

\*HOTELS AND RESORTS REVIEWED BY AUSTRALIAN TRAVELLER ARE VISITED ANONYMOUSLY BY OUR WRITERS, WHO PAY THEIR OWN WAY.



## Totally Zen

Qdos Arts, a culturally rich retreat on Victoria's southwestern coast, is a study in pure aesthetics. With a generous dollop of luxury.

WORDS AND IMAGES BY VANESSA MURRAY

Lorne, the third major stop outside Melbourne on the Great Ocean Road, is a huge drawcard in the summer months. Its beachfront shopping strip, al fresco restaurants and stunning scenery charm locals and visitors alike. Camping grounds fill with families indulging in the great Australian summer, hotels are booked to capacity and the entire town stays up late, relaxing in the wakefulness that comes with a hot Victorian night. I had a tip-off a few months ago that makes Lorne worth visiting year round – one from a local, too, the kind that shouldn't be ignored: "You must go to Qdos," the woman said as her husband busied himself behind his newspaper in a cafe on Lorne's Mountjoy Parade. "It's an art gallery set in a sculpture garden. And cake!" she said, her eyes meeting mine. "They have wonderful cake." So we followed her directions up into the hills to Allenvale Road. And what a tip-off. Qdos was more than the satisfaction of a sweet tooth – it was the highlight of our trip down the Great Ocean Road.

Reclining organically in a three-acre bushland garden in which tall eucalypt maidens watch over works by some of Australia's leading sculptors, Qdos Arts is many things: a sculpture garden, art gallery and cafe, a ceramics studio, an outdoor performance space and a luxury retreat. Owner/Director Graeme Wilkie's catchphrase for Qdos is *when aesthetic matters*. He explains: "I place every rock here with conscious awareness. Every plant I plant here, it's with that same understanding. So I'm looking at a property now of that: when aesthetic matters. I take aesthetics a step further, into the art of living. The art of living is to sit here and smell the bush, enjoy the cockatoos or the koalas, or whatever else is screaming in the night."



LEFT A side view of the gallery, with Deirdre Walsh's *The Sleeper* in the foreground and Bjorn Holm's *Continuity* in the background. FAR LEFT BELOW Viktor Kalinowsky's *Warriors* and the gallery's lounging deck. ABOVE Russel Petherbridge's *Dolphin Man*.

There's a distinctly Japanese aesthetic to Qdos; there's the anagama cave kiln Graeme uses to fire his ceramic creations, the unique, origami-inspired gallery and cafe space, and of course the luxury tree house lodgings emerging like the vertebrae of a dragon's spine along the garden's southern edge.

Graeme has been involved in the design and execution of every aspect of the continually evolving property, from the landscaping of the grounds to the laying of the blue bam paving stones. It's a work in progress. His present focus is the romantic tree houses for two nestled into the hillside. I spent a night in the most recently completed retreat. It was pure luxury, a Japanese-style lovers' nest complete with futon and Egyptian bed linen, tatami mat flooring, white pebbles, soft lighting, books on art and travel, and an entire wall of glass opening onto a deck with a view of Qdos' expansive sculpture garden. There's no TV, no radio. They're designed, says Graeme, "for couples with a propensity to be quiet, to be still."

Lorne's first contemporary art gallery, Qdos is a cultured escape from city life. There are seven gallery exhibitions a year, showcasing significant members of the Australian and international arts community. Earlier this year Wolfgang Wernhauser, a second-generation student of Salvador Dali, exhibited. Each Easter, Qdos hosts the Annual Open Air Sculpture Exhibition. In February, Finis Tansby,

The touristy seaside bustle of Lorne gave way to a meditative calm that made life in the city seem impossible.

the bluesy bass player from John Lee Hooker's band, performed in the outdoor amphitheatre. John Butler has been known to indulge in an impromptu jam. But Graeme is not all about the big players. One of the annual invitation exhibitions is reserved for an emerging artist. Wilkie says of art: "I expect greatness from my colleagues. I say, 'Astonish me, artists of the world' . . . I'm not astonished very often. I want to get transported, uplifted by a creation. That's the role of an artist: to transport and uplift, to move a person's consciousness."

The philosophies of Zen Buddhism and the Japanese tea ceremony (chado) underpin all that is Qdos, especially the key principles of harmony, respect, purity and tranquillity. Initially, I was struck by Qdos' quietness. The touristy seaside bustle of Lorne gave way to a meditative calm that made life in the city seem impossible. After a time my senses reawakened to the bush: birdsong gentle and melodious, cackling and raucous; the wind whispering seductively on my skin then rustling through the trees in a swift tango; the moist smell in the air, fresh and green. I didn't want to leave – but the lure of the complementary full breakfast that comes with the tariff and a generous check out time of 12pm made it bearable. Just. ■



### DETAILS: Qdos

**Style:** Luxury Japanese-style tree houses

**Size:** Five tree houses, each housing two

**Service:** Discreet

**Cuisine:** Cafe onsite, full breakfast included in tariff

**Outlook:** Overlooks Qdos Arts culture park

**Room Service:** No

**Disabled Facilities?** No

**Fee:** Peak rate \$240 per night per couple, off-peak \$180

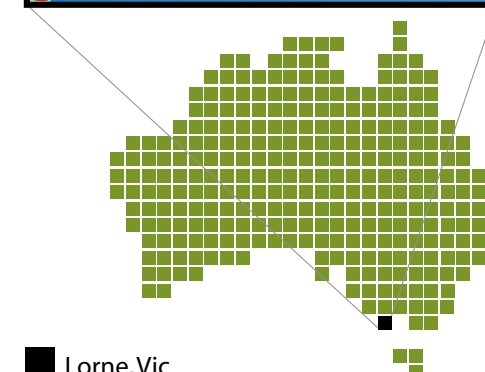
✧ Romantic escapism with a sculpture garden and art gallery just outside the door. ✧ Having to leave!

### CONTACTS

**Where:** 35 Allenvale Road, Lorne, Vic 3232

PHONE: (03) 5289 1989 WEBSITE: [www.qdosarts.com](http://www.qdosarts.com)

EMAIL: [qdos@iprimus.com.au](mailto:qdos@iprimus.com.au)



■ Lorne, Vic