

WINTER
WEEKENDS
AWAYOUR INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO THE
BEST COOL-WEATHER ESCAPES

IRONCLAD

HOW LOBBYIST MITCH
HOOKE BROUGHT DOWN
A PRIME MINISTER

FINDING FEY

IN SEARCH OF THE REAL
BRENDAN FEVOLAANGEL OF
DEATH ROWTHE AUSSIE WOMAN TAKING
ON THE US JUSTICE SYSTEM

THE HOUSE AT SMOKO

1691 GREAT ALPINE ROAD, SMOKO, VIC
PHONE: 0448 992 960

WEB: THEHOUSEATSMOKO.COM.AU

THE LOCATION You reach Smoko, in the beautiful Ovens Valley, just before Harrietville, the last petrol stop before the climb to Mount Hotham and its snowfields. Allegedly named for the place where late-18th-century workers stopped off for a billy tea and a smoke on their way to and from the region's gold dredges, it could equally be named for the heavy mists that settle on the mountains on chilly mornings.

THE PLACE Set amid a hectare of native shrubs, towering gums and mature oaks and elms, The House at Smoko is made of stone, timber and galvanised iron and has the look of the old tobacco kilns that once dominated the local landscape. Inside is a mixture of polished boards and stone-tiled floors with see-through timber wall dividers separating the main living areas. One, a huge circular bookshelf, hangs from the ceiling. A builder's pallet, sanded and oiled, makes a great coffee table. The eight-seater dining-room table is a solid timber affair with paint-spattered tabletop evoking the bench top of an artist's studio.

THE EXPERIENCE At least a day is needed to appreciate the gardens, the decor and the attention to detail that makes this house special, but Mount Hotham is a drawcard. Even if you're no lover of skiing, the kids will enjoy chucking snowballs, building snowmen and tobogganing.

DON'T MISS ... a visit to Bright and its cafes: Ginger Baker (127 Great Alpine Road; 03 5755 2300) overlooks Centennial Park and the Ovens River and is renowned for its superlative coffee, while Simone's (98 Gavan Street; 03 5755 2266) is widely regarded as the best restaurant in north-east Victoria. In Harrietville, there is the small volunteer-run Harrietville Historical Museum (Great Alpine Road, next to the general store), which tells of the town's gold-mining days, and Morries Ice-creamery, which is a must, even in winter (195 Great Alpine Road; 03 5759 2612). Granny's Pantry (56 Great Alpine Road; 03 5759 2699) is renowned for its jams, relishes and Indian-style kasundi.

SALLY DUGAN

COST: from \$360 a night for two to \$600 a night for six. Children are an extra \$30 a night. Two night minimum stay.

DISTANCE: about 330km (4½ hours' drive) north-east of Melbourne.