



byron is back

Long-time local *Craig Tansley* says this beachside haven is on the rise again.

The travel restrictions of COVID-19 created a feverish, unsustainable demand for Byron Bay. When the whole world shut down to us, Byron Bay became our French Riviera, southern California and Paris all rolled into one. Then the world opened up again, about the same time the worst floods in history turned the Byron Shire into a temporary disaster zone. Byron Bay was no longer the coolest place on earth. People were saying, “The bubble is finally going to burst.”

But it hasn't. I live on the outskirts of town so I can tell you: Byron is back in business. I'm spending a weekend at Sun Ranch: a sprawling, Californian-style ranch house with Spanish influences and oodles of space for its chic, upwardly mobile clientele, set on 22 hectares of Byron's greenest hinterland. Created by 13 of Australia's best young creative minds, it opened to great fanfare last September. Which was only a couple of weeks after the five-star Hotel Marvell opened near the main street with the town's first rooftop bar and pool. Hotel Marvell debuted the same month that two hipster Californians revealed the new ultra-glamorous Swell Hotel just behind the CBD, on Butler Street. And all this was about six weeks after one of the region's

hippest-ever accommodation options, The Brooklet, opened on a former macadamia farm out of town near Newrybar. A 76-room luxury hotel with an even bigger rooftop bar is now being built along Byron's beachfront.

There's a full-house where I am at Sun Ranch, but it doesn't feel that way. Except for the gridlock into town come holiday time, Byron has always had plenty of empty spaces to disappear into. There are 18 beaches and only long-term locals know where to find them all. Sun Ranch epitomises Byron. You come expecting it to be full of wankers and then, despite yourself, you make friends, fall in love with life all over again and never want to leave.

The dreamy '70s Californian vibe of the décor might sound hipster-wannabe, until you realise Byron's reinvention as an alternative surf town (from its roots as a place built around whaling, sand mining and abattoirs) came courtesy of an influx of Californian surfers throughout the '60s. Sun Ranch – with its sculptural fireplace, whisky lounge, basalt stone pool and wood-fired sauna by the water, which feels very Big Sur-meets-Malibu Hills – actually captures the essence of the origins of Byron.

The Brooklet isn't far from Sun Ranch. There are only a handful of

villas here, barely a kilometre up the road from Olivia Newton-John's old luxury wellness spot, Gaia Retreat. In the evenings I sit out on a huge terrace overlooking rolling paddocks and the green caldera of the 20-million-year-old volcano that's the shire's best asset.

There's more than just new accommodation, too. The restaurants that have sprung up in the past 12 months are topping the *Good Food Guide's* list of hot new places. There's the Smoking Camel, where hot-shot Sydney chef Joachim Borenus is literally cooking with fire as he fuses Lebanese, Turkish and Israeli dishes with something distinctly local. Or the Parisian-style Bar Heather in Byron's main street, and late-night bar and restaurant Moonlight, built in the vibey narrow lane behind the Beach Hotel. And there's Bonito, too, inside Hotel Marvell, where in-demand head chef Minh Le left some of Australia's best restaurants to start afresh in the Bay.

All these places are defining Byron version #2024. And they're about as far from the trust fund Insta crowd blowing \$500-per-head at Raes on Wategos as it gets.

Byron's going to be just fine.

Craig Tansley was a guest of Sun Ranch.



MY DAY ON A PLATE

Shaun Greenblo
Co-managing director, 38

7.30am Scrambled eggs with sourdough toast and a few cherry tomatoes with a pinch of salt and olive oil.

7.45am I make a double shot long black with a dash of cream.

1pm A packed lunch with leftover roast chicken, tri-coloured quinoa, fresh tomatoes, cucumber, feta and olive oil. Later, I have two pieces of dark chocolate spread with almond butter, and a nectarine.

3pm Earl Grey tea with regular milk in between meetings.

7.30pm Roasted wild salmon with tamari, roasted sweet potato and a rocket salad with broccoli sprouts.

8.30pm A plum, a banana spread with peanut butter, and biltong.

Dr Joanna McMillan says:

Top marks for ... Reducing your food waste by using leftovers for lunch; food waste is one of the biggest issues for sustainability. You also have an excellent intake of good fats from your olive oil, nut butters and salmon.

If you keep eating like this you'll ... Manage your blood glucose and energy levels nicely as your carbs are coming from good sources, your meals are nicely spread over the day and you have an excellent array of essential nutrients.

Why don't you try ... To ensure your sourdough is wholegrain to deliver fibre and B group vitamins. Add more vegies and vary them across your week to include all different colours, maximising the array of antioxidants and other protective plant compounds.

Shaun Greenblo is co-managing director of clothing brand Boody.