

asiaSpa

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6th
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east china's
BUDDING SPA SCENE

thailand's
KHAO LAK

chilling in
BYRON BAY

TOP 10
AYURVEDIC
SPAS

SPRING CLEAN
YOUR HEALT

URBAN DETOXI
HOW TO... AGE GRACEFUL

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spadestination



BYRON

Although the once sleepy, bohemian town of Byron Bay has been somewhat 'yuppie-fied' over the last two decades, this quaint coastal town on Australia's most eastern tip still exudes all the mystical beauty that made it famous in the first place. A blend of organic living meshed with designer shopping and gourmet dining, it is a great destination to get grounded and become part of nature without having to leave the sophistication of the city behind.

While the 'hippies' and healers add to Byron's deeply spiritual energy, the 'yuppies' have introduced stylish cafes, plush restaurants and decadent healing retreats. The upside of this is a bountiful array of alternative treatment modalities on offer; the downside is that they – and other creature comforts like wheat free bread and soy lattes – come with prices to match any big city.

Above all though, this charismatic seaside town is famous for its sun and surf, fabulous food, luxurious spa retreats and powerful healing treatments...

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photographer **daniel leser**



BAY

GAIA RETREAT

Nestled on a hilltop in Byron Bay's hinterland, Gaia Retreat is an oasis of purity. Said to be set amid powerful energy lines, it's the ideal retreat for nourishing the body and soul through everything from Qi Gong, Tai Chi and Yoga to sculpting lessons. There is also an on-site naturopath and nutritionist. Surrounded by raw rocks and greenery, Amala Day Spa is a quiet and peaceful sanctuary set within the grounds of the retreat. As well as the usual pampering body treatments like their Mango and Coconut Wrap, you can opt for something unusual like a didgeridoo 'vibrational therapy' healing session. Gaia is a private luxury retreat, not a health camp and this is reflected in its lavish facilities, appointment flexibility and gifted chefs who prepare all meals to suit individual dietary requirements – be it vegan, vegetarian or meat lover (chicken or fish only). All guests leave with a calmer soul and renewed energy.

www.gaiaretreat.com.au





spa resorts

THE BYRON AT BYRON BAY RESORT & SPA

Built within and around old growth forest so as not to disturb nature, this resort takes its environmental responsibilities seriously, without compromising on comfort or mod cons. To absorb that sense of freedom, take a walk along The Byron's beach or through the forest boardwalks. Cosy and private with experienced staff trained in various modalities, the spa has one of very few Vichy showers in the region. Preceded by a thorough Pevonia body scrub and ending with a wet oil treatment, this decadent experience will leave you truly refreshed. Although immersed in typical Australian bushland The Byron is only 10 minutes drive from the heart of town.

www.thebyronatbyron.com.au

RAE'S AT WATEGO'S

The words 'eclectic opulence' immediately come to mind when setting eyes on Rae's for the first time. Set on the beach front in a quiet cul-de-sac, its design is LA Bungalow meets Morocco, exuding a pink glow. Consisting of seven rooms and a private

spa, it's easy to see why this exclusive haunt is a favourite among celebrities like Elle McPherson and Kate Hudson. Tucked away next to a tropical poolside, the spa's interior is offset by mosaic tiling and Bali-style teak doors. Marianne De Candia is the darling of Rae's spa and her lymphatic drainage facials are a must try, especially when combined with the healing powers of Reiki. This uber-private space can also be booked for couple's treatments.

www.raes.com.au

THE VILLAS OF BYRON & BUDDHA GARDENS DAY SPA

Stepping in the villas and day spa is like being transported to the heart of Bali minus the long haul flight and immigration queues. The owners, inspired by their travels through Asia, have created a Balinese style healing haven. Think sauna and open-air hot plunge pools carved from rock set around a tropical garden. Treatment-wise, don't hesitate to check in for one of their signature facials, all of which are delivered with delicious head and scalp massage. There are massage therapies for everyone including mother-to-



be pampering. Balinese rituals include the Boreh and Lulur scrubs. Feeling extravagant? Book the Orchid Room, ideal for couples, that's all Bali-style with a bath carved from natural rock and outdoor shower. Post treatment, drift and dream as you recline upon a Balinese day bed.

www.thevillasofbyron.com.au

www.buddhagardensdayspa.com.au

THIS PAGE: Rainforest boardwalks in The Byron at Byron Bay Resort & Spa; guesthouse at Rae's at Watego's; and The Buddha Gardens Day Spa, both photographed by Daniel Lesez. OPPOSITE PAGE: Steam room at Gaia Retreat's Spa photographed by Daniel Lesez. OPENING PAGES: Sunrise surfing at Main Beach, Byron Bay, photographed by Daniel Lesez.



EMERALD VALLEY LUXURY VILLA

After a scenic 25-minute drive from Byron Bay town you'll come across this crème de la crème private villa. Set on 85 acres of land and with breathtaking views, it is the perfect place to unwind. Soak up the fresh spring water in the ionised pool or outdoor spa bath – both of which overlook the misty valley below – or head to the private treatment room, with adjoining steam room, for some R & R. Living spaces are all tastefully furnished with recycled Balinese teak furniture which adds to the villa's natural ambiance. If you're feeling a pull to nature, a buggy is at your disposal to whisk you down the hill to take a dip in the waterfall and creek below. It's the perfect location for a wedding or a soiree with a difference

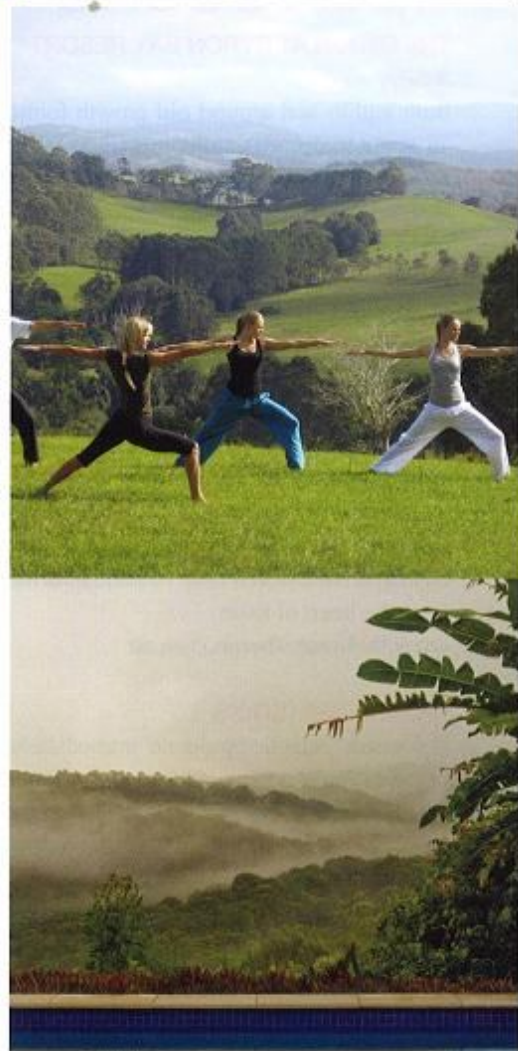
and there is a large modern kitchen built to cater for such celebrations.

www.emeraldvalleyvilla.com

BYRON BLISSHOUSE

Blisshouse Spa is one of four villas with day-spa scattered around Byron under the Blisshouse name. Featuring spacious tree-house style treatment rooms, a sauna, Jacuzzi and Vichy shower, it has all of the trimmings of a quality spa. Rustic and lush, the house and surrounding gardens exude a mixture of old-world Victorian charm while the spa has a distinctly eastern flavour. Ideal for families or couples, the villa is just a short walk to the beach and a heartbeat from local hangout, the Top Shop Cafe.

www.byronblisshouse.com.au





wellness retreats

RADIANCE RETREATS

With a heavy focus on yoga, Radiance Retreats guides its guests towards health and wellbeing through chakra awareness, meditation, chanting, nutritional talks and guided nature walks. Gourmet meals, cleansing juices and spa and massage treatments also add some pampering to the mix. Run by Byron yogi Jessie Chapman, the retreat prides itself on giving each individual personal attention and has a host of experienced instructors on-hand at all times. Popular for those wanting to increase energy levels, cleanse or simply get away by taking a healthy timeout, it will leave you feeling truly radiant.

www.radianceretreats.com

YOGA ARTS

Geared towards 'waking up the individual', Yoga Arts is a retreat that specialises in yoga and hosts a range of teacher training courses and intensive retreats. Lasting from seven days to six weeks, retreats take place in Japan, Bali, India and of course in Byron Bay throughout the year. Set in the beautiful hinterland a short drive from the main town, the Byron property has a peaceful creek, gazebo and yoga pavilion. Packages include accommodation, gourmet vegetarian catering, meditation and yoga practise, while providing plenty of time to explore Byron Bay.

www.yogarts.com.au

SANTOSHA RETREATS

Meaning 'contentment', Santosha promises just that with guidance in yoga practise, surf lessons and luxurious beachfront accommodations that make for a relaxing but active escape. Besides surfing, you can tailor-make your retreat to include Ayurvedic cooking lessons, diving or horse riding on the beach. Set just 10 minutes outside of town, Santosha is ideal for stressed out workaholics looking for some dynamic respite. www.yogasurfingretreats.com

THIS PAGE: Girl on the beach and a girl in meditation at Santosha Retreats. OPPOSITE PAGE: Rae's Guesthouse, Watego's Beach; Tai Chi at Gaia Retreat; and soothing valley views from the pool at Emerald Valley Villa, photographed by Daniel Lerer.



nourish

When it comes to cuisine, Byron Bay offers an impressive array of award winning restaurants and cafés that showcase fresh produce and locally-grown ingredients. Byron is filled with wandering nomads and the menus around town reflect this international palette.

THE PETIT SNAIL

This quaint husband and wife-run gem is French owned and staffed, serving casual French cuisine that is the 'real deal'. Famous for their crême brulee – a delicious dessert that crunches and melts in the mouth – Le Petit Snail is the perfect place to go if you are after some warm hospitality, hearty comfort food and a great wine list.

www.thepetitsnail.com.au

RAE'S AT WATEGO'S

As you sit perched on a cushioned seat, with a glass of wine in hand, watching the sun disappear from a beach just metres away, your worries will slip out of mind. The menu reads temptingly and a heavy Asian influence can be found in each dish. Recommendations include the whole deep fried snapper with nam plah prik and the tuna tartare. Although pricey, the experience is well worth it with romance and attentive service included.

www.raes.com.au

BAY LEAF

The king of Byron's café scene, Bay Leaf has been known to attract the odd movie producer and celebrity yet, this gorgeous café is laid back, unpretentious and friendly. Serving up all sorts of wholesome paninis and salads, its gourmet brunch and quality coffee has made it a favourite among locals and visitors alike. **8/77 Johnson Street**

OTHER STAND OUT EATS

The Pacific Dining Room (www.pacificdiningroom.com.au) offers sea views and relaxed gourmet dining on low cushioned seating with a wine list that far outweighs the food menu. For some gourmet fish and chips, pop into **Fishmonger's** (www.mongers.com.au) while the tastiest Falafel's are hiding just a few doors up at **Orgasmic** on Bay Lane where you'll also find authentic Middle Eastern cuisine. **Red Ginger** is a quaint Asian foods deli cum mini yum cha hang out, great for a spot of pu-erh, whereas **Café Mokha** on Lawson Street offers up good old Australian brunch fare. A newbie to the cafe scene is Clarke Beach's **The Top Shop** on Carlyle Street which was once upon-a-time an old milk bar but turned funky local hangout with a beachside atmosphere and great coffee.

refresh

Futon-style couches and communal bench seating are the best place to sip on cocktails and nibble on Spanish tapas at well-known 'watering hole', **Balcony** (www.balcony.com.au). A Byron Bay institution that's withstood the test of time, **The Beach Hotel** (www.beachhotel.com.au) boasts spectacular views of the ocean and is a great place to chill with a beer and enjoy the sunset. If you are seeking impressive decor, award-winning cuisine and cocktails galore head to **Dish** (www.dishbyronbay.com.au). The most upmarket bar in town, it draws a trendy crowd.

quick list

The Byron Beach Café
www.byronbeachcafe.com
 Fresh Byron www.byronfresh.com.au
 O-Sushi www.osushi.com
 The Pass on Brooke Drive
 Orient Express on Fletcher Street
 Olivo on Jonson Street
 Harvest on Old Pacific Highway, Newrybar
 Bella Rosa Gelateria on Jonson Street

THIS PAGE: Balcony Bar & Restaurant; Dish; 'Red Ginger' Yum Cha and shopping, all photographed by Daniel Leser
 OPPOSITE PAGE: Horseback riding on the beach with Tassitiki Ranch; Circus Arts; and jamming it up at the markets both photographed by Daniel Leser.

outside the spa

With so many sights and adventures waiting to be experienced, it's impossible to visit Byron and stay indoors. When you're not being pampered head out and see everything this beautiful town has to offer. From sightseeing to surfing lessons and dolphin watching, Byron is the perfect place to get lost in nature – oh, and do a spot of shopping.

Tassiriki Ranch Horse Riding caters especially to couples and small groups wanting a peaceful ride. Tassiriki Ranch has impeccable safety standards, with beautifully mannered horses and is serious about conserving the stunning local beaches and native bird life through a committed green business model. The scenic 40-minute drive out of Byron is well worth the trip just to be able to enjoy an entire beach with barely a soul in sight. www.tassirikiranch.com.au

Byron Bay Dive Centre offers turtle snorkelling, whale and dolphin watching and of course diving adventures. Sightings of leopard sharks and other beautiful marine life are not uncommon at the Cape Byron Marine Park. The centre also offers PADI, SSI and NAUI courses for those who like to study on holiday.

www.byronbaydivecentre.com.au

Byron Bay Surf School provides thorough instruction and is one of only four schools licensed to operate in the area ensuring plenty of crashing space. Students learn quickly the basic and correct techniques during the half-day programme. An indulgent alternative is to get in touch with ex-pro surf champion Rusty Miller who gives one-on-one surf classes.

www.byronbaysurfschool.com,
www.rustymillersurf.com

Circus Arts offers an affordable workout with the trapeze, acrobalance and silks plus guaranteeing something completely out of the ordinary. It's excellent fun for both kids or adults and entertaining for those watching too. It may even inspire the inner child that always wanted to run away and join the circus. The massive Circus Arts warehouse is located in the Arts and Industry Park, so be sure to take time to explore the other crafts and locally produced clothing on offer in the area. www.circusarts.com.au

Weekend with a Goddess is a personal mind, body and spiritual makeover led by the ethereal Sienna St Clair. Men, women or couples who visit are guided through meditation, the practise of Tantra, beach walking and sightseeing. Massage treatments are included as emotional healing and sacred sexuality workshops that are geared for the open-minded.

www.byron-bay.com/sienna

Cooking Classes with Nadine Abensur are a lovely way to tap into your domestic goddess. Learn to create contemporary

Australian, Middle-Eastern or gourmet vegetarian using fresh local produce. After class, students are treated to a sit-down lunch, glass of wine, dessert and given some recipes to practice at home.

www.nadineabensur.com

The Byron Bay Market is held on the first Sunday of each month and is the place where hippies, yuppies, tourists and backpackers come together for the common love of shopping and the discovery of new and old treasures. Teeming with creativity, the markets showcase local art, fashion, and live music. For the best in organic, locally produced fresh foods visit the Byron Farmers Market every Thursday at Butler Street Reserve. www.byron-bay.com/markets,
www.byronfarmersmarket.com.au

Crystal Castle is just 20 minutes from Byron Bay and is an oasis of calm tranquillity and natural beauty. Set in the hinterland, it has a jaw dropping collection of giant crystals collected from all parts of the earth. The perfect place to absorb the forest fresh air, it is a lovely place to take a stroll.

www.crystalcastle.net



alternatives

Seahorses Riding Centre

www.seahorsesbyronbay.com

Pegasus Park Equestrian Centre

www.pegasuspark.com.au

Sun Dive www.sundive.com.au

Sky Dive Byron Bay

www.skydivebyronbay.com

Go Skydive! www.goskydive.com.au

Byron Bay Kiteboarding

www.byronbaykiteboarding.com.au

Surfing Byron Bay P/L

www.gosurfingbyronbay.com

Kool Katz Surf School

www.koolkatzsurf.com