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**T**orquay in late winter is nothing like the busy coastal town that it is in the height of summer. There are no raucous party-goers, no bumper-to-bumper traffic. The town centre reverts to a peaceful, leisurely pace. But some things never change: at the local fish and chip shop – “one of the best two in Victoria”, declares a friend – the fare is as tasty as ever, fortifying our appetite for the weekend’s activities. Even our three little dogs have a heightened sense of anticipation. Nostrils flaring, ears pricked up, they realise that the combination of travel cage, sea air and fast food means that they’re up for a big adventure.

And they’re not disappointed when we arrive at our destination in Bambra, 30 minutes later. Country Wide Cottages, run by friendly Di Schulze, bills itself as “most definitely dog/pet-friendly”. It’s not an idle boast: four-legged visitors get beds, treats and their own private veranda/compound to run in. Which is not to say the humans are forgotten. Each of the four timber cottages – close enough to glimpse, far enough not to intrude – has a theme: castle, beach house, igloo. Our Villa, styled Mexican-cheerful, lent a casual air for lolling about on the comfy couches in front of the wood fire. Even more



relaxing were the pamper packages we’d booked. Once masseuse Jenny had set up the massage table in a bedroom, it was 45 minutes of body rub-down bliss.

Dinner was a home-cooked affair of fishcakes and salad. Coupled with the complimentary port and sparkling wine (plus a basket of cheese and dips), there was more than enough

for a feast and a giggly girls’ night in. We didn’t get up in time the next day to feed the two alpacas and bunnies on the 10-hectare property, or take a bushwalk in the Otway Forest Park. But the long scenic drive back to Melbourne through nearby Lorne brought home the many charms of the region – and more than enough reason for a return visit. **Miranda Tay**

**Cost:** \$180 a night for two in the Villa, Castle and Igloo; \$150 in the Beach House. \$25 per extra person. Minimum two-night stay.

**Distance:** 125 kilometres (about two hours’ drive) south-west of Melbourne.

**Accommodation:** the three-bedroom Villa has two queen beds and two double bunks in the third bedroom. Sleeps eight.

**Features:** open-plan living, dining and kitchen areas, wood heaters and air-conditioning, microwave oven, gas hotplates and oven, electric blankets,

pamper packages. Outdoors is a barbecue, picnic table and camp fire. Wildlife, bushland views, yabbing.

**Nearby:** bushwalks, waterfalls, horse riding, tennis, wineries, restaurants, Otway National Park, Great Ocean Road, Cape Otway light station.

**Bookings:** a few weeks ahead.

**Children:** yes.

**Wheelchair access:** yes.

The Igloo is purpose-built for wheelchair access.

**Pets:** welcome, on leash in the Otway Forest Park.



1-8



2hrs

