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# VOGUE

AUSTRALIA

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byron bay's newest cafe  
return of berowra waters inn

### DISCOVER

outback adventure  
stockholm in style  
washington update  
tokyo's latest luxe hotel  
liam tomlin eats out

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## greener pastures

Byron Bay is still the star attraction on NSW's north coast, but there are treasures to be found beyond the city limits

**R**epentance Creek, Middle Pocket, Main Arm and Eureka – them's pioneerin' words and the placenames scattered across the map of the hinterland of Byron Bay in NSW's Northern Rivers region. We've wound our way inland from Ballina, a few kilometres south of Byron, along the eye-wateringly beautiful Coolamon Scenic Drive, with its views to Cape Byron and the Pacific.



There've been plenty more recent pioneers digging in around these parts – building or restoring beautiful properties as weekenders, hobby farms or creative retreats. Byron Bay was the original lure – a surfer's nirvana of spectacular beaches with a higgledy-piggledy populace of farmers, freaks and free-thinkers. Thirty years on and it's paying the price with busy streets and parking police. It's been described wryly as Sydney's most northern suburb, but there are just as many Queensland plates on the cars crawling through the main drag. So this is one pioneer who's not leaving the hinterland in a hurry – no sirree.

We've struck gold (or a precious gem) at Emerald Valley Villa in Goonengerry, a few minutes down the road from Federal, with its cheekily named cafe, Club Fed. Set amid 33 hectares of rolling hills and dales, this six-star, self-catering accommodation is the brainchild of Michael J Robison, formerly a successful industrialist/entrepreneur, who leapt into the environmental fray about 15 years ago (among other things, he is founder of Climate Friendly, a greenhouse-gas neutralising company).

Built using sustainable practices wherever possible, the property's aesthetic is very Bali-chic – think Seminyak's Ku De Ta with fine antiques.

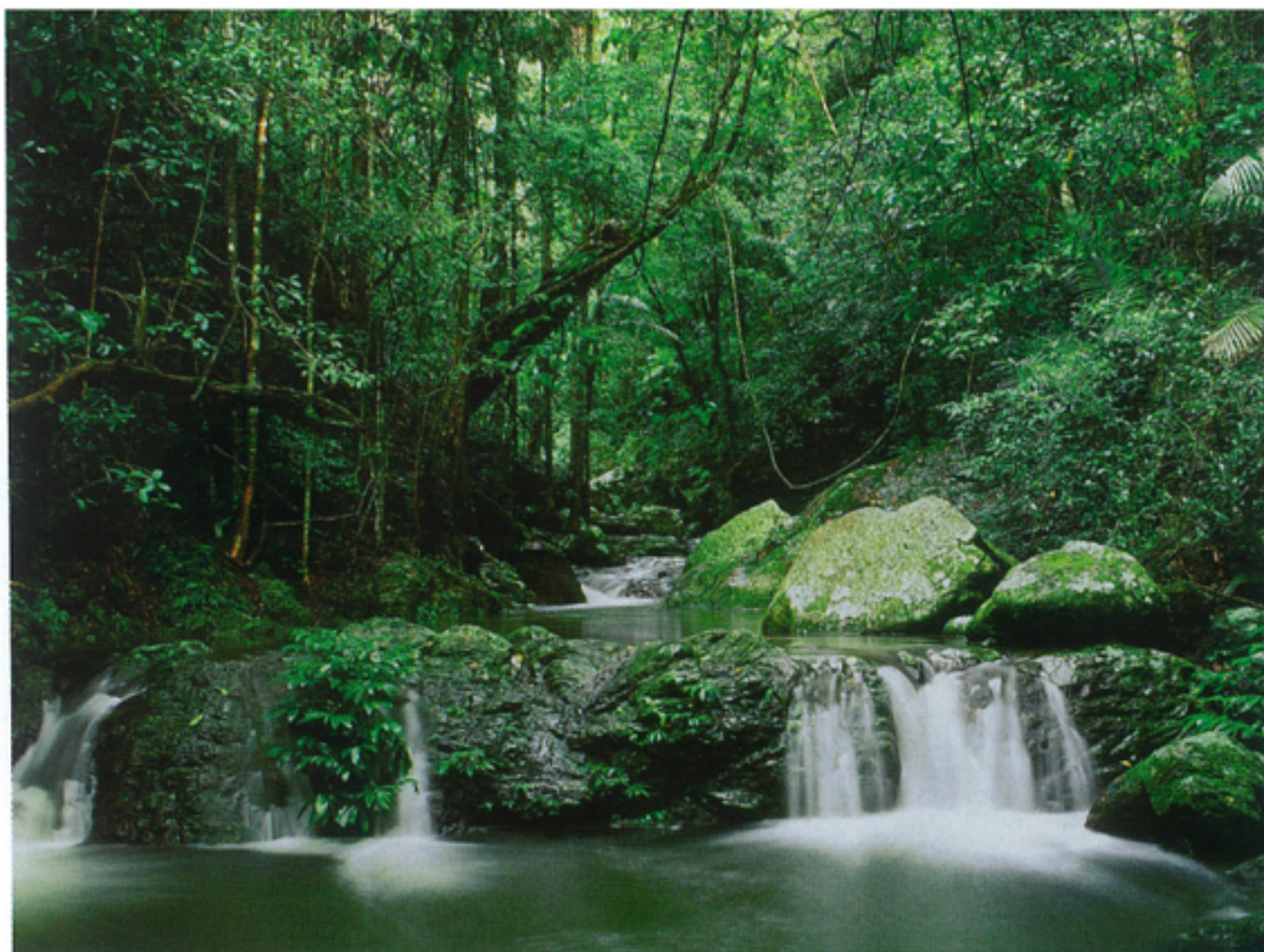


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Wategos Beach, Byron Bay; swimming pool at Emerald Valley Villa; Nightcap National Park in the hinterland.

Much of the furniture is made from recycled 200-year-old Javanese teak, and the water is heated (and recycled) using solar and green power, and the vegetable gardens are organic. The living quarters – four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a grand, vaulted living/dining room and a lavishly equipped kitchen – are built around a large cloistered courtyard. Here, trickling pools provide a soothing backdrop to the trill of swifts that nest in the eaves and swoop like cartoon characters from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The villa's floor-to-ceiling glassed walls are shaded by a broad verandah, which opens to the swimming pool, a sweep of lawn and lush terraced gardens (designed by no less than Mr K Packer's landscaper). Beyond that lies the 'emerald valley' below, which harbours some of the finest remnant rainforest in NSW and a number of rare and endangered species.

The pool, bordered by vast day beds, is fed by the property's freshwater spring,





LEFT Crystal Creek, near Murwillumbah. BELOW Sculpture at the Tweed River Art Gallery, by John Petrie. BOTTOM RIGHT The courtyard at Emerald Valley Villa.

## Spend an afternoon making like picnickers in a Monet painting

which, incredibly, is also the source of the Villa's drinking and bathing water.

One of the highlights of this luxurious idyll is the valley itself, a decent walk away, or a few lazy minutes in the (hugely fun) Polaris buggy. There, in a clearing where two rivers meet, is a darkly glinting pool, shaded by tall, shimmering eucalypts. On a grassy slope above it stands a pavilion, shrouded by white muslin drapes, from which another capacious day bed beckons. Get Varney, Emerald Valley's hospitable (and gorgeous – what is it about the women in these parts – the water? the yoga? the Brookfarm macadamia muesli?) concierge to organise some lunch. Bring a book and a towel and spend an afternoon making like picnickers in a Monet painting. There's even a waterfall for some all-natural deep-tissue massage, should spotting a platypus get too stressful.

Byron still has its magic, though, and if this pastoral reverie starts to pall (unlikely), there's plenty to tempt you back into the big, um, smoke. Delvene and John 'Strop' Cornell have engaged Sulman Prize-winning architect Ian McKay, who reworked the Beach Hotel just along the road for them nearly 20 years ago, to design Beach Suites Byron, overlooking Clarkes Beach and Julian Rocks. It includes four penthouse suites with dazzling rooftop pools (and underground parking with private lift – perfect for the paparazzi-challenged).

John van Haandel, of Melbourne's Circa, The Prince and The Stokehouse, has taken over the Beach Hotel and done up what was previously Fins restaurant – now the Pacific Dining Room – and added on a chi-chi outdoor cocktail bar with banquettes among the palm trees. Circa head chef David Moyle has flown the coop to take charge of a menu that ranges from tapas-style bites at sundown to a well-priced menu in the restaurant.

Over at Clarkes Beach, Ben Kirkwood, owner of Dish in town, has done a lovely job on Byron Beach Café, fitting



it out with pared-back wood and metal tables, and some fantastic old surfing memorabilia he's picked up from Byron Surf Club. See page 102 for a sample of what chef Daud Kendall (ex-Swell in Bronte) is dishing up through summer.

Further south, the surfing hotspot of Lennox Head is upping the ante on the beachfront. Quattro, a brand-new woodfired-pizza-pasta-cocktail place, was packed to the gills on its fourth night of opening when we visited. It's owned by two couples, one of which also runs the pretty Matricardi's Antiques store out at Byron Bay's Arts & Industry Estate, so the restaurant is decked out in an eclectic array of contemporary pieces and interesting collectables.

And let's not forget dear old Brunswick Heads, which, for all its down-home board-shorts-and-singlets charm, boasts some great eateries, such as Fatbelly Kat, where chef Katerina Williams cooks ambrosial mod-Greek food to share. Or the seriously alternative Yami (just like Byron used to be), which serves the classic Israeli *melawach* for breakfast (a crisp but chewy, plate-sized savoury pancake served with hard-boiled egg, freshly grated tomato and chilli – way more delicious than it sounds). Piri-piri prawns under the verandah at the beautifully restored art deco Brunswick Hotel aren't a bad lunch option, either.

For a long lunch closer to home at Emerald Valley, Fresca at the Bangalow Hotel continues to dish up fantastic, gutsily flavoured food to the weekend market crowds. It's worth tearing yourself away from paradise for the black mussels baked in a bag with cotechino, capers and linguine alone. **VE+T**



## NORTHERN RIVERS FILE



**Details** Contact Tourism NSW, 132 077, [visitnsw.com.au](http://visitnsw.com.au).

**Where to stay** Emerald Valley Villa, 84 Jarretts Rd, Goonengerry, NSW, (02) 6684 9398, [emeraldvalleyvilla.com](http://emeraldvalleyvilla.com).

**Beach Suites Byron**, 20 Bay St, Byron Bay, NSW, (02) 6680 9944, [beachsuites.com.au](http://beachsuites.com.au).

**Where to eat and drink**

**Byron Beach Café**, off Lawson St, Clarkes Beach, Byron Bay, NSW, (02) 6685 8400.

**The Beach Hotel**, Bay Ln, Byron Bay, NSW, (02) 6685 6402, [beachhotel.com.au](http://beachhotel.com.au).

**Fatbelly Kat**, 26–28 Tweed St, Brunswick Heads, NSW, (02) 6685 1100.

**Fresca**, Bangalow Hotel, Byron St, Bangalow, NSW, (02) 6687 1711, [fresca.net.au](http://fresca.net.au).

**Quattro**, Shop 1, 90–92 Ballina St, Lennox Head, NSW, (02) 6687 6950. **Yami Falafel**, 1 Park St, Brunswick Heads, NSW, (02) 6685 0186.

**What to do** **Farmers' markets:** Byron Bay, Butler St Reserve, (02) 6687 1137, [byronfarmersmarket.com.au](http://byronfarmersmarket.com.au). Thursdays, 8am–11am; Bangalow, Byron St, (02) 6687 1137. Saturdays, 8am–11am.

**Rae's Spa** at Rae's on Watego's, Marine Pde, Watego's Beach, Byron Bay, (02) 6685 5366. Go the Cleopatra treatment for 90 minutes of milky bliss at Rae's lush new spa.

**Tweed River Art Gallery**, cnr Mistral Rd and Tweed Valley Way, Murwillumbah, NSW, (02) 6670 2790, [tweed.nsw.gov.au/artgallery](http://tweed.nsw.gov.au/artgallery). Modern architecture in a rural setting houses excellent permanent and temporary exhibitions. Look out for the first tour outside Sydney of the Salon des Refusés from the Archibald and Wynne selections, 22 May–29 June. Great cafe, too.



PURSUIT (2004), BASALT BOULDERS AND STAINLESS STEEL, BY JOHN PETRIE. GIFT OF THE FRIENDS OF THE TWEED RIVER ART GALLERY. TWEED RIVER ART GALLERY COLLECTION. PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID YOUNG SAM McADAM