

# Ariah Park

*Just 20 minutes west of Temora lies Ariah Park, a village of peppercorn trees, grand buildings and wide streets that seem to exist in another era. Slip into something comfortable, slow down and enjoy the journey as you explore this timeless village.*

Ariah Park (pronounced Area Park) is a heritage-listed village whose appearance has changed very little since the height of its prosperity in the roaring 20's.

First settled in 1850 by big grazing interests, Ariah Park sprang to life in 1906 with the arrival of the railway, connecting the town to the larger centre of Temora. Ariah Park's ubiquitous peppercorn trees were planted in 1917, around the same time that the village became the first place in rural Australia where shipments of wheat were loaded for rail travel – bringing a degree of affluence to the town. The Federation-style Ariah Park Hotel, with its plush rooms and intricate tiles, remains a testament to the village's prosperous history.

Once known as a place where pleasure-seekers with a penchant for automobiles mixed with folk who frowned on 'progress', Ariah Park would have been an interesting place to be a fly on the wall during its heyday. Today, the town primarily exists to serve the surrounding agricultural district, which produces a range of cereal crops, wool, beef, lamb, deer, pigs, ostriches and stud rams. Fun fact: The pig from Babe was born and raised in Ariah Park.

Wander the town's quaint streets to admire the old shops and picture a time when horses and sulkies were the mode of transport and cars were a spectacle. While you're there, drop into Second Glance, a community centre where visitors and locals can meet over a friendly cuppa and browse the ever-changing range of bric-a-brac and wares brought in by townsfolk. The area's history can also be explored at Echoes of Ariah Park, a museum that provides information on the district's heritage.

Feel like exploring the place? Enjoy an appetising lunch or dinner at the Ariah Park Hotel, where you can savour your food in the hotel's wonderful outdoor beer garden. Kids will love the play area and animal enclosure; they can even reach through the fence and pet a calf or hold one of the hotel's resident chooks. Feel like exploring the place? Stay the night in one of the Ariah Park Hotel's freshly renovated B&B style rooms to experience a slice of country hospitality. Alternatively, the quiet and secure Ariah Park Camping Ground is located a stone's throw from town, supplying flat sites, hot showers and toilets for caravans and campers.

For more information visit [ariahpark.com.au](http://ariahpark.com.au)



Wheat Lumper Statue - Image: Nigel Judd



# Heart of Gold

*Coolamon - Junee - Temora*

Unearth the people & places of The Riverina's heartland along The Canola Trail



**On opening night they all came through the doors and we couldn't believe it**

## New locals in the Aria

*In 2017, Sydney couple Jacqui Collins and Paul Meek were ready to shed their city skins and semi-retire in Tasmania. Life had other plans, and they are now busy breathing new life into the 105-year-old Aria Park Hotel.*

Even by country pub standards, the heritage-listed Aria Park Hotel is impressive, having retained much of its Victorian décor and original features. The building's imposing exterior opens to a warren of elegant rooms surrounded by grand staircases, stained-glass windows and handmade tiles. For Jacqui, it was love at first sight.

"We were looking for a big old house in Tasmania when my sister happened to come through Aria Park and saw the hotel," she reflects. "Paul and I were in the car within a couple of weeks and absolutely fell in love with the building as soon as we saw it. We also realised what a huge job it would be to take the business on."

After visiting a second time in December 2017 with my 10-year-old daughter, Lucie, we all sat down together and said, 'let's go for it'. At this point, we still hadn't met anyone in Aria Park so it was a huge leap of faith."

With a background as a club manager, Jacqui had plenty of hospitality experience behind her. For Paul, a logistics manager, the difference in job description was a little more extreme.

"I was generally on the other side of the bar!" He laughs. "It's definitely been a lifestyle change for me, but I'm happy with it. That said, we're probably busier now than we've ever been."

Jacqui and Paul reopened the hotel in January 2018. The response from Aria Park locals amazed them.

"When we first visited this village it seemed like a ghost town," Jacqui says. "We wondered where all the people were! On opening night they all came through the doors and we couldn't believe it. That was really the first time we met the locals and they have continued to be so welcoming and supportive towards us."

Since then, the couple have worked hard to make the Aria Park Hotel a place that brings excellent food and events to the

town as well as providing quality accommodation for visitors. They received a Heritage Green Energy Grant in May 2019 which assisted in their renovations and upgrades to things such as bathrooms, sitting rooms and air-conditioning.

"We're aiming to boost the accommodation side of the business and encourage people to 'eat, stay, play', contributing to the town's economy," Jacqui says. "We're also intent on providing services that the townspeople want and need."

"When we took over the hotel we noticed there was nothing for ladies - so, we created a Ladies Room where women can get together, enjoying wine and fostering a real wine culture in the town. We also celebrate events like Oktoberfest and Valentine's Day with special themed dinners and live music."

With a focus on welcoming families and kids, the Aria Park Hotel menu offers good-quality pub grub, an inviting outdoor dining area and a large space that has allowed Jacqui to indulge her passions for gardening and animals.

"We've built an animal enclosure with chickens, goats, lambs and a little calf, next to the kids' play area," she says. "Local parents tell us that their kids try to con them into coming to the hotel just to see the animals - which I love! I've also been able to start a veggie garden and we're now hosting gardening workshops."

It's clear that Jacqui, Paul and Lucie relish not only the challenge of running a busy pub, but country life itself.

"My daughter loves it here," Jacqui smiles. "She gets up early in the morning and helps to feed the animals and is able to ride her bike around town with friends. At first I was worried, wondering where she was, but then I realised that people here look out for everybody's kids. It really is a wonderful place."

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