



NSW SHORT STAYS

Cupitt's arrow

Fiona Carruthers falls for a charming South Coast wedding venue with the lot.



Left: The Cupitt family, Wally, Griff, Rosie, Tom and Libby. Some of the new pods, below, include an outdoor bath, above. Winemaker Wally Cupitt in the barrel room, bottom. PHOTOS: LOUISE KENNERLEY



The story of how a 19th-century dairy farm turned piggery on the NSW South Coast got taken over by a cattle farming family – who were originally butchers in Bowral – and transformed into one of the state's most sought-after country wedding venues is quite a tale. As you'd expect.

"The weddings really started around the time our son Tom and daughter-in-law Libby returned from London to get married here in 2011," explains Rosie Cupitt, the estate's elegant matriarch. "After their wedding, people kept asking if they could get married here too."

From that point, the weddings grew organically. When one large party asked if they could put up a marquee, the family just left it up, Rosie quips – for six years – until so many weddings had been held, Cupitt's was deemed to be an official wedding venue by the locals.

A comfortable 3½-hour drive south of Sydney near Ulladulla in the picturesque Shoalhaven region (where the 1995 blockbuster *Babe* was filmed), Cupitt's Estate is a 76-hectare sustainable farming operation, with everything from a worm farm to a climate-controlled cheese house with full cheese-making facilities and an extensive herb and vegetable garden.

There's also an ambience-rich restaurant overlooking the property, a small vineyard, a brewery and a cellar door, housed in a restored stone building that dates to the 1800s and was originally the creamery when the property was a dairy farm.

In the back paddocks, about 70 Black Angus graze, making quite the spectacle



With the decor and the plant varieties found in the garden ... people often liken Cupitt's to the south of France.

Rosie Cupitt, above

with their dark hides set off against the rolling green hills. "I call them our token cows," says Rosie's husband and veteran farmer, Griff Cupitt. "There's hardly enough of them to make a herd."

Griff comes from a long line of butchers, publicans and rural entrepreneurs in



Bowral (a two-hour drive north-west from Cupitt's), where he met Rosie, his childhood sweetheart. Her family had the local florist. You can bet that was some wedding.

It's hard to convey the full charm and diverse range of experiences you will find on arriving at Cupitt's, tucked away behind the local village of Milton. Not to mention the array of fresh produce grown or made on the property, from hard and soft cheeses to jam, apple jelly, 24 varieties of wine, plus various ciders and pale ales.

Make sure you arrive with an empty cooler and a clutter-free boot. Also bring a picnic blanket so you can enjoy the grounds if all the picnic tables (and the restaurant) are full. There's even live music on Sunday afternoons – or at least there will be again soon as NSW continues to open up.

This busy working farm is overseen by two generations of the family.



Need to know

Cupitt's Estate is at 58 Washburton Road, Ulladulla, NSW 2539. See cupittsestate.com.au or call (02) 4455 7888.

Stay Midweek bath suites from \$595; \$645 on weekends. Prices include a breakfast hamper, Cupitt's Estate sparkling wine, Woodstock packaged chocolate truffle box.

■ FOLLOW THE FOOD TRAIL SOUTH

Is grazing platter-hopping a thing? If so, the South Coast is rapidly making an art form of it. Just two hours' drive from Sydney, Bangalay Luxury Villas opened its doors last year on windswept Seven Mile Beach. It also backs onto the golf course.

The site is now in full swing and the 16 self-contained villas are offering mid-week accommodation packages, including dinner in Bangalay Dining Restaurant, overseen by acclaimed chef Simon Evans. From the Target Creek sirloin and Robertson hasselback potatoes to the grilled Clarence River prawns in garlic and chilli oil, Evans' tasty menu is based around native Australian spices, and plenty of local produce.

Use Bangalay as a base from which to forage: Cupitt's Estate, Rick Stein at Bannisters in Mollymook, and the cafés and bakeries of Milton are all within a comfortable 1½-hour drive.

Reduced mid-week special rates (on offer until November) in Golf-view or Garden Villas are from \$490 a night with breakfast, or from \$650 a night with breakfast and dinner – including a multi-course tasting menu for two people, arrival drinks and Bangalay's soon-to-be released Lumira candle. See bangalayvillas.com.au or call (02) 4448 7729.

Luxe Bangalay Villas offer food by Simon Evans, right, and golf course views.



True, Rosie and Griff are stepping back a bit (they live in nearby Milton), but they're still at the property almost every day.

Their eldest son, Tom, is operations manager, and his wife, Libby, is in charge of customer experience; Tom's younger brother, Wally, is the estate's head winemaker, and oversees the brewery, which produces up to 40,000 litres of beer a year. The volume will more than double to 120,000 litres after a new shed is built.

The family is also committed to "cross-pollinating" their produce, as Libby puts it. Just one of many examples is the "Go Your Own Whey" Stout, which uses up whey from the cheese room. "The whey softens the taste off, until it almost tastes like a chocolate milkshake," says Wally.

In the same way that the wedding market grew organically over the past decade, the estate is now gearing up for a new chapter with increased onsite accommodation.

For the past decade, a small cottage (sleeping five or six people) is all that has been available. But as the nuptials market has thrived over the past decade, more brides and grooms began asking the family if they could accommodate the entire bridal party, as have other holidaymakers.

Earlier this month, five large one-bedroom "pods" arrived, with five more due any day. Each pod, designed for two adults, is spacious yet well-cocooned; fitted with timber furniture, plush sofas and all-luxury finishes (including Leif toiletries).

The family went with the pods rather than putting up larger villas. Now there is enough accommodation for up to 20 people, but plenty of privacy.

As Libby says: "Everyone has their space this way, and no one cops the bunk beds."

Designed and made in Melbourne, the pods are mini-home perfection. With small fridges, convection microwaves, stone benchtops and pantry space, you could stay here for weeks. Some pods also have an outdoor bath on the screened balcony, and the unique artworks in each are provided by local Van Rensburg Galleries & VRG.

Rosie's fresh flowers will take pride of place on the kitchen tables, and she is already busy planting around the pods: Japanese wind flowers, tea tree, white carpet roses, oceans more lavender, plus physocarpus, with its vibrant yellow leaf, also known as Dart's Gold; and cat mint and lamb's ear for ground cover.

"If I had to sum it all up, I'd say our ethos is to produce as much as possible, and use it in interesting ways," she says.

"We're also about giving people experiences, whether it's gardening workshops or beer appreciation classes. With the decor and the plant varieties found in the garden – like the lavender and rosemary – people often liken Cupitt's to the south of France."

"Given no one could get to France the past two years, I guess that's not entirely a bad thing." **L&L**