

# Rest, relax and rejuvenate

AUSTRALIA'S EASTERNMOST TOWN IS HOME TO INCREDIBLE BEACHES, LUSH RAINFORESTS, BUSTLING BOUTIQUES, HIP CAFÉS AND INDULGENT SPAS

WORDS: Karen Bleakley

**Y**ou've picked a busy time to visit – it's Schoolies week!" says Penny, the manager of Bayshore Bungalows, as she hands my friend and I the keys.

Byron Bay, Australia's easternmost town, is home to incredible beaches, lush rainforests, bustling boutiques, hip cafés and indulgent spas. School leavers flock here in their droves in November, but they aren't the only ones that love Byron; it's a great spot for scuba diving, surfing, shopping, wildlife spotting and hiking too – Byron pretty much has it all covered.

I hadn't even thought about our trip coinciding with the end of the school year when planning this retreat with my friend. I was thankful we'd chosen to stay at the tranquil self-catering resort on the edge of town, away from the parties, noise and backpacker lodges. >>

Main image, a massage in the rainforest at The Byron at Byron Resort and Spa

The next day we head into Byron for breakfast overlooking Main Beach. Apparently schoolies don't make it out of bed before noon, so the place feels deserted.

**TAKING IT EASY**

Afterwards, we start our holiday off slowly with a potter around the unique shops trying not to damage our credit cards.

It's not that the shops are expensive in Byron, just that they're so good you want to buy everything – surf wear, nik naks, jewellery; you name it there is a cute shop selling it.

At the top of the main street we follow a crowd and stumble upon an arts market in the grounds of a school. Byron is the kind of place where you discover new experiences around every corner.

Our afternoon treat awaits, so we make our way to the tranquillity of Buddha Gardens Day Spa.

I feel my worries melt away as we step into the tropical gardens – our own private retreat from the chaos of family life.

The plunge pool and sauna are there to help us unwind before our treatments. A friendly lizard joins us on our loungers as we sip herbal tea. The two-hour treatment – involving a massage, facial and body brush – wipes away my stress.

As we walk out of the door my shoulders feel light and my skin is shiny. We take the opportunity to grab a table at Miss Margarita. This bustling Mexican restaurant serves



Jonson Street has a wide range of shops, restaurants, bars and cafés

us the best margarita and burritos I've ever tasted, and it's the perfect spot to people watch as the evening comes alive.

After a few cocktails, we head back to our accommodation for drinks on our secluded patio in the warm evening air, leaving the teenagers to party the night away.

"The wildlife near the car park is totally different to the wildlife you'll find lower down," Greg tells us as we listen to the changes in the sounds of the forest around us.

"Down here you'll find bandicoots, quolls, echidnas, wallabies and even platypus, although I haven't seen one myself

**"I FEEL MY WORRIES MELT AWAY AS WE STEP INTO THE TROPICAL GARDENS"**

**HINTERLAND TOUR**

Bright and early, Greg from Byron Bay Adventure Tours arrives to take us on a 'Big Day Out'.

The tour starts with a hike to Minyon Falls. After viewing the cascading waterfalls from above, it's time to hike through the lush green forest down a narrow path, strewn with rocks and tree roots.

as they're pretty hard to spot. Just make sure you keep an eye out for leeches, they're common and easy to rub off."

As I'm struggling to haul myself over some large boulders, Greg points out that "a 70-year-old made it over these on a tour last week."

This spurs me on to make a bit more effort with my climbing.

We emerge at the foot of Minyon Falls to see the water tumbling into the dark natural pool of water.

"Are you going for a swim?" Greg asks.

I've never been for a swim in fresh water before, but I didn't need to be asked twice after our sweaty hike. We strip down to our swimwear and carefully pick our way over the rocks into the icy water.

It's so shallow that we have to edge over the slippery floor all the way to the middle of the pool before there's enough depth to submerge. The chill takes my



The tropical setting of Buddha Day Spa

breath away as I swim towards the falling water. It's so refreshing after being in the steamy rainforest. We pull ourselves up on the rocks at the other side and sit under the spray of the waterfall, letting it run over our faces.

Looking up the 100-metre-high cliff face gives me a feeling of intense energy. We're sitting under a natural landmark, once part of the ancient Tweed Volcano and it feels a million miles from the bustling shopping strip of Byron.

As we swim back across, the heavens open, making it difficult to see where the waterfall ends and the rain begins. There's no point getting dry; we dress over our swimmers and duck under the canopy of the trees to start our clamber up the track.

Amazingly, the hike back – although uphill – feels easier, even with legs that feel like jelly.

There's something about stepping out of reality into the natural world that invigorates the soul. I know the morning's experience will stay with me as one of my favourites experiences in Byron.

Next is a visit to the Bangalow Markets, where I'm more than ready for the Caribbean food truck and the soy cappuccino that I hunt down. I adore the outdoors, but there's something special about returning to reality again too. More rain tumbles down as we head back to Byron.

**RAINFOREST RETREAT**

After checking out of our chic self-catering accommodation, we

move on to our second resort: the iconic 'Byron at Byron'; a sprawling luxury hotel resort and spa scattered through a rainforest.

As soon as I step into our suite, a raging storm descends. The panoramic forest viewing rooms on either side provide an intense connection to nature, so I settle down in an armchair to watch the most incredible lightening show I've ever seen.

There is no chance of paddle boarding or surfing this afternoon as I'd planned – it's time for some enforced relaxation. It's probably for the best as my legs are aching from the morning's hike. The storm drums on for hours, allowing me a chance to indulge in the luxury of the room and sink into a deep herbal bath to wash away the mud from the rainforest.

Next morning the sun is shining again, so it's time for an invigorating 8am outdoor yoga session at the resort. After the gentle exercise, my body craves healthy food from the breakfast buffet, so I fill up on fruit and muesli instead of bacon and eggs without feeling tempted.

More spa time kicks off with a dip in the heated plunge pool before I have a delicious body scrub and firm massage that wipes away any remaining tension I might have had left.

My friend and I spend the afternoon lazing by the glorious infinity pool, before strolling through the rainforest to the deserted Tallow Beach. The white sand and rolling waves are



Boutiques on Larson Street



Bathing beneath Minyon Falls

Byron Bay Adventure Tours



Byron Bay's Main Beach

# USEFUL CONTACTS

## STAY

### BAYSHORE BUNGALOWS

The self-catering accommodation at this secluded resort is a great place to relax with its pool, tennis courts and barbecue area. Belongil Beach is a short stroll away. Bungalows from A\$135 (£66) per night.

[www.bayshawbungalows.com.au](http://www.bayshawbungalows.com.au)

### THE BYRON AT BYRON

Luxury suites nestled within a private rainforest, right next to Tallow Beach. Daily yoga, an indulgent spa and infinity pool mean the resort is a destination in itself. Prices from A\$350 (£171) per night.

[www.thebyronatbyron.com.au](http://www.thebyronatbyron.com.au)

The swimming pool at The Byron at Byron



## PLAY

### SEAHORSES

Enjoy a blissful two-hour horseback ride along the beach from Brunswick Heads for A\$100 (£49).

[www.seahorsesbyronbay.com](http://www.seahorsesbyronbay.com)

### BUDDHA GARDEN DAY SPA

This unpretentious day spa is a great place to unwind in natural surroundings.

[www.buddhagardensdayspa.com.au](http://www.buddhagardensdayspa.com.au)

### BYRON BAY ADVENTURE TOURS

Visit Minyon Falls on the full-day 'Big Day Out' tour or choose from a range of other tours from A\$119 (£58) per adult.

[www.byronbayadventuretours.com](http://www.byronbayadventuretours.com)

### BYRON BAY STAND UP PADDLE

Explore the beautiful Brunswick River on a stand-up paddleboarding tour for A\$70 (£34).

[www.byronstanduppaddle.com.au](http://www.byronstanduppaddle.com.au)

### BLACK DOG SURFING

Book an introductory surf lesson from A\$60 (£29), or take a course to develop your skills.

[www.blackdogsurfing.com](http://www.blackdogsurfing.com)

Byron Bay is a mecca for keen surfers



Karen on the Seahorses beach ride



Coastal views from Cape Byron Bay



breathtaking. Byron's famous lighthouse stands proudly on the headland in the distance.

## BEACH RIDE

After a final evening involving cocktails and incredible food, it's time to move on to Brunswick Heads for a beach horse ride.

The conditions are perfect – sunny but breezy. As a beginner, I'm matched with a horse called Jade, who plods along following the others.

Jo, who runs Seahorses, leads the ride. Her passion for her horses shines through as she tells me how she nursed the horse she is riding back to health after an injury.

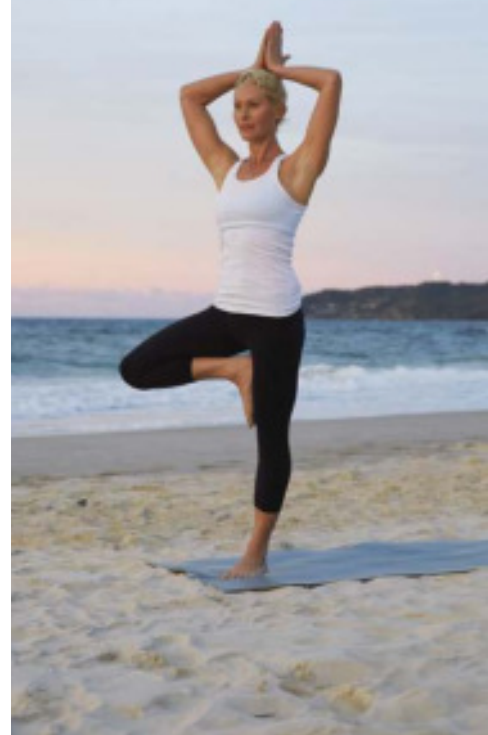
She gushes about her plans to take her older horses to semi-retirement on a new riding camp that she has created that combines rides with gourmet food and wine. Her enthusiasm rubs off on me and I find myself planning another weekend away.

The horses' hooves squeak on the sand as we walk to the water's edge. Some of them plod through the waves, but Jade prefers to stay dry so skirts around the water, taking a wide berth. Some of the more experienced riders canter off, while the rest of us trek on slowly, drinking in the view of the frothy blue waves.

Towards the end, I can feel every muscle in my body aching – a hike, yoga and a ride have awoken muscles I didn't know existed. My mind, on the other hand, feels light, relaxed, nurtured and excited – something I haven't felt in a long time.

A stiff walk around the cute little shops and cafés of Brunswick Heads afterwards makes me realise two things: I'm going to need another massage to recover from this holiday, and Byron is a destination to feed the soul. 🇺🇸

Yoga on Belongil Beach



Cape Byron Lighthouse

