

Glamping VINTAGE STYLE

words KATRINA HOLDEN



Fans of vintage style can hire Vintage Glampervans' Fern.

In the Sunshine Coast hinterland's Mary Valley, two renovated vintage caravans have settled in to welcome visitors for a slow-moving stay



Olive and Frankie are starting to feel like we're firm friends. As gracefully ageing vintage caravans, these old girls hold stories I'm certain, from their many trips around the block.

I'm staying in Olive, a 1960s Millard caravan in a soft shade of green. It doesn't take long to feel at home within her compact and clean interior. She and Frankie are positioned permanently at Kookaburra Park in Queensland's Sunshine Coast hinterland, about an hour's drive from Maroochydore airport. Olive and Frankie are separated by a communal, roofed

structure designed as a chill-out zone furnished with dining tables and chairs, a lounge, barbecue and a pot-belly stove. The powered caravans overlook a dam where pink lily pads are sprouting and a white heron perches on a waterside log. A herd of deer roams the hillside and grunts from the park's pig pen echo in the distance.

The vans belong to Vintage Glampervans, the work of Amanda Gray, a self-confessed gypsy and vintage fanatic. Amanda grew up in Tasmania but moved to Queensland in 2003 at 20, when in the midst of travelling.

"When I had my daughter, Sari, I really wanted to go overseas but I didn't know if I could handle it because I was on my own. But

There is zero phone reception and Wi-Fi leaving no alternative but to connect with nature

I did – I went to Europe with a backpack on the back and a baby on the front,” Amanda says.

With her daughter in tow, she was also keen to explore her own country. She bought a Toyota Coaster bus and her father helped her turn it into a mobile home. Amanda and then four-year-old Sari spent 18 months travelling Australia’s east coast until Sari declared she wanted to wear a uniform and go to school. That’s when they started hiring out the bus to other holidaymakers.

Amanda and her father have now renovated four caravans. In addition to Olive and Frankie, Vintage Glampervans’ collection includes Willow and Fern, which can each be rented out longer-term to go elsewhere.

Amanda wants to help other families have the experience of staying in a caravan park. “I’ve noticed that shift in people’s openness when they are in a caravan park where they can talk to everyone,” she says. “I love that openness that caravanning brings out in people; it’s more of a community.”

In September 2019, Emma and Adam Dickson bought a Mary Valley caravan park that would become Kookaburra Park. The couple cleared the run-down site and opened in March 2020, but traded for only 10 days before Covid forced them to close. Undeterred, they made use of the down-time to start more work on site. Emma and Amanda began following each other on Instagram.

“They invited me over and said, ‘come and have a look, we’ve got a spot overlooking a dam where we’d really love to put the caravans,’” Amanda says. “I had my vision board up in my office with pictures of caravans around a dam with a beautiful outlook and I thought, ‘this is going to come true, it’s going to be awesome.’”

Like-minded Emma and Adam also have vision boards positioned around Kookaburra Park to show guests their goals for the future.

In addition to Amanda’s caravans, Kookaburra Park features 32 campsites, a Jungle House cabin, Bunkhouse Cabin and Garden Studio cabin. For now, the sites and caravans can only be booked on weekends but from December 2021, they will be available seven days a week.

Labour-intensive work is familiar territory for the energetic young couple, who married in May under a gum tree on their 30ha property.

“We travelled through Europe in a bus in 2018. We randomly bought a block of land in Ireland and built a tiny home in just 12 weeks from scratch, using no power tools. Emma managed the property herself through Airbnb,” Adam says. “We love the lifestyle of creating something for other people to enjoy.”

Most guests are young families craving a taste of country living and getting off the grid. They can feed the farm’s deer and pat the pigs, and kids love the recently opened guinea pig enclosure.

There is zero phone reception and Wi-Fi so there really is no alternative but to connect with nature – and each other – by swinging in the caravans’ hammock chairs, playing games on the lawn, lighting a pit fire, visiting nearby towns, exploring hiking trails or four-wheel-driving to nearby swimming holes.

Back inside light-filled Olive, a look around shows that Amanda and her father have achieved a thoughtful facelift, keeping the van true to her age and enhancing her best attributes. The sun is setting over the hill behind Olive while I munch on local cheese and sip kombucha.

I recall my drive out here earlier through winding green valleys and village streets lined with timber Queenslander homes on stilts. It’s been like travelling back into another time where simple living reigns – and I reckon Olive, with her wheels parked firmly in the soil, would be feeling like she’s found home.

Exploring nearby

Booloumba Creek

The turn-off to Booloumba Creek in Conondale National Park is a one-minute drive from Kookaburra Park. You’ll need a four-wheel drive to access area three, which has a beautiful turquoise swimming hole next to a camping area and is child-friendly.

Kenilworth Bakery

Test your sweet-tooth with a monster pastry at the home of Australia’s 1kg donut eating challenge and the country’s first “coffee-in-a-donut”. Doughnuts come in an incredible array of flavours, all baked on site. Don’t miss the exterior walls for eye-catching murals of famous performers by Australian airbrush artist Daus Von Roe. kenilworthbakery.com

Jurassic Trail

Hike through Kookaburra Park’s private property for vistas of the Mary Valley and the chance to spot echidnas and other wildlife. The trail is a 2.4km return trip with steep sections and requires a good level of fitness. kookaburrapark.com.au

Kenilworth

About a 10-minute drive from Kookaburra Park, the township has several shops, a hotel, shops, its famous bakery and the Big Boss Chocolate Co. featuring the work of eight local chocolatiers and two fudge makers. Sample locally made ice-cream, yoghurt and cheese at Kenilworth Dairies. The picturesque towns of Maleny and Mapleton are a 25- to 30-minute drive away.

Staying there

Rates: \$170 a night per caravan including all linen and towels. vintageglampervans.com kookaburrapark.com.au

THE WRITER WAS A GUEST OF VINTAGE GLAMPERVANS AND SUNSHINE COAST TOURISM



Clockwise from top left: Frankie the Glampervan; Daus Von Roe’s bakery mural; Frankie’s cool interior; Kookaburra Park; Kenilworth Bakery’s doughnuts; rural life at Kookaburra Park; Booloumba Creek.