Step back in time in quaint colonial villages such as Berrima and Braidwood and explore the gracious gardens, art galleries and antique stores of Bowral and Moss Vale in the Southern Highlands.

Wind through Australia’s most fertile farming country to Yass, where Banjo Paterson lived on a farm here in his youth. Then explore the orchards and vineyards of the cherry capital of Young. Visit the cool-climate wineries near Murrumbateman and enjoy gourmet delights in Gundaroo and tiny Collector, before returning to Canberra. On this scenic touring route you can picnic on picturesque lakes and visit historic homesteads. See the sun fracture through the stained glass window of a century-old church and wander through rose gardens and cherry orchards. From food and wine to history and scenery, you’ll savour the delights of the Capital Country region.

DAY ONE

Drive out of Canberra and through the pretty riverside town of Queanbeyan, once a gold, silver and lead mining hub. Stop for a coffee in Bungendore, renown for its art, craft, antiques and restaurants, or detour south to the National Trust town of Braidwood. Tour Australia’s colonial past in Braidwood’s century-old buildings, crammed antique shops, tea houses and old world pubs. Have lunch here or wait until you reach the rose-lined streets of Goulburn, Australia’s oldest inland city. Visit historic landmarks such as St Saviours Cathedral, the 1849 Goulburn Courthouse and heritage-listed Riversdale Homestead. Stop in South Hill Homestead, which is said to be haunted, and have a pint at the Old Goulburn Brewery. From Goulburn you can take a side trip to Crookwell, the place to fish from sparkling streams and see an old stone inn. Or continue north to Mittagong in the heart of the Southern Highlands.
DAYS TWO TO FOUR

Have breakfast at a sandstone café on Lake Alexandra then walk to Mount Gibraltar, Mount Alexandra Lake or along the Box Vale Walking Track. In spring the floral displays in Winifred West Park are breathtaking. Check out the town’s famous antiques and art and craft stores before driving the short distance to Bowral, at the foot of Mount Gibraltar. Wander past gorgeous country gardens and grand old estates and learn about Australia’s best cricketer at the Donald Bradman museum. Next door is Moss Vale, where you can wind down the tree-lined main street, visit Leighton Gardens and browse antique and speciality shops. Before you get back on the highway, stop in Berrima, an 1830s pioneer village with gracious Georgian-English architecture. You can visit Australia’s oldest jail and tour the restored Courthouse Museum that doubles as an information centre. Drive back through Goulburn and the 1820s blue stone buildings of Gunning. Next stop is Yass, in the rich sheep grazing country where Banjo Paterson lived in his youth.

Have breakfast on historic Comur Street, where the colonial buildings have been lovingly restored. Then visit Cooma Cottage, once home to the great Australian explorer Hamilton Hume. He added classical Greek style wings and portico to the 1835 colonial cottage. Drive north out of Yass, stop for a picnic at Burrinjuck Dam and visit the glassware galleries along the road between Bowning and Binalong. Take a small side trip to the river town of Boorowa and tiny villages of Rugby, Frogmore, Rye Park and Reid’s Flat. Or head straight to Australia’s cherry capital of Young. See the pink-tinged cherry blossoms in early October, join the ten-day harvest celebration in November and pick fruit between November and April. If you prefer your fruit fermented, head to the Hilltops wine region, where the signature blends are cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, riesling and chardonnay. Alternatively, learn about Young’s controversial goldmining history in the Lambing Flat Folk Museum and walk to Tout’s Lookout for views over Wirrimah Valley.

Head out of Young and stop to explore Boorowa if you missed it before. Spot platypus on the river, learn about the town’s Irish history on the Shamrock Heritage Trail and see native birds at the local aviary. Visit an 1884 courthouse with Roman arches, then admire the stained glass windows and Italian marble altar of the first Catholic church west of the Great Dividing Range. Next door in the twin town of Harden-Murrumburrah, the local museum showcases a 19th century apothecary’s shop, music room, colonial kitchen and bathroom complete with thunderbox. Next, stop off at the excellent cool-climate wineries near Murrumbateman. Take a short detour to the gourmet village of Gundaroo and enjoy the fresh, quality produce in a sandstone restaurant or with a picnic on the Yass River. Drive through the tiny town of Collector and join the Canberra university students who line up for the famous food of the Lynwood Café. Soak up the scenery on the slow drive back to Canberra.