

I'm truly sorry, regional Australia

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Dear regional Australia, I'm sorry. I'm sorry on behalf of myself, and my fellow travel writers. I'm sorry on behalf of travel bloggers and social-media influencers.

I'm sorry on behalf of Australian city-dwellers who maybe don't get out as much as they should, who might previously have preferred to spend their annual leave and their tourism dollars on fancy trips to Europe.

Because we're coming. With state borders closed and long-distance travel prohibitive, we're all looking for somewhere to go, somewhere new, somewhere different - and the highway beckons.

We're coming for you out in regional Australia. We're coming to drink at your pubs and eat at your cafes and stay in your B&Bs and peruse your shops and wander your streets. We're coming to discover your offerings and experience your culture and report back on it to readers and followers and friends.

And we're going to be a bit of a nightmare. Oh wow, we'll say. The coffee's actually all right out here, isn't it?

And isn't this place just so charming? Isn't this quaint? Isn't Australia an amazing place?

This will be annoying for you on several levels. It will be annoying because most times you'll hear all of this gushing praise and you'll think, yeah, no kidding. This is an amazing place, and it's been here all the time. You just never bothered to look.

It will also be annoying because these gushing five-star reviews will glamorise rural life. They will idealise the country Australian existence.

I grew up in regional Australia, in central Queensland, so I know that the rural existence is more complicated than that. Yes, it's charming in some ways, but it's soul-sapping in others. It can be a hard place to make a living. If you live in a rural area you already know this, and my reckoning is that you're not really going to appreciate some writer or influencer swanning in and telling you what an idyllic existence you enjoy, and how it's making them consider a tree change. Oh yeah, you'll think - go ahead and try. (Or: please don't.)

So all I can say is: sorry. This is definitely a case of "better late than never". We might be condescending and we might be glossing over any problems in regional Australia (or not staying long enough to notice them) but at least we're making the effort. At least we're taking the chance to see our own country and maybe understand a little bit more of it and send tourist dollars in the right direction.

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