

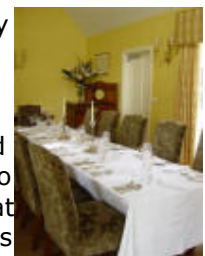
International travel writer Frances Beasley says...

AN ISLAND WITH A GRAND PRIX HISTORY

Phillip Island which is located between the Mornington Peninsular and the Gippsland area of Southern Victoria with the notorious Bass Strait has the capability to bathe you in warm sunshine or blow you to pieces with 110 km per hour winds. It's an island of contrast with warm inviting bathing beaches on its north side and rougher surfing beaches on the south. Somewhere in the middle it boasts the original Grand Prix track from years gone by and is still home to the Australian Motor Cycle Grand Prix, when this tiny little island positively bursts at the seams. For the rest of the year, it is jealously guarded by its local population who has little intention of watching it being spoilt by ruthless developers. Instead it is growing at its own pace with small and generally tasteful apartment developments and more recently the opening of a small luxury boutique property named Glen Isla House. The main town of Cowes (which is not very big but is the main meeting place for locals and visitors to do their shopping) is situated on the north shore on the edge of a long beach which locals claim they can walk along out of season and never meet another soul. Wondrous stuff! The sole winery on the island, named as one would expect, the Phillip Island Vineyard and Winery offers tastings, light food platters and sales. Being owned by the same people who have the award winning Diamond Valley Vineyards in the better known Yarra Valley region of Victoria, this island winery offers some stunningly good wines at what are still considered reasonable prices. Growing grapes on the island is not for the faint hearted, with the precious vines having to be protected by wind nets to ensure the massive gusts don't destroy the ground's offerings. Whilst in the Yarra, De Bortoli has a name for its Noble One Dessert Wine, the 2001 Pinnacles Botrytis Chardonnay from this little island winery, gives a yummy combination of marmalade and apricot flavours that is a delight to any who enjoy something special with their dessert or cheese. Wine fundi James Halliday has already extolled the virtues of their 2001 Estate Chardonnay and 2001 Merlot which should give an indication that this small boutique winery deserves to be taken seriously.



Staying on the island, **GLEN ISLA HOUSE** run by the hospitable Baker family is more like being in a country house party than a numbered hotel guest. Their enthusiasm for the property is infectious. Developed on two acres which incorporates a National Trust listed house that dates back many years, Glen Isla's beautifully laid out formal gardens are a sight for sore eyes and the comfort levels of its seven rooms ensure that guests feel seriously pampered. Ian Baker was in the IT industry for many years and with his wife Madeleine, used to travel extensively and spent a long stretch in Singapore before settling back in Australia and deciding to go the hospitality route. With two sons who have become chefs, one has based himself with them at Glen Isla and Martin turns out some serious culinary creations utilizing the abundance of fresh farm produce which is available locally. During a dinner to celebrate the Slow Food organization, his Gippsland lamb fillets with a shiraz and blueberry jus were an example of how food should melt in the mouth. Locals who attended the event raved about the high quality of the food and wine, saying that until now there has not been anything of this calibre anywhere on the island. It's clear that the Baker family has captured a niche market and the only problem they may face in the oncoming months is the constant stream of bookings that doubtless will



ensue once the yuppie Melbournians get wind of the product. With the small number of rooms, all of which are individually themed (Oriental, French, etc), the service is highly personalized but without pomp and ceremony. Their beloved and very well trained wof, "Blue", accompanies guests as they walk around the gardens and guests will be amazed at the attention to detail that has gone into the rooms. Huge walk in dressing rooms which also have a fridge and your own tea and coffee making facility are a definite plus. Power showers and large bathroom cupboards are another bonus for travellers weary of trying to balance toiletries on tiny shelves. French doors lead out on to a wooden deck with your own table and chairs, encouraging one to sit outside and listen to the birdlife that inhabits the several 100 year old trees that are on the property. It's the type of place that needs a few nights stay to ensure you maximize your relax mode although Ian and Madeleine are very happy for people to just do the "one night stay" if



time is precious. Some Ozzie properties have made themselves distinctly unpopular by insisting visitors stay a minimum of two nights. Not Glen Isla – they understand that people make last minute plans or often have tight schedules. They also offer proper cooked breakfasts, something which many accommodation establishments in Australia no longer do. There's little to beat a full cooked brekkie with the Sunday newspapers and when people only leave the table after 11am, it's a sure sign of a relaxed and contented stay. When a family put their heart into something the way the Bakers have done, there is only one thing that can happen. – a sure success story.



IAN AND SON, MARTIN.

www.glenisla.com

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This article by Frances Beasley appeared on PIP Travel News: <http://www.piptravelnews.co.za> in January 2004.

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