

DESTINATION: RYE, VIC

Mornington glory

Jane Reddy is in liquid bliss taking the waters at Peninsula Hot Springs.

In the change room at the Peninsula Hot Springs I'm eavesdropping as two half-dressed strangers, side-by-side, chuckle together.

"If I were rich I would come here every week," one says.

"We women need to look after ourselves, don't we," the other replies, as they nod in agreement.

I'm headed to their happy place, the adults-only spa dreaming area of the springs at Rye, on the Mornington Peninsula, and a 90-minute drive from Melbourne.

Here, and at the public bathhouse at this open-air property in the bush, mineral waters pumped from a thermal aquifer more than 600 metres underground feed the property's 29 pools of tem-

peratures ranging from 36 to 43 degrees. Some cool pools operate during summer.

Screened by stands of tea trees and native grasses, bathers recline on wooden daybeds and float in steaming pools and barrel jacuzzis.

At 42 degrees the heat of the circular orchid pool is too intense. Instead, I settle into 40-degree waters, vaguely aware of birdsong and the quiet talk of fellow bathers (signs encourage this).

For greater solitude, there are private outdoor thermal pools and indoor baths, infused with essential oils of lemon and orange.

"Taking the waters" from the sodium chloride bicarbonate spring has never been such a serene (or eclectic) experience.

Founded in 1995 by brothers Charles and Richard Davidson and Norm Cleland, Charles's overseas spa experiences are reflected here in nature.

There is the hamam, or Turkish steam room (BYO rinsing container and scrubbing mitt); Arabian marquee with couches and treatment tables; breathtaking Russian plunge pool and Japanese reflexology walk, a shallow stretch of water inlaid with pebbles to massage feet.

The result is a luxe cultural medley rather than spa theme park.

My massage starts with a smocking ceremony of local lemon myrtle and paperbark and ends in an anteroom hung with Japanese room dividers, and green tea.



In between I have dreamt, snored and dribbled before therapist Michelle, who is unfazed by what she has seen. "It's a sign that you are relaxing," she says.

At the more social bathhouse, mothers and babies paddle next to a waterfall and a man of a

certain age starjumps under an outdoor shower before entering the cave pool. Long live the weekly rituals of the spa. ■

The writer visited courtesy of Peninsula Hot Springs. See peninsulahotsprings.com.

Cultural infusion ... Peninsula Hot Springs is modelled on overseas spa experiences.