

Gippsland High Country Tours – Winter Update 2020



Hello everyone,

I hope you are all staying safe and I am acutely aware that this update is coming to you with us all still living under a heavy cloud of COVID-19 restrictions wherever you live. None more so that those living in Melbourne who are only midway through the 6-week period of Stage 4 restrictions and must be craving some simple freedoms right now. There are so many people who are doing it really hard right now in all sorts of situations. However, our thoughts are also with those who have contracted this horrible virus themselves or know someone who has. It is an incredibly tough time for everyone right now.

Enjoying nature during lockdowns and restrictions

I hope all of you are finding small ways to connect with nature on your daily exercise if in Victoria, or living in states with less restrictions, within your local area. We know that time in nature is so good for our mental wellbeing and we need that more than ever right now, but not everyone has an opportunity to get out into their usual natural places at present. If restrictions don't let you take a bushwalk in a favourite National Park, there are still other ways to connect with nature.



Even in our cities, there are local parks and green spaces and even some nice street trees that you can take time to appreciate on a daily walk. It is a great time to tune in more closely to what is at hand – finding the small joys. Our gardens (or even potted plants) will attract invertebrates, there might be tiny spiders curling up in the leaves and are the flowers attracting only honeybees or native hoverflies or other insects as well? I've found a new interest in invertebrates this winter – with some wildlife like birds are a bit less visible over the cold months, small things like insects have been something new to spot, photograph and learn about. I did a [Blog](#) article on Tiny

Wildlife for the website back in May as I was fascinated by how many tiny critters are around that I've never appreciated before.



Fire Recovery in East Gippsland

Despite less strict restrictions in regional Victoria during the second wave (and a period of “Stay Safe” light restrictions for a few months), we have stayed fairly close to home this year. This means I have not yet visited or assessed many areas where the tour program normally visits. However, I have been recording some of the tricks that nature uses to recover from fire and regularly surveying a few sites in burnt forest not far from Bruthen. You might like to look at the website [Blog Page](#) and click through to the story Nature’s recovery from fire in East Gippsland, the first 6-8 months.



Our program of ecotours and walks

While I am sure you would love to be planning holidays now including nature tours and walks with me, I’m afraid this update does not bring any offerings of tours for the near future. Even when travel restrictions are eased (both within Victoria and from interstate), at present I cannot see a way forward to safely offer tours again. I cannot safely manage “social distancing” when putting 3-10 total strangers together in a 4WD or minibus to travel and staying in accommodation where we are in close proximity.

So for now the program continues to remain on hold with no tours scheduled until at least March 2021 and more likely not until Spring 2021. Much will depend on the background risk both within Victoria and interstate. If we get to a happy situation like WA has found itself in, (over 100 days without community transmission) it may be time to consider bringing people together on a tour, but it is far too early to plan this yet. Once possible, program details will be finalised at least 3 months ahead, for you to plan and book.

Nature holiday suggestions

I know this is disappointing news for some of you, especially those who can see their own prospects of travel getting closer. However, I have been working on some suggestions of other nature holidays you may like to consider that will be available again before my tours are. Many of you have expressed a desire to come to East Gippsland and support businesses recovering from bushfires and once restrictions allow, this will be possible again. Do please be respectful of local communities, they are very fearful of visitors bringing COVID-19 into our (currently) COVID-free zone. Follow regulations and then some more... (ie: wear a mask even if you don’t have to), follow instructions from local businesses and be considerate of others.

There are lots of places to stay in East Gippsland, but I am currently recommending two local accommodation providers who will allow you to have a close-to-nature holiday. Neither are open right now, but will be re-opening once restrictions ease and you can make enquiries or even book ahead now for later in spring or summer. You will be best to contact them directly rather than use an online booking service. That way you can speak to them personally and gain an understanding of when they are likely to re-open and what cancellation policies they have in place for advance bookings in case of further travel restrictions.

Goldsmith’s in the Forest at Lakes Entrance

This is probably the closest thing you will get to being on one of my tours, coupled with beautiful accommodation and chef-prepared meals (I can’t do that!!!). Darilyn and Les Goldsmith are your hosts and their modern B & B style boutique accommodation is nestled in private bushland only 15 min drive from Lakes Entrance. Birdwatchers are well catered for, but even if you are not a birdwatcher, how could you not be thrilled by the Lyrebirds that visit the garden and bathe in the pond! Les will take you for some short

guided walks through their bush, with lots of nature interactions and help you appreciate what makes their little patch of forest special. Tall trees, a rainforest gully, birds, wildlife and wildflowers. Darilyn uses many native plants from her Australian Edible Garden in her cooking and either she or Les will be glad to give you a tour of the garden. You could take a day out to visit Lakes Entrance, cycle local cycling trails which pass nearby or just stay put and relax. The accommodation has 4 separate rooms each with ensuites and a private door out to the garden. Relax in shared lounge area (with wood heater) the balcony or the garden – finding a quiet private space is not hard. Individuals, couples or small groups are well catered for, but this is not suited to families with children. Goldsmith's in the Forest is not a budget holiday, but when you consider what is included – it is wonderful value for money and well worth spoiling yourself for a complete holiday. Goldsmiths in the Forest was not directly affected by summer bushfires (no burnt forest nearby) but they were heavily impacted by evacuations and closures during and after the fires (and like everyone else, COVID-19 restrictions) so will be very keen to welcome visitors again once it is safe to do so.

Website: [Goldsmith's in the Forest](#) or phone: (03) 5155 2518



Murnong Country House – Flaggy Creek

If you would like a fully self-contained holiday accommodation option, Murnong Country House at Flaggy Creek (around 25 minutes drive NW of Bairnsdale) is a beautiful place to stay. This quaint and cosy little cottage has 3 bedrooms and shared bathroom with a fully equipped kitchen and a wood heater in the lounge room. It is set on a 40ha property with private bushland as well as being adjacent to State Forest and only a short drive from Mitchell River National Park. There is a shady rambling garden around the cottage with plenty of places to sit with a good book or a pair of binoculars to birdwatch. Beyond that an orchard and vegetable garden, paddocks and bushland. Your hosts Robyn and Bill can provide information about walks on the property drives nearby, but you also have privacy to relax and unwind if that is what you need. Murnong Cottage was also not directly affected by summer bushfires (no burnt forest nearby) but they were heavily impacted by evacuations and closures during and after the fires (and like everyone else COVID-19 restrictions) so will be very keen to welcome visitors again once it is safe to do so.

Website: [Murnong Country House](#) or phone 0438 571 586



The coming months

As the months pass and travel options improve there are many other great parts of East Gippsland to visit and places to stay of course, but for now, these are my two recommendations.

I will continue to share regular stories of local nature experiences and fire recovery via the [Blog page](#) of our website and shared via our [Facebook page](#). So please keep an eye on these for some lovely photos and great stories in the coming months.



If you are looking at our program on the website and interested in one of the tours listed for 2021, please let me know. I am not taking any bookings or deposits for tours at present but will be recording “Expressions of Interest”. Right now exact dates and prices are not available, so please be patient, but if I know you are interested, you will receive details as soon as the tour looks likely to be able to proceed and details are finalised (and before it is advertised publicly).

Our normal annual Newsletter will come out when the prospect of re-commencing tours becomes clearer. In the interim keep up to date with the [Blog Page](#) of our website and our [Facebook page](#).

Stay safe everyone and please take care of yourselves and others during this really difficult period. It will pass! And on the other side of this current crisis, the beauty of the natural world, whether it be mountains, coasts, forest or river systems, will still be there ready for you to enjoy again.

Regards, Jenny.

P.S. If this email does not display photos, please open the attached pdf file instead.

Jenny Lawrence

Gippsland High Country Tours

PO Box 69

Bruthen Vic 3885

Phone: (03) 5157 5556

Email: info@gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au

Website: www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au