



An Introduction to The Benedictine Community of New Norcia

PAX - a Latin word meaning Peace is the motto of the Benedictine monks of New Norcia. It is the fruit of their regular, prayerful and stable life together and the gift they offer to all who visit their town

Helpful Facts at a Glance

- Located on the Great Northern Highway, 132km or a leisurely two hours north of Perth
- Founded by Roman Catholic Spanish Benedictine monks in 1847
- 9 monks of New Norcia, 8 in residence
- Approximately 40 residents (additional to monks) and 70 employees
- 69 buildings of which 27 are listed on the National Estate by the National Trust
- Buildings and architecture reflect Spanish/European influence
- Town, farm and services owned by the monks of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia
- Self-sufficient - no regular government funding, with monks relying on own businesses and donations
- Approximately 75,000 visitors a year
- All sites of interest within walking distance
- Roadhouse, Museum and Art Gallery, Hotel, Town Tours, Guesthouse, Education Centre, Group Accommodation are main operations in the town
- 8,375 hectare (20,000 acre) grain and sheep farm
- Filming, photography and interviews of monks by prior request (see application in media section)
- No filming, photography or recording of monks at prayer
- Filming and photography permitted around the town
- Monastery not open to the public
- European Space Agency (ESA) Deep Space Tracking Station located 7km south of town with ESA interpretive display at New Norcia
- Overnight accommodation available at the New Norcia Guesthouse and New Norcia Hotel

Introduction

The Benedictine Community of New Norcia is the official title of the group of Roman Catholic monks who have owned and operated the small town of New Norcia, which is located 132km north of Perth in Western Australia, since 1847. New Norcia is Australia's only monastic town, with the Monastery, where the monks live, work and pray, at its heart. The Monastery is set amongst imposing buildings and a rural landscape that is archetypal Australian outback in summer, but bursts forth with lush green and colour during winter/spring.

The Monks of New Norcia

The monks of New Norcia live according to the guidance and rhythms of *The Rule of St Benedict*, which has been followed by monks since the sixth century AD. Monks who do so are referred to as 'Benedictines', although the concept of monks being part of a religious order is a relatively new concept, dating back only to the 19th century. Unlike many priests and nuns, monks do not join an 'order' as such, but instead join an autonomous monastery where they promise to remain for the rest of their lives. Some monks will write 'OSB' after their names, meaning 'Order of St Benedict'. The monks who live at Holy Trinity Abbey will often simply call themselves 'a monk of New Norcia'.

The Name New Norcia

New Norcia was named by its Spanish founders in honour of the birthplace of St Benedict, who was born in a town called Norcia, or 'Nursia' in Italy in around 480AD.

A Brief History

New Norcia was founded at its current site in 1847, just 17 years after the settlement of the Swan River Colony, by a group of four Spanish monks led by Dom Rosendo Salvado and Dom José Serra. The monks had left Spain for Italy in 1838 after the anti clerical government suppressed religious orders. Bishop Brady, the Catholic Bishop of Perth, invited them to set up a mission in the 'wild bush country' beyond the limits of the new colony. After arriving in Perth, the monks walked north in search of Aborigines, and eventually found some on the banks of the Moore River on 1 March 1846. They set up camp at New Norcia's current site in 1847. The monks celebrate the first of March as their Foundation Day.

The early years of New Norcia were full of setbacks and disappointments as the monks struggled with the harsh natural environment, and the cultural challenges of teaching the Aborigines about agriculture and Christianity. Two other groups of missionaries that set out at the same time as Salvado and Serra both failed within their first couple of years.

By the time that Salvado died in Rome in 1900 aged 86, New Norcia was an established mission and thriving farm. However, the effects of European settlement had been tragic for the Aborigines, many of whom died from European diseases unknowingly introduced to them by the missionaries. Salvado had tried to equip the Aborigines with the skills necessary to survive the changing times, but he felt profound personal loss at so many deaths. It appears that the Aborigines were more forgiving of Salvado. It is said that they cried and wailed for three days when word of his death reached New Norcia. Salvado's body was brought back to the town, and his tomb is inside the Abbey Church.

Salvado had appointed Fulgentius Torres, a Spanish monk with Bachelor's degrees in both Arts and Science, as his successor. Torres embarked on construction of a number of buildings to cater for the educational needs of the surrounding district. St Gertrude's College for girls and St Ildephonsus College for boys, opened in 1908 and 1913 respectively, provided facilities for around 200 boarders. During Torres' period as Abbot, the Bishop of Perth extended the area administered by the New Norcia mission to cover 30,000 square miles. Torres also established the Kalumburu mission in the far north of the State. Torres died in 1914, however the schools that he set up operated until 1991. They, together with the farm, formed the basis of the monks' work and income for most of the twentieth century.

By the 1980s the schools had become uneconomical to operate, and were closed down with relatively short notice in 1991. Almost overnight, the 200 students, staff and associated families left New Norcia, leaving a population of about 50 monks and locals. The monks were forced to embark on a transition within the town in identity and financial security following the loss of the colleges. However, schools and other organisations began requesting the use of the large accommodation, catering, and classroom facilities left vacant in the

colleges. Tourism also grew, and the monks began harnessing these two markets as means of revenue and expressing the monastic value of hospitality.

New Norcia Today

New Norcia is 'open' every day of the year, with some exceptions for Christmas Day and Good Friday. The monks own and operate a 8,375 hectare farm, a Roadhouse and General Store, a Hotel, a Museum and Art Gallery and Gift Shop, an Education Centre, a Group Accommodation service utilising the facilities in the two colleges and the Old Convent, a Guesthouse, and twice-daily guided Town Tours. Approximately 75,000 people visit New Norcia every year and the monks employ about 70 full time, part time and casual staff to run the various town operations as well as the support infrastructure that is needed to operate a town and Monastery.

The Population of New Norcia

There are nine monks who belong to the Benedictine Community of New Norcia, eight of whom live in the Monastery. Approximately 40 lay people live in New Norcia, made up almost exclusively of employees and their families. The population can temporarily swell to over 300 on a weekend if large groups are staying in the colleges and at the hotel.

The Town

New Norcia has been described as 'a slice of old Spain in the Australian bush', due to its many buildings displaying European style architecture. The township is made up of 69 buildings spread over about five hectares. A precinct comprising 27 of buildings and surrounding grounds has been listed by the National Trust on the National Estate due to their heritage value. There is about 750m between the buildings on the northern and southern boundaries of the town, and about 500 metres between buildings on the eastern and western sides. All the sites in the town are within easy walking distance of each other. New Norcia is bisected by the Great Northern Highway, with the Monastery being on the east side, and the visitor services precinct being on the west side. Each side has a different 'feel'. The East Moore River flows along the eastern boundary of the town.

Travelling to New Norcia

New Norcia is more a hamlet than a town, and is a leisurely two hour drive north of the Perth CBD. Travelling times vary, depending on any large trucks and road trains that may be sharing the journey, and road works that are often being carried out along the way. Car is the main means of transport to New Norcia, although Transwa buses stop at New Norcia several times a week.

A Suggested Itinerary

New Norcia is a pleasant day trip from Perth. The visitor can arrive in town by mid-morning, spend a few hours browsing the Museum and Art Gallery or strolling its environs, have a meal at the Hotel or Roadhouse, join the two hour guided Town Tour, have afternoon tea, and be back in Perth well before sunset. Being north of Perth, New Norcia has the benefit of having more fine weather than the southern tourist destinations. It has been said that New Norcia is at its best in the late afternoon and early evening. The slanted light is gentler and has a golden hue, the birds come to life, and the sunsets can be exceptional. It is a perfect setting for a relaxing stroll. There are enough attractions to keep a guest overnight. Accommodation is available at the Hotel, and an extended stay will maximise the benefits of the relaxed tempo that seduces most guests after an hour or two at New Norcia. The various visitors books around the town are full of compliments from guests about the 'peace', 'tranquility' and 'relaxation' of New Norcia, which suggest that these are the greatest attractions of the town.

The New Norcia landscape changes from the hot, dry, and dusty 'outback' look of November to April, with temperatures usually in the mid-thirties, to the green, lush, almost 'English' setting from May to October. Nights can be surprisingly chilly from about Easter onwards, while winter days can also be cold. New Norcia's 'peak' season begins with the arrival of the first wildflowers in July, and runs until the arrival of the first warm weather in about mid-October.

Services for Visitors and Residents

New Norcia has six main departments that provide visitor services. These are managed and operated by employees of the Benedictine Community on behalf of the monks: The Roadhouse, the Hotel, the Museum, Art Gallery and Gift Shop, the Guided Walking Tours, the Education Centre, and Group Accommodation.

The Roadhouse The Roadhouse is located at the southern entrance to the town. It consists of a Post Office, a small convenience store, take away meals and sales of petrol.

The New Norcia Hotel The Hotel is set back about a hundred metres from the Highway on a hill on the western side, and has an impressive façade. It was built in 1927 as accommodation for the visiting parents of the students boarding at the colleges. It was converted to a hotel in the 1950s and has 15 basic but comfortable rooms, with shared hallway bathrooms. The Hotel has a licensed bar, and a kitchen that serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. It is also a popular venue for group functions.

The Museum and Art Gallery The Museum houses an impressive collection of art and artifacts owned by the Community that reflects the Monastic, European and Indigenous history of New Norcia. The Art Gallery displays paintings dating from hundreds of years, right through to a contemporary religious collection. The Gift Shop sells souvenirs and local produce, including the New Norcia Bread, Nutcake, Pan Choccolatti and Abbey Wines.

The Guided Town Tours Some of New Norcia's most impressive features are found inside buildings that are not open to the public. The only way to see them, and to have the eclectic built environment interpreted and the history of New Norcia explained, is to join the very popular twice-daily Town Tour. Experienced guides take guests on a two-hour stroll through the major buildings including the chapels in the Monastery and Colleges. Tours leave from the front of the Museum at 11.00am and 1.30pm daily.

The Education Centre The New Norcia Education Centre delivers hands-on programmes to school and community groups of all ages. The activities are designed to give students an authentic and practical experience of New Norcia's Aboriginal, Monastic, and agricultural history and culture. New Norcia has Aboriginal artists and experts who supervise students in activities ranging from art and language, through to spear and boomerang throwing.

Group Accommodation The buildings that made up St Gertrude's and St Ildephonsus' Colleges and the Old Convent are now used to accommodate groups from 15 to 250. These groups are either participating in the programmes conducted by the Education Centre, or using New Norcia's unique built and natural environments as venues and sources of inspiration for music, art and drama camps, as well as leadership camps and retreats.

Food and Wine

The Spanish monks brought their Mediterranean diet of bread, wine and olive oil with them to New Norcia, and developed the means to sustain it. The monks operated a bakery in the Monastery until the early 1990s, and cultivated vineyards elsewhere that were eventually sold off. An olive grove was planted near the monastery precinct in the 1860s and this is harvested by the New Norcia staff and volunteers.

The Monastery Bakery The Bakery was leased to a private business in the 1990s, and is not open to the public. Bread and long life shelf products (such as Nutcake and Pan Choccolatti) are baked in its 100-year-old wood-fired oven every day for sale in shops from New Norcia to New York under the 'New Norcia Bakeries' label. Bakery produce may be purchased in New Norcia from the Museum Gift Shop, the Roadhouse and online via the New Norcia website www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au

New Norcia Abbey Wines The Abbey Wines label is owned by a private business, but the wines are cellared beneath the Monastery. They include Chardonnay, Cabernet Merlot, Shiraz, Vintage Port and Liqueur Muscat. They are available for purchase from the Museum Gift Shop, the Hotel and online via the New Norcia website www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au

New Norcia Olive Oil The olive oil is made from olives that are grown, harvested and bottled at New Norcia according to traditional Spanish techniques. On years when there has been a harvest, the olive oil is sold through the Museum Gift Shop and online via the New Norcia website www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au

New Norcia Abbey Ale New Norcia Abbey Ale is a limited handcrafted brew made for the monks of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia by Brew Master Dr Chuck Hahn of Malt Shovel Breweries.

It is exclusively on tap at the New Norcia Hotel but can be purchased bottled from the New Norcia Hotel, selected Perth outlets and online via the New Norcia website www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au

The Monastery Guesthouse

The monks operate a Guesthouse that adjoins the Monastery. A cornerstone of monastic life is the virtue of 'hospitality', which is integral to the monks' search for God. St Benedict cited Christ's words in the Gospel of St Matthew that 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' as evidence that God may be found in visitors to the monastery.

In the days when monks were plentiful and strangers few, a visitor arriving at the Monastery would have been greeted by the Abbot, invited to join the monks in prayer, had their hands and feet washed, invited to a meal, and given a bed. Such a literal interpretation of the Rule of Benedict is no longer practical with 75,000 visitors to New Norcia a year, but the monks still offer visitors accommodation and meals in their Guesthouse. There is no set charge for this, but the monks suggest guests make a donation, of \$75 per person per night to cover costs.

The Guesthouse is not regarded as an alternative form of accommodation to the Hotel. The Guesthouse is primarily for people who are seeking to join the monks for prayer, are on retreat, or who are at least seeking some spiritual refreshment.

The Farm

From its foundation, New Norcia has been a farm, and it is within the farm that the monastery and township steadily were built up. The New Norcia town site is surrounded by its 8,375 hectare or 20,000 acre farm, which makes it one of the largest farms in the District.

About 40% of the farm area is uncleared and still in its natural state. The result is an area that is a haven for flora and fauna. It was recently estimated that there are around 500 species of wildflowers in one uncleared part of the farm, with 212 of them being identified and mapped. The night sky at New Norcia is crystal clear, and an evening walk beneath the stars is worth the visit in itself.

The New Norcia Deep Space Tracking Station

In 1999, scientists from the European Space Agency (ESA) toured New Norcia, looking for a location to site their Deep Space Tracking Station. Although the site chosen was on a neighbouring property about 8km south of New Norcia, a relationship between the monks of New Norcia and ESA was established, and has continued beyond the opening of the Station in 2003. The Station is involved in tracking ESA missions to map Mars, as well as the 'Rosetta', which is on a 14 year journey to rendezvous with a comet.

ESA funded the establishment of the 'ESA Room' at the Education Centre to meet any public demand for interpretation of the operations of the Station. The ESA Room contains scale models of three of the ESA spacecraft, as well as information panels about ESA and its missions, and a multimedia facility for presenting DVDs about the Agency's activities. The ESA Room is not open to the public, but is made available to schools and organisations as part of the Education Centre programmes.

The ESA Tracking Station dish can be seen on the western, or 'left' side of the Highway when approaching New Norcia from the south, approximately five minutes before arrival at New Norcia. It is usually easier to see on the return journey. A road can take the visitor to a gate, but entry is by prior permission from ESA.

Monastic Terminology

The monks who make up The Benedictine Community of New Norcia are often collectively referred to as 'the Community'. The Community is led by an Abbot, who is elected by the monks to lead them until he retires at age 75. New Norcia has had seven abbots, with the first four being Spanish. Fr John Herbert, the current Abbot of New Norcia, was elected in January 2009 following the death of the sixth Abbot, Fr Placid Spearritt, in October 2008.

The usual title for a monk of New Norcia is 'Dom', which comes from the Latin 'Dominus' or 'Master'. The usual mode of address for a monk is 'Dom', followed by the monk's first name; e.g. 'Dom Chris'. Some monks have been ordained priests so that they can perform rites associated with the Roman Catholic liturgy. They have the title 'Father', and their usual mode of address is 'Father' followed by the monk's first name; e.g. Father David. In more formal settings the Abbot is referred to as 'Fr Abbot'. All monks have equal status, regardless of their title.

The Abbot is assisted in his duties of administering the Monastery by a Prior. Fr David Barry is the Prior of New Norcia.

A Monk of New Norcia

Men become monks of New Norcia to seek God. Unlike other religious communities, they do not serve God and the world as teachers, or by operating hospitals or other charitable institutions. They believe that their vocation is in praying for the world. Up until the 1960s, the monks of New Norcia were mainly recruited by the Spanish Abbot during his trips to Spain. At its peak there were around 80 monks living in the Monastery. Today the monks are Australians who come mainly from the Eastern States.

Only men can join the Monastery, and unlike the early years when novices could be as young as 14, a man has to be over 18 to be considered. More often, they will be older than this, having lived normally in society for some of their adult years. Men can come and live with the monks and join them in their routine during a period of 'observation' to allow both the monks and the potential applicant to make a more informed decision. If the man is accepted as a novice, he gives up all his property and joins the Monastery. After a year, the monks vote as to whether he should join them for another three years, during which he studies scripture, liturgy, and Church history. At the end of the three years, if the monk agrees to make a lifetime commitment to the Monastery, he makes promises of Stability, Conversion of Life, and Obedience, and becomes a solemnly professed monk.

The Daily Life of the Monks

The monks spend their lives devoted to a strict routine of prayer, work and study, most of which takes place inside the Monastery cloister. They work Monday to Saturday, with Sunday a day of rest. The monks come together six times a day for prayer, and have Mass once a day in the mornings. Their day begins at 5.00am, and their last prayers together are at 8.15pm. Monks are not permitted to leave the Monastery cloister without permission of the Abbot or the Prior.

During the hours 9.00pm to 8.00am, the monks observe 'The Great Silence', when they do not speak, but focus on listening to God. From 8.00am until 9.00pm, they observe 'Day Silence', which means that they do not engage in superficial talk; although this observance does not hinder their interactions with outsiders, with whom the monks will gladly engage in conversation.

The monks come together for meal times, which are eaten in the Refectory in silence. During their meals, a monk is rostered to read aloud from scripture, followed by some reading from a book of non-fiction, while the other monks eat. Guests may join the monks for a meal at the invitation of the Abbot. After the meal, the Abbot may invite his guests to join him for port and coffee. Between 1.30pm and 2.30pm the monks may enjoy a siesta.

As well as prayer and study, each monk must undertake some form of work. The type of work is decided between the Abbot and the monk, according to the needs of the Monastery, and the skills and preferences of the monk. Monks work in the library, the office, the Education Centre, and on upkeep of the Monastery itself.

The best way to see a monk at work is to join the Community for one of their six prayer sessions a day. of the prayers are held in the Oratory, which is a chapel that is open to the public. The monks also gather for morning Mass in the Abbey Church.

| Prayer times from Monday to Saturday | Prayer times on Sunday |
|--|--|
| Vigils: 5.15am Lauds: 6.45am Mass (in Abbey Church): 7.30am Midday Prayer: 12.00pm Afternoon Prayer: 2.35pm Vespers: 6.30pm Compline: 8.15pm | Lauds: 6.00am Mass (in Abbey Church): 9.00am Midday Prayer: 12.00pm Vespers (in Abbey Church): 5.30pm Compline: 7.35pm |

Guests joining the monks for prayer are encouraged to arrive five minutes early, and to take a programme as they enter the Oratory. They should follow the monks' lead in when to stand and sit, and should wait for the monks to file out before leaving. Prayers take between fifteen and thirty minutes.

Holy Trinity Parish

Holy Trinity Abbey holds responsibility for the Catholic parish of New Norcia, which includes a number of surrounding towns and farms. An ordained monk is appointed parish priest, and he provides spiritual and pastoral service to parishioners. A Parish Council meets several times a year to discuss matters of relevance to the life of the parish.

Religion at New Norcia

The monks of New Norcia are Roman Catholic, and the practice of their liturgy is governed by the Archbishop of Perth. However, the monks openly welcome visitors and guests of all – and no – faiths to both visit New Norcia and to join them for prayers. The monks are generally open minded and respectful towards people's beliefs. Staff of New Norcia include some who are Catholic, some of other Christian traditions, some of other faiths or who have no faith tradition.

Income

New Norcia is mostly self-sufficient. The Benedictine Community receives no regular income from the State or Commonwealth governments but does apply for and receive grants as part of a standard competitive grant process. It relies primarily on its income-earning activities to fund the preservation of its historic buildings and the maintenance of New Norcia's infrastructure. The Community estimates that it needs \$19 million just to remedy the deterioration of its heritage buildings, and to preserve them for future generations. The Community welcomes donations and sponsorships from individuals and companies.

Aborigines at New Norcia

The relationship between the monks of New Norcia and the Yuat Aborigines whose ancestors inhabited the area when Salvado arrived is fundamental to the identity of New Norcia, and of the Benedictine Community. The monks recognise that the Aborigines were at New Norcia 40,000 years before the town was established, and that they have a rich culture, steeped in spirituality.

New Norcia has received some publicity as a result of its association with what has become known as 'The Stolen Generation' – the period from the 1930s until the 1970s when Commonwealth Government policy saw Aboriginal children removed from their parents and placed in institutions or in foster care. Some Aboriginal children who had been taken from their families were brought to New Norcia by government officials, where the monks and nuns cared for and educated them. The monks of New Norcia did not initiate the removal of Aboriginal children, but were seen by the government as suitable custodians because New Norcia had the facilities to house the children, and the experience of teaching them. Life at New Norcia was sometimes harsh for the Aboriginal children, as it was for many of the white students in that era. The monks of New Norcia

recognise that some Aboriginal children suffered greatly as a result of their separation from their families, and have sought to engage in practical reconciliation with the first inhabitants of New Norcia.

The Community has worked to cultivate and nurture the Yuat culture in a number of ways. The Education Centre conducts Aboriginal studies programmes that involve Aboriginal people in teaching art, story telling, mythology, tool-making and hunting. Father Bernard, who retired as the fifth Abbot of New Norcia in 1980, spent many years being taught by Aboriginal elders, is fluent in the Yuat language, and gained his Doctorate in Aboriginal studies. The exterior of the Education Centre also features six panels depicting the six Aboriginal seasons, painted by an Aboriginal Artist in Residence, Sheila Humphries. The Community has also set up the Prindiville Room at the Education Centre, which holds a number of display panels, each explaining various aspects of pre and post-European Aboriginal life. The exterior wall of the Education Centre also holds the 'Name Wall', where Aboriginal families may symbolically reconnect with the land by placing plaques with their names along a painting of the Moore River. The members of the New Norcia Aboriginal Corporation are consulted, and their approval sought, before any decision is made that involves the representation of the Aboriginal culture and history of New Norcia.

The Future of New Norcia

In these early years of the twenty-first century, the monks of New Norcia have responded to the strong public interest in both the heritage significance and spiritual focus of New Norcia. They have worked hard at developing New Norcia's existing facilities to ensure that visitors are enriched by the experience of spending either a day visit or longer overnight stay at New Norcia. Monks have always been renowned for achieving excellence in their varied endeavours, and those at New Norcia retain the tradition of wanting to glorify God through their actions.

Conclusion

New Norcia is many things to many people. However, it is primarily home to a community of monks; each of whom has made a promise to remain at New Norcia until they join the hundreds of their brethren who are buried in its cemetery.

Further Information

Contact the Public Relations Manager on:
communications@newnorcia.wa.edu.au
 P (08) 9654 8371

or the Chief Executive Officer on:
chiefexec@newnorcia.wa.edu.au
 P: (08) 9654 8018

Visit the New Norcia website at:
www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au

Recommended Photographic and Filming Locations

- The exterior and interior of the New Norcia Hotel
- The exteriors of St Gertrude's and St Ildephonsus' colleges
- The chapels in St Gertrude's and St Ildephonsus' colleges (only accessible on town tour, or by prior arrangement)
- The 'Six Aboriginal Seasons' panels in the Education Centre
- The new and old flour mills
- The sundial on the north wall of the old Novitiate in the central precinct
- The olive grove (by arrangement)
- The front of the Monastery
- The Monastery Gate
- The exterior and interior of Holy Trinity Abbey Church
- The surrounding paddocks, particularly of the canola and wheat in July/August
- The apiary (across the East Moore River)