

## Hilary Doling: A Travel Writing Masterclass

Specialties · By Simon Townsend · 4 min read

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This article was written by the brilliant travel writer Hilary Doling. She's also the EDITOR of the paper's travel section. So this article is VERY VALUABLE to students. Why? If you study her own style, you should get a good idea of the kind of bright, informative, PEOPLE-centred writing that she and all travel editors prefer. Because there is so little good travel writing offered to editors, a lot of crap gets published, I'm sad to say.

Early bird gets the massage Words: 575 + factfile

It looks great on paper, a weekend at a Hunter resort, but be smart when you book. Hilary Doling found out too late.

As soon as we'd checked into the swish Cypress Lakes Resort in the Hunter wine region, I headed straight for the 18-hole championship golf course. I couldn't wait to give those greens a going over. Meanwhile my husband made for the Golden Door Resort Spa for two hours of pummelling and pampering. He'd opted for a Mineral Mud body wrap and an age-defying Self Renewal Facial. Our son sat quietly amusing himself reading a book.

OK, I'm lying about all of the above. We are a cliched couple. Personally I wouldn't know a birdie from an albatross, but my husband was out of the villa door and on the course before you could shout, ``Fore". Meanwhile I was desperately trying to book in for those miracle treatments (without much luck as it turned out. More of that later).

As for the bookworm, too young to play, he was still resolutely trying to follow his father out of the villa and into the path of dangerous low-flying balls, being equally obsessed with all things sporting.

Opened in 1996, Cypress Lakes is looking good. In the early days things were a little stark. Now greenery has grown up, balconies have more privacy and the whole place is blooming.

It is a large resort spread over rolling hills in Pokolbin, the heart of wine country, with more than 200 one-, two- and three-bedroom villas; outdoor swimming pool and spa, two floodlit tennis courts and central reception building with two restaurants and bars so you never feel crowded in.

Just as well, really, because it's a popular conference venue and a haven for well-heeled families at weekends. There's an awful lot of Ralph Lauren polo shirts and chinos knocking about the place. Which means there can be a lot of people.

While the golf course is appropriately manicured, the villas are scattered through bushland over a pretty wide area. The only time you realise the place is full is at breakfast (see Lowdown).

We stayed in a villa set high above the golf course and resort. I loved the peace and quiet, but if you don't fancy a healthy walk or lazy drive down to the action, make sure your villa number isn't in the high 600s.

The villa was so comfortable and clean (Note to self: must clean stove) that I could happily have moved in permanently.

There was a large kitchen with an open-plan dining and lounge area. And a wide deck complete with stylish outdoor timber furniture.

If you like the space of a villa but the service of a hotel, there are 15 channels of satellite television and all of the resort's dining and sport facilities are a phone call away.

I'm told the course is challenging but enjoyable. I certainly enjoyed looking out over it from the comfort of the wide deck.

There's a Critter Club for children from 3 to 13 if you want to do a bit of trouble-free wine tasting on your weekend away.

The spa has a range of tempting treatments on offer. I'd had my eye on something called Pampering Passion, which offered 3 1/2 hours of indulgence. There is also a nice line in customer flattery "true health and beauty comes from within" says the brochure even though most people are after physical transformation as much as stress relief.

I was so convinced by the invitation to "take a journey into our sanctuary of wellness and holistic healing" and experience "a unique blend of ancient natural therapies combined with 21st-century science to restore balance and harmony" that I would have happily spent all weekend and most of my bank balance (treatments start at \$80) there.

Provided, of course, that they weren't booked solid until 2pm on the day I was due to check out at 11am.

So if you're after some serious relaxation, I'd advise you to book into the spa as soon as you book your weekend away.

The effect of not being able to de-robe and de-stress in the spa as anticipated can be, well, very stressful.

No matter, by the time we left I was feeling pretty mellow anyway and my husband was on his way to being a new-age man.

"You know," he said, as he packed the clubs in the boot, "this spa business doesn't look too bad after all. There's a Golfer's Revival [1 1/2 hours, crystal healing foot soak, revitalising Vichy shower, massage] that doesn't look too bad."

Yes, but will it improve the handicap?

## **The Lowdown**

Address: Cypress Lakes Resort, corner McDonalds and Thompsons roads, Pokolbin, NSW 2320.

Phone: 1800 061 818; 02 4993 1822; fax 02 4993 1598.

Visit: [www.cypresslakes.com.au](http://www.cypresslakes.com.au).

Tariff: From \$140 per person, per night twin-share midweek, in a pretty, spacious villa with full country-style breakfast. From \$354 per person, two nights weekend in villa accommodation with full breakfast. There are also a variety of spa and/or golf packages available. For example, the Stay & Play, from \$179 per person twin-share, is for one night midweek including breakfast with the choice of either 18 holes of golf on the championship course or a one-hour aromatherapy massage at The Golden Door Resort Spa. Prices based on one- and two-bedroom villas. Weekend green fees for in-house guests \$95 for 18 holes.

Getting there: About 90 minutes' drive from Sydney.

Best tip: Book a large three-bedroom villa and go with friends.

Bed: Very comfortable but the amount of accommodation means that your bed could be a long appetite-stimulating walk away from breakfast.

Breakfast: The large kitchens make eating in the villa easy but breakfast is a great buffet so why self-cater? Just remember to get there early; once the conference parties get up, there can be a crowd waiting for croissants.

Rating: 7/10

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Reprinted from The Wonderful World of Journalism. Written in the spirit of Simon Townsend's journalism craft advice. Visit [simontownsendjournalist.com](http://simontownsendjournalist.com) for the full archive.