



Above and left: Immaculately restored, The Old Bank Boutique Hotel in Mittagong offers guests a step back in history while discreetly including all the modern conveniences expected at a luxury B&B.



Take in panoramic views at McVitty Grove while enjoying a sustainable and delicious dining experience with locally sourced foods and wines.

# SHORT BREAK: MITTAGONG NSW

Around 90 minutes' drive from Canberra, take a step back in history and be embraced by an enchanting balance of luxury and country hospitality at The Old Bank Boutique Hotel in the NSW Southern Highlands.

The gracious co-owners, Barbara and Warwick Wainberg, and guest experience coordinator, Moira Mevissen, greet guests upon arrival with warm smiles, open hearts and a delicious afternoon tea of fresh home-baked cakes or scones with dollops of Barbara's homemade jam. We took ours outdoors on the terrace overlooking the Italianate fountain, potted cumquats and historic standalone cottage and stables.

Built in Mittagong's Main Street in 1892, a seven-year restoration project has seen the historic building, which was "a derelict pigeon coop" when its new owners bought it in 2009, painstakingly returned to its glory days.

Wherever possible, the building's original materials – including convict bricks, tessellated tiles, timber staircase and balustrades, floorboards and ceilings – have been salvaged, lovingly restored and reused. The old bank vault, with its thick walls, arched ceiling and beautifully restored one-tonne metal door, has been transformed into a wine cellar. The front room, where tellers once served customers, is a comfortable sitting room furnished with chesterfields, antiques and marble fireplace. The adjoining library is more intimate with cosy chairs by another fireplace and a china

cabinet laden with period crockery and serving ware. Throughout the hotel, historic black and white photographs of the Highlands hang from picture rails, and exquisite custom-made carpets designed by Warwick demonstrate his attention to detail, passion and level of care taken with the building's restoration (a building he was worried would be demolished by developers if he hadn't bought it).

Upstairs, where the bank's first manager lived with his wife and many children, each luxurious guest bedroom has been exquisitely decorated sympathetic to the period – and with all the mod cons thoughtfully integrated. Underfloor heating and heated towel rails in the ensuite enhance the luxury in winter.

Barbara, who once worked as Kerry Packer's personal chef, rules the kitchen with Warwick by her side. Guests have the option of taking dinner in the spacious dining room and, following pre-dinner drinks in the drawing room, Barbara served us a gourmet three-course meal, catering to dietary requirements with aplomb. Afterwards, guests are left to experience The Old Bank's magic by themselves and are welcome to partake of a complimentary glass of port.

Breakfast orders are taken the evening prior. We ate at 9am, after a leisurely stroll around nearby Lake Alexandra, and were served coffee or tea to our liking, freshly squeezed orange juice, Bircher muesli or fruit and coconut yoghurt, a

traditional cooked breakfast or garlic mushrooms with hazelnuts and fresh pesto. There's also toast, muffins and rolls but we were replete.

Due to popular demand from locals and others wanting to see inside without staying the night, The Old Bank Boutique Hotel is now taking reservations for cream teas and light lunches. Bookings are essential: call 02 4872 4496 or visit [oldbankboutiquehotel.com](http://oldbankboutiquehotel.com)

*Canberra Weekly* stayed as guests on the weekend of 10-11 December and we highly recommend The Old Bank Boutique Hotel for an indulgent getaway.

After waving a fond farewell, we headed to Berrima to browse the Sunday markets and take in the historic village vibe, then made our way to McVitty Grove café which offers panoramic views across the Highlands. Here, you're welcome to try the wines before ordering them with lunch or buying bottles to take home. Closely aligned with the tractorless vineyards winemaking philosophy, McVitty café aims to create a sustainable and diverse dining experience with locally sourced, foraged, grown and produced foods. An uplifting and delicious way to end our memorable Mittagong getaway.

- Julie Samaras

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*McVitty Grove, 434 Wombeyan Caves Rd, Mittagong NSW. Ph: 4878 5522.*