



Orange Farm Trail visits an orchard Hillside Harvest and (inset).



TAKE A TOUR Orange appeal

The Farm Trail, Orange, NSW



Tara Wells regrets that in the four years she lived less than an hour down the road, she didn't discover this tour.

In the history of calling things "orange", the fruit came first. The colour, second, and the Central West NSW town settled in the 1820s on Wiradjuri land, a distant third. The latter's namesake is likely a nod to a 19th-century Dutch "Prince of Orange".

That helps explain why Orange's food bowl does not contain oranges. Citrus doesn't love the cool climate like chardonnay vines do, despite fertile

volcanic soils from Gaanha Bula-Mount Canobolas. Today I'm exploring the district's produce with third-generation apple orchardist Pam King, owner of Country Food Trails.

We begin at a farm producing something so tiny that Angela and Brendon Argyle's first harvest of 10g was cause for celebration. Since then Argyle Australian Saffron has produced far more award-winning

"red gold", prized for packing a flavour punch into each flower stigma. *Crocus sativus* flowers are fleeting so I see unremarkable rows of mondo grass-like sproutings. The work, at this moment, is underground. Brendon digs up corms that look like garlic cloves and tells the story of saffron's life cycle. For just one gram of finished product, it takes 250 painstakingly hand-picked and stripped flowers. It's a farmgate exclusive to Country Food Trails, with tastings of homemade saffron-infused honeycomb, lamingtons and tea.

The next stop can be visited by anyone, any time. When you come determines what you'll see. Right now at Hillside Harvest I'm picking the first plump cherries of the season. A quick lesson from owner Paula Charnock (twist at the stem; don't pull at the fruit), and I'm filling my bucket. At other times of year there are stone fruit, berries, figs, pears and apples.

The final stop is another Country Food Trails exclusive. I'd spotted Fourjay Farms' roasted hazelnuts, muesli and dukkah at Orange's monthly farmers' market earlier this morning (they completely sold out). Now I'm standing among rows of hazelnut trees learning from long-time

farmers Basil and Jean Baldwin about their crop. Some 23 tonnes of hazelnuts fall from the trees here in Orange, to be enjoyed in places as far-reaching as Journey Beyond trains *The Ghan* and *Great Southern*, and in Adelaide's Rinaldi nougat.

The tour itinerary changes seasonally so there's always something ripe and ready – just don't expect oranges.

The writer was a guest of Central NSW Joint Organisation and Orange360.

TO KNOW
STAYING THERE
The Oriana Orange is a revamped retro motel with on-site restaurants using local produce.
orianaorange.com

TOURING THERE
Country Food Trails offers a variety of Orange tours. The Farm Trail is a full-day tour visiting two to three farms and includes wine tastings and lunch. Prices start from \$235 a person, depending on numbers.
countryfoodtrails.com.au

GETTING THERE
Orange is a 3.5-hour drive from Sydney or Canberra, or a five-hour train from Sydney. **transportnsw.info**