

A taste for heritage

Drawn in by the promise of fragrant Earl Grey tea and still-warm scones, the Blue Mountains' afternoon tea ritual surrounded by storied architecture and sweeping valley vistas is a wistful affair.

There's a sense of stepping into the romance of another era. The region's grand hotels, long-standing sanctuaries for city escapees, still cradle that old-world charm in every creaking floorboard and every sunlit parlour.

Here's how five legendary grand hotels now serve afternoon tea.

Hydro Majestic Hotel, Medlow Bath (1904)

In its heyday, flamboyant Sydney retailer Mark Foy's "grandest of the grand hotels" drew famous guests

from Dame Nellie Melba to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. (Australia's first Prime Minister Sir Edmund Barton even died there.)

You can relive those halcyon days in the restored hotel today, where high tea is an elegant affair: delicate finger sandwiches, freshly baked scones and petit fours accompanied by tea, coffee or a glass of sparkling wine.

The Carrington Hotel, Katoomba (1883)

The "grand dame of Katoomba" is a living time capsule of Victorian grandeur at the top of town, with vintage chandeliers, an operational antique lift and historical photos lining the walls.

Through the early 20th century, it reigned as a social hub, its stained-glass facade and sprawling verandas welcoming



honeymooners, governors and aristocrats escaping Sydney's bustle.

Today, you can settle into a plush lounge, at Champagne Charlie's Bar or the sunlit veranda with a Devonshire tea or cake any day.

Hotel Mountain Heritage, Katoomba (1908)

So extravagant for its time, in 1935 it was hailed as "the largest and most palatial guesthouse in the southern hemisphere, with hot and cold water in each room, a neon-lit ballroom, in-house entertainment and a permanent orchestra".

Today, it embraces nostalgia and comfort and you can walk through its glamorous history as you pass old photographs in the hallways.

You can pop in for a two-course lunch or cut to the chase and just have dessert – valley view served free.

Palais Royale, Katoomba (1896)

Exuding the charm of a European manor, this boutique hotel began in 1896 as two cottages before transitioning into a convent

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school then detouring as a luxurious guesthouse and a Bible college.

Today, the private hotel features original hardwood floorboards, fireplaces and Art Nouveau light fittings in the Grand Ballroom. You can sit on replica vintage dining chairs in Gazelles restaurant for breakfast, a light meal in the café or under leadlight windows in the lounge with a drink.

Grand View Hotel, Wentworth Falls (1883)

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the original weatherboard country inn that morphed into an Art Deco beauty, served hearty meals, basic lodgings and grand views to travellers.

By the 1930s the Grand View had a touch of Gatsby-era style with streamlined architecture and a cosy parlour bar.

Today, you tuck into dessert surrounded by country pub warmth with heritage character, pressed-metal ceilings and historic photos on the walls.