

Fun for the family

WITH BEAUTIFUL, SAFE BEACHES AND LOTS TO DO AND SEE, BYRON BAY IN NEW SOUTH WALES IS A PERFECT HOLIDAY DESTINATION FOR FAMILIES...

WORDS: Karen Bleakley

“Kids, come over here,” beckons a man drawing to a stop on his bike in the middle of the car park. He smiles at me and points to the ground, where a crisp ten dollar note lays folded on the concrete.

“It’s not enough to hand in, so it’s all yours. I’m sure you can buy something nice,” beams the man. The kids look at me to check it’s okay before picking it up and thanking the man.

We’ve just arrived at the hip coastal town of Byron Bay in New South Wales and are making our way to Main Beach to stretch our legs on the golden sand after being cooped up in the car. The kids are too full of excitement chattering about their new-found wealth and the kindness of the stranger to appreciate the glorious coastal view that is bathed in an orange haze.

We weave through the people listening to the busker, and the families playing frisbee, to get to the sand so we can dip our toes in the ocean. >>

Main image: Family-friendly
Clarkes Beach in Byron Bay



Above: Beachgoers at Byron Bay's Main Beach

"Can we jump in?" the kids ask eagerly, not caring that they are fully clothed or that we still need to finish unloading the car and find some dinner. They splash, carefree, in the waves.

Byron Bay is one of our favourite places; the beaches are breath-taking, the locals are laid-back and friendly and I always feel a sense of calm the moment we arrive. It's an eclectic place where backpackers, families, aging hippies, yoga enthusiasts and raw food lovers live side by side. Here, bohemian lifestyles are celebrated and the streets buzz with holiday vibes all year round.

We're staying at Outrigger Bay Apartments which is perfectly located for the beach and the shops – this is handy as we walk back with damp, sandy, exhausted kids. I can already tell this is going to be a great holiday.

MACADAMIA CASTLE

It is raining as we pull into Macadamia Castle the next morning but that doesn't dampen the kids' spirits. "It's a real castle!" squeals five-year-old Eva.

Macadamia Castle is a wildlife attraction, perfectly sized for little ones and with plenty of hands-on experiences. We arrive in time for the reptile talk.

Josh, the keeper, fires questions at the kids while showing us different animals. Next, we meet a baby crocodile and learn that they have three eye-lids on each eye. The kids eagerly await their chance to stroke the reptiles and feel their leathery skin. A photo

Opposite page (clockwise from top): The rolling hills in Byron Bay's hinterland; Cape Byron Lighthouse; Lincoln and Reuben at Discovery Park Byron Bay; Macadamia Castle

opportunity at the end involves us holding a baby croc while I have an ice-cold python draped around my shoulders.

In-between informative wildlife talks, holding baby chicks and stroking rabbits, we let the kids play in the park, which has a balancing surfboard, a flying fox and a big wooden fort at the centre.

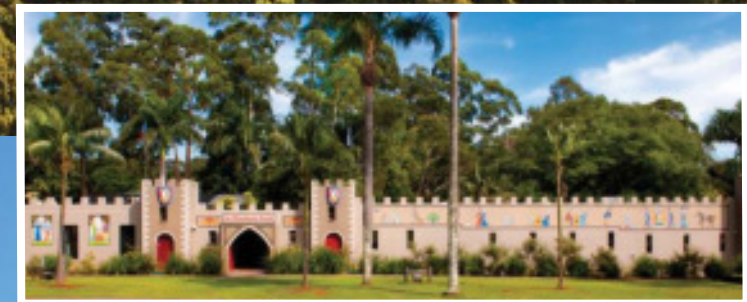
We go on to feed the baby animals. We hold their large bottles of milk and feed the sheep, goats and cows as they guzzle their breakfast from the teat and try to slurp us when the milk is gone. A train ride around the park and a game of mini golf finish the kids off nicely.

“Macadamia Castle is a wildlife attraction, perfect for little ones and with plenty of experiences”

Exhausted, we end up in the café where we enjoy some of the delicious pancakes the café is famous for.

While the kids snooze in the car, we head to nearby Ballina. We drive through this relaxed little seaside town centred on the mouth of the Richmond River. It looks like the ideal spot for stand up paddle boarding and kayaking.

As the kids start to stir, we head back to Outrigger Bay in time for an evening swim in the outdoor >>





Above (left to right): Popular Mexican cantina Miss Margarita, bustling Byron Bay Markets; and (below left) cows at The Farm

pool and a dip in the hot tub. There is nothing like swimming outside in the dark, illuminated by the glow of the blue pool lights. This is what holiday memories are made of.

CRYSTAL CASTLE

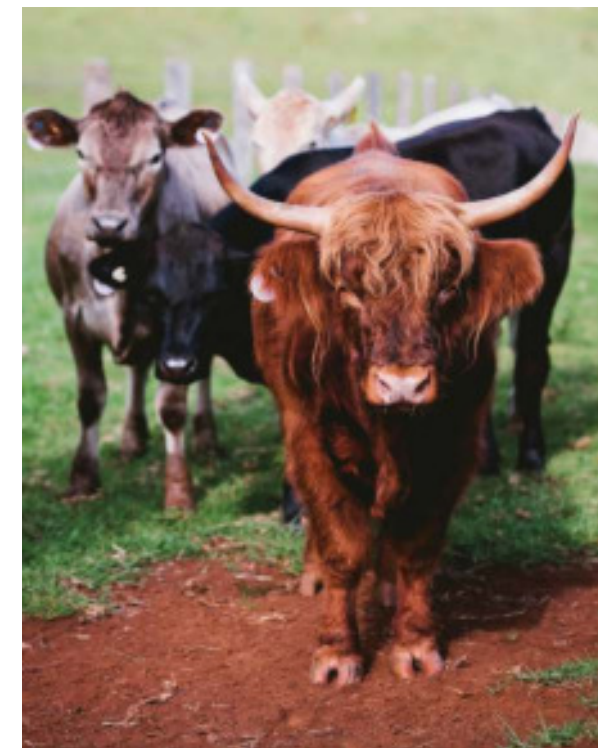
We head off to the Crystal Castle and Shambhala Gardens bright and early. Our eight-year-old twins are geology-mad and they love gardens and nature, so it is the perfect attraction for them.

After a winding drive through the glorious countryside, we collect some kids' activity sheets and start exploring.

The Crystal Castle stands in 25 hectares of lush countryside. The building's wings are built where the ley lines (the Earth's energy lines) intersect. The botanic gardens are filled with crystals and geodes of all shapes, sizes and colours, creating a special place for peace, contemplation and mindfulness.

"You need to smudge your house," we hear a visitor tell their friend. "It's full of negative energy." I have to Google what this means – we are all learning new things today.

“The botanic gardens are filled with crystals and geodes of all shapes, sizes and colours...”



purple sparkles. This display known as the 'enchanted cave' is the result of a bubble in volcanic rock.

The outside hardened and, over time, dissolved minerals were deposited in the hollow which allowed crystals to form. Over millions of years, these iron-rich deposits grew to form this perfect purple amethyst cave which is around 5.5 metres wide and weighs over 20,000 kilograms.

Our kids take time to read the signs guiding them through a labyrinth, reflexology walk and a crystal spiral. A visit to the shop at the end involves an hour of careful contemplation as they each pick a crystal.

SUSTAINABLE BYRON

Driving back to Byron, we call into The Farm. This working farm sprawls over 80 acres and is home to a number of micro businesses that are working towards a sustainable, healthier lifestyle.

We take a self-guided tour around some of the fields, lingering to watch the heritage-breed piglets nursing their mum for milk. With a motto of 'Grow, Feed, Educate', this place is all about community and inspiring the next generation to take care of the land,

Byron's World Peace Stupa is an impressive sacred monument representing universal divinity. Tibetans believe you gain wisdom from walking clockwise around the structure and it is supposed to put you in touch with kindness, compassion and good karma. We follow the instructions and walk around it, gently turning the beautiful brass prayer wheels as we go.

The Castle's owners, Naren and Sono King, have spent 30 years collecting extraordinary crystals. The world's tallest crystal geodes are on display here, standing together at an amazing five and a half metres tall – this glimmering smoky quartz geode has delicate sprinklings of amethyst and calcite crystal flowers as well as clear quartz and agate, and it is a sight to behold.

"Look at the size of this geode," exclaims Lincoln as he sees a giant hollow rock encrusted with glimmering



to raise animals ethically and to enjoy the connection between the land and your plate.

On our way back into Byron we pull into Discovery Parks Byron Bay for an afternoon interlude at a waterpark. It looks like my kids' eyeballs are about to pop out of their heads when they see the big pirate ships and slides with water squirting in every direction.

As the day is cooling down, it seems a good time to walk to the Cape Byron Lighthouse. We drive part of the way up as we know the kids' legs won't last long after their day's adventures.

We walk up the hill looking across the ocean trying to spot dolphins and whales. As we reach the lighthouse, the wind whistles in our ears and we snuggle into our hoodies to keep warm.

Back in town it is time to introduce the kids to my favourite place in Byron: the Mexican restaurant Miss Margarita. We arrive early, partly to grab a table in the busy little restaurant and also because we know the kids won't last long before they crash and we want to have enough time to eat all the food. We crunch on delicious nachos and devour rich, aromatic fajitas while washing it down with the best salty margaritas around.

EXPLORING NIMBIN

Nimbin is a quirky little town west of Byron. We pop in on our final morning to explore the colourful shopfront murals along Cullen Street. There are some funky little souvenir shops and the kids enjoy >>

Above: Giant amethyst crystals with hinterland views at Crystal Castle



Right (from top to bottom): Evangeline admires the Buddha statue at Crystal Castle; the Enchanted Cave at Crystal Castle





Left: A colourful street stall in Nimbin; and (above) buzzing Cullen Street

looking at more crystals and little Buddhas which they recognise from their trip to the Crystal Castle the day before.

Our final stop as we drive back to Brisbane is Brunswick Heads. This little village is set on the mouth of the Brunswick River and is the perfect spot for a picnic or some gentle water sports.

Today, we potter around the shops and collect a clue sheet to lead us around the Fairy Trail from the Visitor's Centre. The cute little house sculptures are made of recycled goods and each fairy house carries a positive message about living simply, being kind, being loving and protecting nature.

Our trip began with the kindness of a stranger, it involved mindfulness, nurturing of animals and wildlife, it encouraged us to take care of the environment and live sustainably, and here we are at the end of our trip being reminded about kindness again. We've come full circle.

Byron Bay has been a place of learning, of tranquillity, of memory making and we are inspired to lead more thoughtful lives because of it. 🇦🇺

Right: The swimming pool at Outrigger Bay Apartments

USEFUL CONTACTS

Plan your trip to Byron Bay with these address book secrets...

Attractions

Crystal Castle and Shambhala Gardens (www.crystalcastle.com.au) is open daily. An adult day pass costs A\$28 (£15); a child day pass costs A\$22 (£12).

Entry into The Farm Byron Bay (www.thefarmbyronbay.com.au) is free. Guided tours cost A\$10 (£5) for adults and A\$15 (£8) for a child.

Entry to Macadamia Castle (www.macadamiacastle.com.au) costs A\$25 (£14) for adults and A\$15 (£8) for children. A train ride costs A\$2 (£1).

A day pass at Discovery Park Byron Bay (www.discoveryholidayparks.com.au) costs A\$15 (£8) per person and includes the use of the swimming pool, waterpark and jumping pillow.

Where to stay

Stay in a self-catering apartment at Outrigger Bay Apartments (outriggerbay.com). The minimum stay is two nights, with prices starting from A\$488 (£276) for two nights in a two-bedroom apartment.

Useful information

Visit www.byron4kids.com.au for ideas about kids activities in Byron Bay and beyond.

