

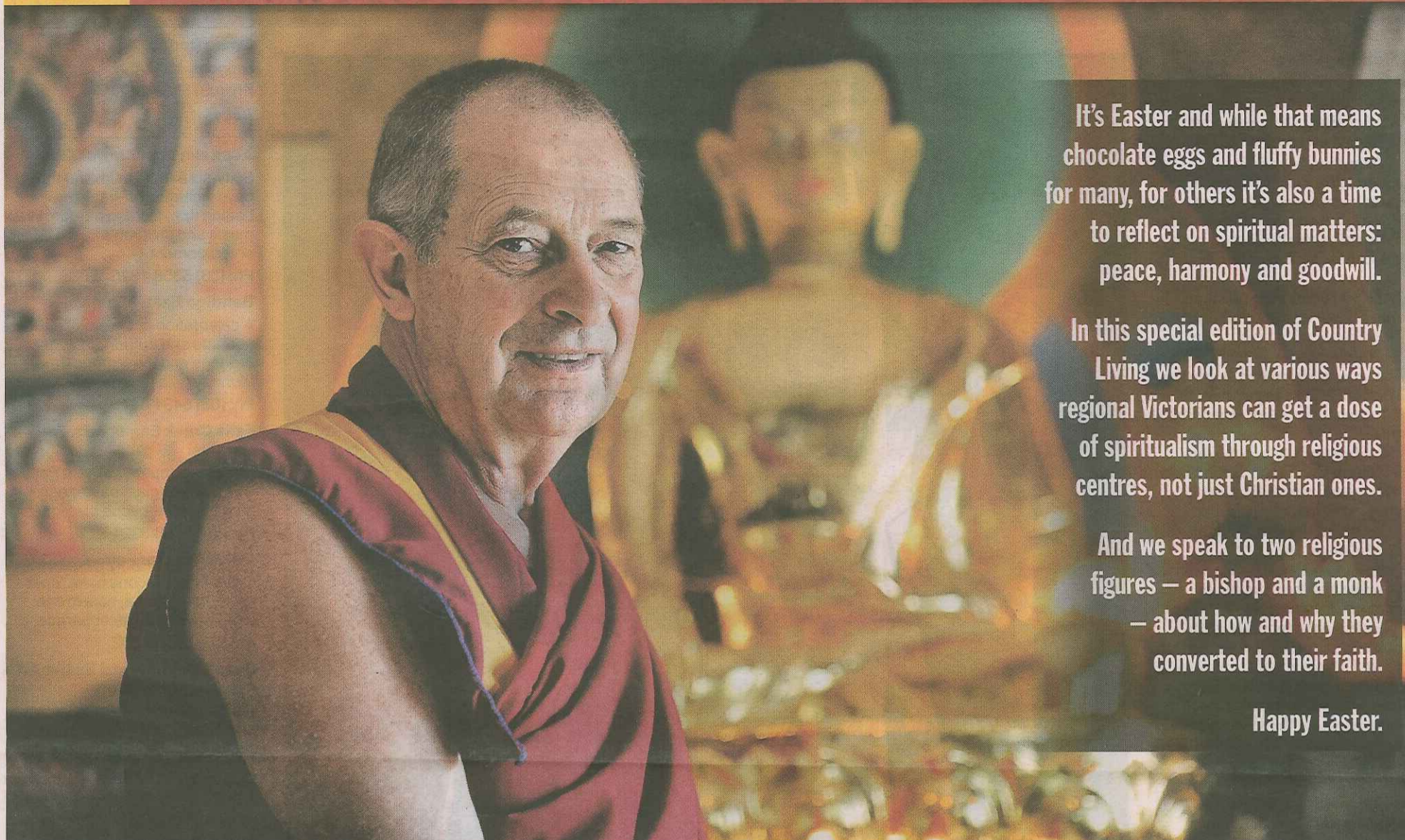
Country LIVING

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It's Easter and while that means chocolate eggs and fluffy bunnies for many, for others it's also a time to reflect on spiritual matters: peace, harmony and goodwill.

In this special edition of Country Living we look at various ways regional Victorians can get a dose of spiritualism through religious centres, not just Christian ones.

And we speak to two religious figures — a bishop and a monk — about how and why they converted to their faith.

Happy Easter.

Rebirth: Buddhist monk Thubten Gyatso says Bendigo locals are very accepting of Buddhism.

Picture: MARK GRIFFIN

Faith is the word

It wasn't so long ago that an Australian seeking spiritual sustenance was forced to make an arduous trek through Tibet, or negotiate the war-ravaged steps of a biblical pilgrimage.

However, Australia has come of age, with an array of spiritual and religious traditions on offer around our cities and country areas, from Catholic convents to Buddhist monasteries and Hindu retreats.

All offer a break from the noises and pressures of daily life, such as an easy-going half day class, an invigorating yoga retreat, or the silence of a monk's life — with most not-for-profit.

Here we explore a sample of spiritual and religious services available in rural Victoria.

And a word of advice: study up on facilities before heading out, to ensure your expectations are met.

Quakers

Quakerism, it seems, has taken off in Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Gippsland and Horsham, with all these areas conducting regular Quaker meetings.

The Religious Society of Friends began in Britain in the 17th century.

Now called Quakers, followers share a way of life rather than a set

The spirit is moving for many beliefs across Victoria, writes Sarah Hudson

of beliefs. Meetings take about an hour and involve followers sitting silently in a circle.

Details: www.quakers.org.au/

Buddhism

Rivalling only Christian centres in number, Buddhist monasteries are spread through regional Victoria.

This reflects the fact there are many different streams of Buddhism, including Tibetan, Kadampa, Theravada and Zen.

Probably the biggest in Victoria is the Atisha Buddhist Centre, 15 minutes' drive from Bendigo, which provides facilities for the study of Mahayana Buddhism and meditation.

Every Sunday at 10am the centre offers a free introduction to Buddhist meditation, a short introductory talk and "an informal cuppa".

For a taste of Japanese Zen Buddhism, head to the Ballarat group of the Jikishoan community.

The group meets for Sanzenkai, or meditation practice and service, on Sunday evenings from 5.30 to 7.30pm, at St Cuthbert's Hall, Ballarat West Uniting Church.

Across in East Gippsland, the SIBA Buddhist retreat centre offers a range of courses and events, from basic meditation to health and wellness residential retreats (which come at a cost).

The society is based outside Buchan, but on the third Sunday of every month in Bairnsdale at 25 Morgan St, from 4 to 6pm, they hold a free guided meditation afternoon.

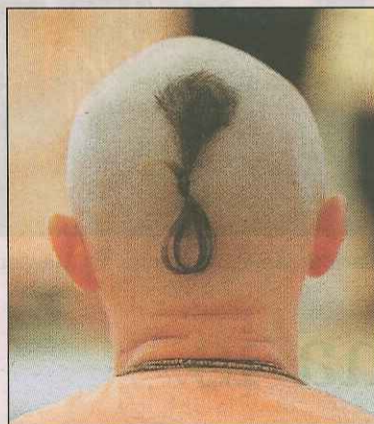
Closer to Melbourne The Tibetan Buddhist Society is based on a 10 acre property at Yuroke.

The Peaceful Land of Joy Meditation Centre offers classes and discussion groups each week, as well as retreats, the annual Tibetan New Year Festival in February and March and the Buddhist Spring Festival in November.

Every fortnight the Vipassana Centre of Victoria runs intensive 10-day meditation courses, that include waking up at 4am and sitting in silence for long periods.

The courses are held at Dhamma Aloka, a three-bedroom house on 7ha at Woori Yallock.

Courses are run solely on a



Peaceful: the main Hare Krishna retreat in Victoria is in Bambra.

donation basis, with no charges for food or accommodation.

Details: www.aloka.dhamma.org/
www.buddhanet.info/wbd/
www.atishacentre.org.au/
www.jikishoan.org.au/
www.sakya.com.au/siba
www.tibetanbuddhistsociety.org/

Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions, but it is not a single doctrine and there is no single founder, prophet or teacher.

In Australia, probably the best known arm of Hinduism is the Hare

Krishna movement. And in Victoria their main retreat centre is in Bambra, near Winchelsea. Visitors can get a taste of ashram life, attend classes and perform four hours of service per day for \$25 per person.

Alternatively, head to Mt Eliza on the Mornington Peninsula, for the Shiva School of Meditation, which offers a wide range of courses and retreats, from basic meditation lessons to hatha yoga sessions and ashram living.

Also on the Mornington Peninsula is Brahma Kumaris, a global organisation with its headquarters in India.

Set amid 8ha of native bushland, Brahma Kumaris teaches raja yoga meditation courses, a method of relaxing, refreshing and clearing the mind.

All courses, seminars and workshops — and even accommodation — are offered to the public free of charge with a request for a donation.

Details:
www.harekrishnavalley.com.au/
www.shivayoga.org/
www.bkwsu.org/au/

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Faith is the word in the search for enlightenment

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Christianity

It was Maria Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music* that made a nun's life seem romantic.

While churches of all denominations can be found in almost every town and village across the state, retreat centres open to the public are generally Catholic and give visitors a glimpse into Maria's

And you don't have to commit to being a nun — guests can stay for a day or a longer visit.

At the **Yarraarra Abbey in Yarra Glen**, guests are invited to join the Cistercian Monks in prayer, which is held seven times a day, beginning at 4am.

Warburton's Sancta Sophia Meditation Community offers help with visitors' spiritual journeys through meditation and liturgy.

A hermitage is also available for a day or a longer stay.

The community is drawn from the Carmelite and the Dominican traditions of contemplative prayer.

Nestled in the foothills of Mt Donna Buang at **Millgrove** is the Pallotti College retreat centre.

You can join Eucharist and prayer, while priests are available by arrangement for the sacraments and spiritual direction and counselling.

Details: www.cathcomm.org/cathcomm/retreats/index.html

www.cistercian.org.au/

www.sanctasophia.org.au/

www.pallottine.org.au/pallotti-college.htm

Theosophy and spiritualism

The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky with no common belief system, except for a search for "truth through freedom of thought".

In **Wodonga** on the first Tuesday of every month a group meets at Tower Place, High St, at 7.30pm for discussion.

With a focus on spiritual and physical health, the **Gawler Foundation at Yarra Junction** has worked with people challenged by serious illness. The foundation offers programs for anyone wanting to improve their physical, emotional or spiritual wellbeing.

Details: www.austheos.org.au/
www.gawler.org



Caring: Ian Gawler, from the Gawler Foundation, at Yarra Junction.

Big Buddha is Bendigo bound

Bendigo will soon be home to a giant jade Buddha and the largest Buddhist stupa — or monument — in the western world.

The Jade Buddha of Universal Peace has been carved from a rare boulder of translucent jade, discovered in Canada in 2000, and modelled on an Indian Buddha.

Since the sculpting of the Buddha was completed late last year, it has been touring Asia and from May will tour Australia before

settling in its final home at Bendigo's Atisha Buddhist Centre.

The Buddha is one of the largest and most magnificent ever carved from gemstone-quality true jade.

The Buddha, including lotus and throne is nearly 3.5 metres tall.

The Great Stupa, currently under construction, will be 50 metres square at the base and about 48 metres high.

It will be completed once enough donations have been received.



Buddha buzz: this Buddha monument will find a home at Bendigo.

Winners are grinners

LUCKY *Country Living* readers will this week be munching on Red Beard Bakery's hot cross buns, while others will marvel at Cirque du Soleil's new performance, *Dralion*.

Winners of the buns are:

B. Lynn, Traralgon; W. Lewis, Alexandra; G. Schuler, Yendon; J. McLoughlin, Toongabbie; J. Schapel, Glenalta, SA.

Dralion winners are:

B. Gravenall, Thomastown; T. Grigsby, Bannockburn; D. Vale, Emerald; T. Preston, Jeparit; J. Derick, Boewya; R. Maher, Stratford.

Coming up

April 10

Queenscliff Seafood Festival

Australia's biggest seafood festival, Princess Park, Queenscliff. 9.45am-5pm.
Ph: (03) 5258 2426

April 11

Omeo Rodeo

Broncos, bulls, thrills and spills.
Ph: (03) 5159 1478

April 10-13

Australia Post Stawell Gift

Sixty-six events held over three days including off-track fun, betting ring, fashion parade, live music and children's entertainment.

Ph: (03) 5358 1326

Bendigo Easter Festival

A celebration of the Goldfields heritage and authentic Chinese dragons and the famous Easter Monday gala parade.

Ph: (03) 5434 6475

Falls Creek Easter Family Carnival

The Easter bunny will visit Falls Creek with a giant easter egg hunt and a barbecue breakfast.

Ph: (03) 5758 3224

Maldon Easter Fair

Great Aussie scone bake, open-air church service, hole in one, tug-of-war and Easter parade.

Ph: (03) 5475 2262

Deep Leads Annual Easter Art and Craft Exhibition

Paintings and craft for sale, Deep Lead Hall.

Ph: (03) 5358 1607

Cobram and District Art Expo

Local and surrounding district art, all paintings are for sale with money raised financing artist workshop and art experience for the community.

Ph: 0407 829 765

April 11-12

Deans Marsh Pioneer Festival

Story-telling, live music, snake handlers, face painting.

Ph: (03) 5236 3205

April 12

Day on the Hill Festival at Warrnambool

Festival of food, wine and entertainment, headed by Daryl Braithwaite.

Ph: 1800 556 111

April 13

Rheola Charity Carnival

Celebrating 139 years of country tradition with woodchopping, footraces, sheep dog trials, vintage tractor pull, riding events and much more.

Ph: (03) 5438 8282

Send details, at least two weeks before the event, to **The Weekly Times Calendar**, PO Box 14999, Melbourne 8001, fax to (03) 9292 2697, or email to countryliving@theweeklytimes.com.au

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