

On the fungi farms

1 Dick and Virginia Groot Obbink of Durran Durra Truffles were Sydney-based microbiologists when they hatched a plan for a tree change. After buying 40ha of farmland in Braidwood, NSW, they planted 400 truffle-inoculated English and European oak trees in 2008, crossed their fingers and hoped for the best. The decision to work with a different kind of micro-organism paid off when they unearthed their first black truffle five years ago – a feeling akin to “finding a piece of gold in the ground”, says Groot Obbink. Although drought and bushfires scotched last year’s harvest, ample rains mean this year is shaping up to be a big one. Visitors can book weekday hunts with the energetic kelpie Bella, while a range of truffle products is currently under development. **Stay** Mona Farm, Braidwood. durrandurrastruffles.com.au monafarm.com.au

2 On the edge of Canberra’s city limits, The Truffle Farm opens for hunts from May to August. Keen to rug up and join in? Get your skates on because many of this year’s sessions have already sold out. After accompanying the truffle dogs as they sniff out buried treasure around the roots of the 3000 or so trees on the farm, it’s back to the truffle shed for a six-course truffle degustation prepared by executive chef Damian Brabender, with matching local wines. If, after all that, you still haven’t had your fill of food and wine, Mount Majura Vineyard with its flagship tempranillo is located next door, while Canberra’s restaurants, bars and cafes are a 15-minute drive away. **Stay** Midnight Hotel, Canberra. thetrufflefarm.com.au midnighthotel.com.au

3 Truffles require frosty winters, so Queensland would seem an odd spot for them to grow. On the Granite Belt, however, sitting 1000m above sea level, the conditions are pretty well perfect. Four years ago, Matt Hibberd was putting security dogs through their paces when a grower asked if he could train truffle-detection dogs. Hibberd couldn’t see why not. Although there are about two dozen Granite Belt growers, European-style secrecy means none is open for hunts or tours. Instead, Hibberd started the Truffle Discovery Centre in Stanthorpe, with gift shop and interpretive gallery, 40 display trees and products such as truffle salts, oils, butter and aioli. In winter, he sources newly dug truffles from highly classified local suppliers so visitors can sample them fresh from the farm gate. **Stay** Granite Belt Retreat. trufflediscoverycentre.com.au granitebeltretreat.com.au

4 Brushing dirt from her hands after a training session with her new labradoodle puppy, Anna Terry of Tasmanian Truffles admits she has been eating truffles since she was three. She and her brother Henry are second-generation farmers; their father Tim harvested Australia’s first truffle in 1999. In addition to black winter truffles (*Tuber melanosporum*) the 5000-tree farm in Deloraine grows black summer truffles (*Tuber aestivum*). In the early days, most fresh truffles were exported, but now that Australians have developed a taste for



Kings Truffles, main; Truffle Kerfuffle in WA, top right; Gembrook Truffles, above right

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Sniff out gastronomic adventures at these burgeoning truffleries

DENISE CULLEN

them, they tend to stay close to home, reducing the stress associated with shipping a product that has a premium freshness of two weeks. Tasmanian Truffles offers hunts with or without lunch. **Stay** Old Wesleydale Cottage, Mole Creek. tastruffles.com.au oldwesleydaleheritage.com

5 The rich soil and lush pasture of Manjimup mean this 4000-strong town is Western Australia’s food bowl but, come winter, there’s only one crop on most people’s minds. Manjimup is the biggest producer of prized black truffles in the southern hemisphere, a fact celebrated during the annual Truffle Kerfuffle food festival, which runs this year from June 25-27. Events include the Chef’s Cabin series, which involves small groups gathering around the kitchen bench for cooking demonstrations plus that all-important chance to taste truffle-laden dishes. Masterclasses, truffle hunts, dog demonstrations, wine tastings and long-table dinners are also part of the program. **Stay** Stone Barn, south of Manjimup. trufflekerfuffle.com.au stonebarn.com.au

6 Marco Marinelli knew he was on to something with his VSTS (Very Special Truffle Salt) recipe when his young daughter spirited the spice away in her school bag so she could season her lunches. He used to make the 25 per cent fresh truffle salt as a present for friends and family but soon added it to the line-up of produce sold at Mushroom Man,

his Adelaide Central Market stall and online shop. Marinelli says the South Australian truffle market is in its infancy but this is changing. In the meantime, he sources fresh product from Tasmania, Western Australia and sometimes even Alba in Italy and Perigord, France. His specialist shop also sells a range of other fresh and dry fungi, from Adelaide Hills porcini, through to French chanterelles. **Stay** Mayfair Hotel, Adelaide. mushroomman.com.au mayfairhotel.com.au

7 In 2018, Jax Lee set a NZ record when she unearthed a whopping 1.36kg black truffle worth thousands of dollars at Kings Truffles. It was a coup for the North Canterbury truffiere, founded by her father 15 years earlier. Surrounded by the limestone escarpments of Waipara Gorge, Kings Truffles is one hour’s drive north of Christchurch International Airport, but sufficiently remote to feel like a real escape. Lee recently teamed with neighbour Black Estate winery, which offers a truffle-based menu throughout winter, as well as packages for private groups to experience a truffle hunt followed by a wine tour and lunch. **Stay** Black Estate. kingstruffles.com blackestate.co.nz

8 Nestled in the Dandenong Ranges, about an hour’s drive from Melbourne, Gembrook Truffles is debuting its public truffle hunts this

winter. That doesn’t mean the operators are new to the “black gold” game. The Carter family also owns and runs Trufficulture Nurseries, which has supplied farmers with truffle-inoculated French oak and stone pine trees for almost a decade. Now, after each hunt, a small number of trees will be available for backyard amateurs to purchase. If a whole tree sounds like too big a commitment, there’s always the option to take fresh truffles home. Don’t be intimidated by prices ranging from \$1500 to \$2500 a kilo; Chloe Carter reckons \$50 worth of truffles is ample to impress your next dinner party guests. **Stay** Arcadia Cottages, near Olinda. gembrooktruffles.com.au arcadiacottages.com.au

9 Truffles occupy a rarefied place in the gastronomic firmament but they are best served simply, says Rodney Dunn, founder of The Agrarian Kitchen in Tasmania. Five years ago, Dunn wrote the definitive tome on the subject, *The Truffle Cookbook*, which included such gems as truffled macaroni and cheese and tjarin (fine pasta) with truffle butter and truffled egg yolk. Truffles have an “amazing affinity with fat”, so when in season, he weaves them through The Agrarian Kitchen’s menu. Surprisingly, the inimitable fungus even works in desserts such as custards and trifles. For a taste of everyday luxury, home cooks can’t go past scrambled eggs topped with grated truffle, says Dunn. **Stay** The Woodbridge, New Norfolk. theagrariankitchen.com woodbridgenn.com.au

10 The new Every Day I’m Trufflin’ three-night package by Launceston’s seven-room boutique hotel Stillwater Seven is designed to showcase Tasmanian winters. It’s about embracing shorter days, sleeping in and slowing down. And what better way to do that than with breakfast in bed featuring scrambled eggs topped with freshly shaved truffles? Hotelier and co-owner of Stillwater Seven Chris McNally says the package also includes menus featuring Tamar Valley truffles by chef Craig Will at Stillwater Restaurant and Black Cow Bistro and an optional visit to a local vineyard and truffle farm. “Sometimes people just want to get on a plane and know that everything has been taken care of,” he says. **Stay** Stillwater Seven stillwater.com.au



Tasmanian Truffles