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Spa

The spa and wellness centre at the Byron at Byron was recently named as the second best spa in Australia at the Luxury Travel Gold List Awards. The award comes only a month after the resort received the coveted "Best Resort Accommodation" Award for an accommodation property under 100 rooms in The Australian Travel and Tourism Awards. "I'm just so proud of the team here" said Naomi Quarrell, spa manager at The Byron at Byron. "We have such a variety of expertise in the Spa and this reaches everybody that walks through our door. It's humbling to receive such a great award".

Set among a 45-acre rainforest, Gerry Harvey, of Harvey Norman fame, created the five star resort on the site of the former Everglades animal and amusement park site. Harvey and his team are committed to restoring and repairing some of the damage caused when the previous owners planted exotic plant species which thwarted the survival of the rainforest. Over the last four years, the ongoing regeneration project has helped restore the Bangalow Palms and surrounding flora and fauna, to their former glory. Spa Manager, Naomi Quarrell says the surrounds give guests a chance to relax and rejuvenate. "It is hard to separate the spa from its surroundings, because our location enriches the entire guest experience. People

By JENNIE LEWIS TEAL

LAKESIDE LUXURY

SHELTERED among the palms and paperbarks and AWASH with ABUNDANT native flora and wildlife, THE BYRON AT BYRON is the ULTIMATE ECO RESORT.





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are drawn to our resort for healing and rejuvenation; they come willing to receive and be taken care of. Within Australia we have that five star edge but, truth be told, anyone could have this facility not do as good a job with it. Our success really comes down to the team, the beliefs they share and the approach they take. The highlight of the spa is the quality of our therapists and what sets us apart from other spas in Australia. They all live in this area and are very much connected from a heart space. Lots of them bring such an array of modalities and experiences. Our guests could be having a facial but the therapist might have a Reiki or Bowen background and this knowledge all enriches the experience," explains Naomi.

"It is the integration that makes this spa work so well. It is a very grounded spa and isn't at all transient, whereas I have worked in a number of spas that are either city or island-based and attract those just passing through. Most of our therapists have been here for more than four years, so they have evolved in themselves and bring this to the spa. That is the contrast in this area; we tend to have a lot of travellers passing through but I always ask people when interviewing them for a role, "What has brought you to Byron?" They might be running away from something, or after some shift or healing within themselves, and depending on what their reasons are, they will work through them here and embark on a new richer life; because this is a healing space.

Naomi grew up in the Blue Mountains and started out in the natural health industry at 18. "Byron is an iconic health capital of Australia, so it was always a dream of mine to get here one day. I knew somehow I would, but as it turned out, it was actually a relationship that brought me here. I haven't looked back since arriving in Byron Bay, it feels like I have found my home. I was originally based at Gaia Retreat for a while and then this role came up."

"Byron attracts so many visitors, mainly because of its sheer beauty. We have the best of the ocean, and all the stunning colours



that go with that and we've also got the rainforest so it suits both water people and earth people. Our natures are elemental in a sense so it does capture a broad range of people because of that. The other drawcard is the history behind Byron. It has an energetic heart-line running through it, so a lot of relationships are created here; we see a lot of weddings! Things happen here, a lot of people meet; it used to be an indigenous meeting place and has this undercurrent of energy about it. That said, a lot of relationships dissolve here as well, because 'heart' is not just about bringing together, it's also about evolving and moving forward. This place has that healing undercurrent which is

so in demand in such a distracted, busy world. Many people come here just to get back to this centre within themselves and end up taking this feeling home with them."

Throughout her career, Naomi has gained a great deal of resort spa experience, so to get to work in a five star resort in such an amazing location is a dream come true for her. "Being an eco resort I felt an affinity with what I believed in and what the team here are trying to do. The atmosphere, the spa, the aesthetics and the family atmosphere here is gorgeous and it's so real, you can't fake it, we are welcoming and keep it real. I started with The Byron at Byron two years ago but I took up the role as spa manager in October last year. I came in as the assistant manager and took on the responsibility in October when the previous manager, Melinda, decided to leave. I found there are highlights in both roles. Getting to know the ins and outs of the spa and how it works gave me a great insight and now coming into the role as manager has allowed me to integrate my ideas into the working of the spa; initially through product choice. We are still very loyal to Pevonia, a results-driven luxury brand, but we are also adding a bit more of a Byron Bay experience with Australian range, iKOU. I have been in spas all over the world and sometimes think I could have this treatment anywhere so what makes it so special in this

particular destination? We wanted to make the most of being in this amazing property, surrounded by rainforests and paperbarks, and are aiming to bring the outside inside the spa. We have revised our spa menu which will now incorporate some very special experiences for our guests. We felt that the brand's philosophies aligned beautifully with ours, Australian-made, eco principals, results through natural and experiential, so they will offer an experience not only for the guest but the therapist as well."

There are 16-17 therapists operating at resort, a lot of whom are contractors, explains Naomi. "This helps with retention because they feel responsible for their own life, they have their own business and are a business within a business which gives them a sense of authority over themselves. It allows them more flexibility as well. One month they might be having a month where they feel tired or have their own things going on and might not be able to work as much, alternatively they may be feeling very energised or have just returned from India or somewhere and are full of ideas, so we will put them on shift a little bit more. We also always supply training to help them upskill if they wish to. There was a time when therapists either had a beauty or a massage background, but nowadays therapists are usually trained across a number of modalities, so they are diversifying their skills. You get these gems coming through that do it all and they are gold! I have a couple of amazing therapists – some of the guys get marriage proposals every day! They just have that edge and the ability to really tap into what the guest needs, not necessarily what they are booked in for. During the booking process you get a bit of an idea of their needs, so we start to align them right from the outset with an appropriate therapist. But we allow our therapists the flexibility to adapt to offer the client what they think they need. It is their journey after all and it is our role to guide them on it. We always try to tailor all our treatments; none are set in stone.

"My role has shifted over the years because I come from a naturopathic background, but the leadership role allows me to ensure all the staff reach their full potential. I aim to inspire them. We set goals together and look at where they want to be, what they want to do and where they want to go. I won't hold on to people if they are moving elsewhere, but if they need to shift a gear, in their current position, then it could involve a course or extra training, or they might just need some healing themselves. I am inspired to get the most out of my team and, after all, is what human resources is all about. I guess from a management perspective I am very real about ownership. I am only here to support them on their journey and they have to own that. There comes a lot of responsibility with being a part of the team because it's not about me, I am not going to do that for them. Our success

really comes down to the fact that we have so much support as part of a family; that's how it feels here. I have a great deal of respect for our general managers, we work smoothly alongside each other and we always brainstorm ideas. It's never wise to get too consumed within your own area, I value their perspective on the spa. We also monitor client feedback by always following up with our clients following a treatment. You get very good at reading people. We also have so many lovely messages left in our guest book."

The new spa menu has been designed to offer an Australian experience alongside more sustainable spa practices. "We are sticking with what works for us, the Pevonia range and the facials they offer always go down well with our guests. But I also wanted to highlight where we are. We are surrounded by these paperbarks in such an amazing location so one of our signature treatments incorporates these Australian native ingredients. We include a number of locally-sourced ingredients in our treatments, macadamia nut oil, sugar cane and an amazing oil from the paperbark. Fragonia oil is relatively new to the market. It is derived from the tree and is one of the most balanced essential oils you can get. You have your wooden blends and higher note blends, but this one covers such a broad spectrum. It can energise you if you are feeling flat or bring you down if you are feeling too high. We have also looked at how we can become a more sustainable spa - we need to walk our talk! So we are removing all plastics in our wraps and replacing with cotton, candles will now be soy based and we are removing paraffin from our hand treatments. We want to minimise any petrochemicals and plastics as well as monitoring towel use, as much as we can. This is just the start of the journey as it takes a while to implement new things, but we are introducing more elements and ideas as we go. I have found it interesting sourcing things. I found these eco friendly plastic wraps on an overseas website, but unfortunately the distributor has folded because he didn't have the demand so he can't supply them anymore. It is such a shame, people talk about eco all the time, but there are very few actually practising what they preach! The price can be higher of course but we factor that into our budget to make it feasible. It is important for our guests and our therapists, I don't want them or the guest in a confined room with paraffin

candles burning." Naomi and her team are very excited about the Luxury Travel Gold List Award. "There are so many awards out there but what is so important is that this wasn't attached to a product company, it was a viewer's choice, so to speak, so it makes us so proud. Our return rate is so high that it speaks itself and coming into our fifth year of operation we want to keep standards high yet keep evolving because our return guests may want to try something a little bit different on their next visit." **FB**

Sample Spa Menu:

SIGNATURE BYRON SPA EXPERIENCES

Rainforest Body Ritual

■ Invigorating scrub, scalp treatment, Vichy shower and body moisture - 1.5 hours
Rejuvenate and refresh in our rainforest treatment room with Vichy shower. This invigorating ritual includes an iKOU Australian Native Paperbark Scrub and nourishing scalp treatment concluding with a light massage of iKOU Rainforest Body Souffle to leave your skin glowing.

Everglades Escape

■ Signature facial with foot bath, back and scalp massage - 1.75 hours
Experience our most indulgent facial - commencing with an aromatic foot bath with foot exfoliation, followed by a relaxing back massage. This luxurious facial includes cleansing, exfoliation, steam, facial massage, treatment mask and an active botanical ampoule chosen specifically for your skin. Hand, foot and scalp massages leave you blissfully nurtured.

Flannel Flower Relax

■ iKOU body polish, cocoon, facial massage, body moisture and tea ceremony - 2 hours
Unwind and allow your body to receive relaxation with this gentle treatment. White flannel flower helps us connect with our inner joy, while exotic ingredients restore a radiant all-over glow. Suitable during pregnancy after the first trimester.

Cypress Sojourn

■ The ultimate face and body therapy - 3.5 hours
This Sojourn commences with an invigorating body brush followed by a relaxing full body aromatic massage. The full Pevonia facial is customised to leave your skin glowing. Your hands and feet are tended with a manicure and pedicure, including an aromatic salt foot bath and foot massage.