hill, owned by John and Genevieve Ashwell, which, along with great wines, has a large open area for families and children to enjoy. Hidden Creek Winery and Cafe was a chance to enjoy award-winning wines over lunch while sampling local produce. We also picked up some of Geoff Metcalf's New England Larder yummy sour cherry jam.

At Rumbalara Estate we enjoyed a cosy winery experience with an African flavour. Host Bobbi Cragg will share her "little bit of Africa" at an annual feast planned for November. Given the popularity of previous similar events at the winery, you'll want to book early for this one!

Linger at Casley Mount Hutton winery just to drink in the aroma of their cellar but don't forget to taste the extensive range of award winning wines that have captured the attention of wine pundits.

Foodies in search of regional finds will be thrilled with the

newly established Granite Belt Dairy Farm at Thulimbah near Stanthorpe. At 900m above sea level and with night temperatures as low as -9 degrees Celsius, this is one of Australia's highest and coldest dairy farms. Their great farmhouse cheeses are made by hand according to traditional recipes with milk from their own herd of 70 jersey cows.

Pick up some olives to enjoy with your new wines at Mt Stirling Olives at Glen Aplin. Growers Jim and Viviane Miller have more than 3,500 trees which they harvest to produce cold pressed extra virgin olive oil, tapenade, spiced olives and a wide variety of other olive products.

New dining options on the Granite Belt include Cooks, Gluttons & Gourmets in the Stanthorpe High Street. Host Athena Corbally and Chef Alec Pioveson use local farm fresh produce and only stock Granite Belt wines. Try their delicious local bacon and sausages for Sunday breakfast.

The Queensland College of Wine Tourism on Caves Road has the Banca Ridge Cellar Door and Bistro, which is open from 10am to 4pm daily. Their medley of mains tasting plate, prepared and served by hospitality students, and accompanied by Banca Ridge wines, is a great lunch treat.

Anna's Restaurant, a local institution, has an extensive Friday and Saturday night Italian buffet with favourites such as cannelloni, scalloppine alla marsala and stuffed mushrooms. Sweets include Italian treats cannoli, tiramisu and crostoli.

After a hard day on the wine trail you can relax over a drink in the new Piano Bar in the Central Hotel, where resident guitarist Lee Williams may be there to entertain you.

Pulling the car into the brand new villas set amongst the granite boulders at 31 The Rocks was a real pleasure, as was meeting our hosts, Phil and Beryl Moye. There's everything you could wish for in the way of comfy queen-size beds and



Stunning rock formations dot the landscape around Stanthorpe

stylish flat-screen televisions plus some extra touches like the hot chocolate and marshmallows for a cosy drink. The finishing touch is a complimentary liqueur and chocolate nightcap delivered to your door. Despite the warm weather in Brisbane, in Stanthorpe it was damn cold that night – cold enough to light the fire and fall asleep watching the glowing red flames.

If you think you know the Granite Belt, think again. There's a new energy in town, new award-winning wines and new food delights. The one thing that hasn't changed is the warm country welcome.

Call or log on for a copy of the Strange Bird map p 1800 SO COOL
www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au

go see

31 The Rocks p 4681 2221 www.31therocks.com

Cooks Gluttons and Gourmets p 4681 2377

Granite Belt Dairy Farm p 4685 2277

Casley Mount Hutton Winery p 4683 6316

**Hidden Creek Winery and Cafe
p 4684 1383 www.hiddencreek.com.au**

**Jester Hill Wines
p 4683 4380 www.jesterhillwines.com.au**

**Rumbalara Estate
p 4684 1206 www.rumbalarawines.com.au**

**Anna's Restaurant
p 4681 1265 www.annas.com.au**