

Love the Life!

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Myrtleford Visitor Information Centre, Alpine Gate Cafe

WORDS JAMIE DURRANT

If you're travelling into Victoria's High Country, it comes highly recommended that you pay a visit to Myrtleford's official tourism and foodies' hub: the Myrtleford Visitor Information Centre and Alpine Gate Café.

Situated on the Great Alpine Road within the heart of Myrtleford, the café and visitor centre is as popular with locals as it is with information-hungry tourists looking to be pointed in the right belly-filling and/or adventure-seeking directions.

Visitor Centre coordinator Lauren Heidke says the centre is unique in that up to as many as 36 local volunteers are involved in operations, and with additions such as the 'build your own travel itinerary' Alpine Explorer touch screen system, and the new cycle helmet cams (free to hire), it is fast becoming the town's must-visit tourism discovery and planning destination.

'The community is clearly passionate about being involved in the centre, which is wonderful', says Lauren. 'The benefits to visitors are the always changing nuggets of local knowledge that are passed on. The volunteers are there for the right reasons, and are extremely positive about presenting Myrtleford as a great destination.'

'Our new helmet cams have been extremely popular. They're easy to use, come with a 9 hour battery life and simply strap onto your helmet ready for you to ride. Cyclists head out and film whatever they like and bring the cameras back to us. The footage is then edited to music and uploaded to Youtube - it's a great way to share fun experiences with the public, says Lauren.

Supporting a range of local premium producers, including some that may not have their own retail outlet or cellar door, the centre also doubles as a retail outlet. Gems such as the Barwidgee Lavender skin care range and wines from Eagle Range Estate and Souters, from the nearby Happy Valley, are but a few highlights of an expansive choice of offerings including the iconic Italian brand Michelinini and the very local boutique wine label Ferraro.

If the thought of sampling fine wines gets the tummy rumbling, taking a seat within the airy and bright, open plan Alpine Gate Café is your one way ticket to a fabulous foodie fix.

'My main aim is to look after the locals', says smiley and vivacious café owner Cindy Bell, a focus that has successfully made the Alpine Gate a bustling 'locals' meeting place, as well as a friendly and relaxed spot for visitors.

'I was born in Myrtleford, went to school here, says Cindy. 'Sure I have travelled; however I love this café and it simply being a part of the town. We have lots of fun with the locals - it's not all about making money; it's also about having fun and enjoying the great lifestyle.

Having purchased the business two years ago, the former Eurobin Red Stag café chef of 5 years, Cindy, seems surprised at the natural and continued growth of her business, with loyal, local clientele returning time and again.

'People come back because they know they're going to get consistent quality', says Cindy, and if sampling the 'selling like hot-cakes' luxurious Devonshire tea is a little light weight, then you can rest assured that the deluxe scotch fillet steak sandwich with homemade relish, or the tasty Hawaiian grilled chicken burger will certainly please the palate.

*Alpine Gate Café
Great Alpine Road, Myrtleford, Victoria
Tel. 03 5752 1375
Open. Mon-Fri, 7am-5pm, Sat & Sun, 9am-5pm*

*Myrtleford Visitor Information Centre
Tel. 03 5752 1044
Open. 9am-5pm 7 days,
excludes Christmas Day and Good Friday*