

The TRAVEL EDIT

WHO'S GUIDE TO THE MOST LUXURIOUS DESTINATIONS HERE AND ABROAD



BEGUILING BELLINGEN

This bohemian New South Wales
country town will steal your heart

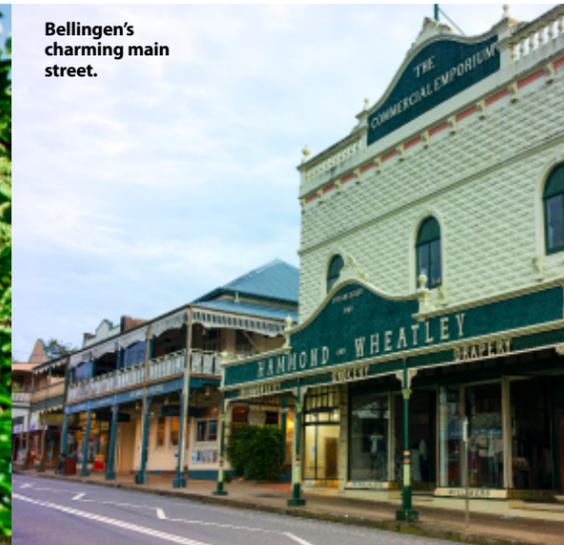


Indulging in the stellar cuisine at Cedar Bar & Kitchen.

In the heart of town, Cedar Bar & Kitchen is located in a 110-year-old converted church.



Bellinghen's charming main street.



Eco meets country charm at Lilypad Luxury Cabins.



AMY MILLS
WHO Travel Editor

We drive into Bellinghen on a sunny winter's afternoon and the main street is abuzz with people from all walks of life.

A less touristy but equally charming alternative to hot spots Byron Bay and Yamba, this heritage town, located in the Coffs Coast hinterland on the New South Wales Mid North Coast, has long been on my radar.

We drive through Bellinghen's main street with its charming heritage buildings, cafes, craft stores, the renovated 118-year-old Federal Hotel, and Emporium Bellinghen on the ground floor of the historic Hammond and Wheatley Building.

I see farmers, hippies, young families with barefoot kids and a bunch of literary types who are clearly in town for the annual Bellinghen Readers and Writers Festival taking place that weekend.

Hippie and artisan stores sit alongside cafes, boutiques and quality dining options, which is hardly surprising given the area, surrounded by rich pasture, is a veritable food bowl.

Our home for the weekend is the award-winning Lilypad Luxury Cabins, just four kilometres from town.

We cross a bridge and drive past farms and rolling hills before we come to a steep driveway. We drive past the owner's house to two self-contained cabins perched on a hill overlooking the lake. A Post-it note with my name tells us which of the two cabins is ours for the weekend.

Lilypad is owned by Yvonne and Frank Wynen, who built the two eco-cabins on their 4.8-hectare property with the purpose of sharing their slice of paradise with visitors from around the world.

Our self-contained abode is comfortable and private, with a king-sized bed and a kitchenette where our hosts have left fruit and chocolates in a basket.

In the bathroom a tub designed for two is positioned by the window so you can look at the lake and gardens while enjoying a relaxing soak.

We have a glass of bubbles on the balcony enjoying the crisp county air and last moments of the sunset.

Wanting to make the most of a child-free weekend, we call a cab and make our way to Cedar Bar & Kitchen, a 110-year-old converted church in the heart of the town, for dinner.

The fully licensed restaurant, boasting high ceilings and the original stained glass windows, is buzzing when we arrive and a bunch of writers – we spy respected journalist Kerry O'Brien – are gathered in a function space out the back.

Our host, owner Victoria Harper, is warm and attentive and we allow her to select some of her favourite dishes for us, which we pair with a bottle of French rosé.

We enjoy the house-made hummus with smoky paprika, pine nuts, parsley and flatbread and the house-cured salmon pastrami with pickled baby beetroot, black quinoa, snow peas and goat's curd.

For mains, we try the fish special and a side of crispy polenta chips with truffle aioli and shaved parmigiano, which are both delicious.

Content, we retreat back to our cabin and quickly fall into a deep sleep.

The following morning, the mercury has dropped considerably so we rug up and drive to the Old Butter Factory Cafe for breakfast.

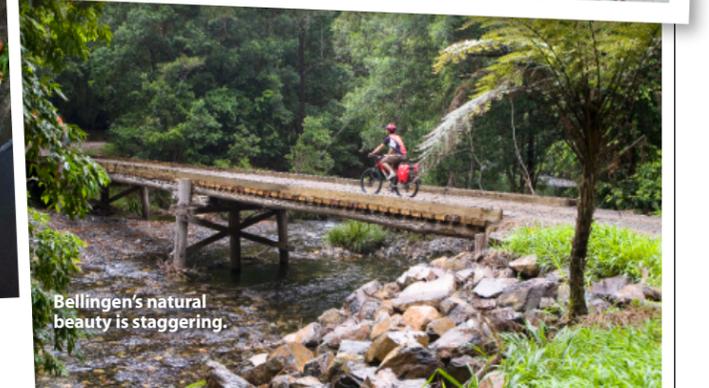
Located in the original 1926 butter factory building – the first reinforced concrete structure in New South Wales – the 25-year-old cafe is a local landmark.



Amy making the most of Bellinghen's burgeoning food scene.



A healthy start at the Old Butter Factory Cafe.



Bellinghen's natural beauty is staggering.

natural wonders of the area.

We take a 35-minute drive along a scenic, winding road to Dorrigo National Park, part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area.

We walk along an elevated boardwalk through the trees at the visitor's centre, and then, keen to walk off breakfast, do the 3.5-kilometre return walk to Crystal Shower Falls. Surrounded by verdant towering rainforest, we listen to the sounds of native birds and walk over a suspension bridge from which we admire the cascading falls.

Later, we explore the river and some much-loved secret freshwater swimming holes, the locations of which the locals prefer to keep to themselves in the fear they will become swamped by snap-happy tourists.

Two friendly dreadlocked locals show us to their favourite swimming spot and, despite the cold weather, we can't resist a dip in this tranquil space. There is no-one else around and there's spirituality inherent in the landscape; it's truly magical.

After an active day, we are ravenous and take a seat by the fire at the eclectic and laid-back No. 5 Church Street in town.

The fireplace is crackling and we take up a seat inside and admire the high ceilings and ornate chandeliers above.

Owner Pia Etteldorf hails from Trier, a south-western German city in the Moselle wine region, near Luxembourg.

She moved to Sydney in 1991 to work for the Four Seasons, and made Bellinghen her home in 2003 after passing through en route to Coffs Harbour and falling in love with the town.

"It reminded me of Europe, well Germany, with all of the green and hilly mountains," she says. "It was pure gut instinct to move here but I fell in love with it. Not only is it beautiful on the eye, there is really, really good community support; it's magic."

Etteldorf is just as passionate about her menu and the fresh, seasonal produce is sourced locally where possible for the house-made, preservative-free dishes.

I relish every bite of my Clean & Green breakfast [\$18.90] with sautéed spinach, asparagus, broccoli, spiced chickpeas, pesto, grilled halloumi, cherry tomatoes and a poached egg with dukkah, along with a strong flat white.

Refuelled, we are ready to explore the

Husk Farm Distillers are located in the Tweed Valley.



HELLO, HUSK

Boasting quality produce, sun, surf and scenery, there's no denying the beautiful New South Wales north coast is a crowd-pleaser.

Continue north past the popular Byron Bay and Brunswick Heads, and you'll find the lush Tweed Valley, which is having its own moment in the sun.

The latest gem in the region is Husk Farm Distillers, Australia's first paddock-to-bottle rum distillery and home of the much-loved Ink Gin.

Located on a 60-hectare farm, which covers 12 hectares of uncleared, remnant rainforest with views across the valley to Mount Warning, Husk houses a lively cellar door, cocktail bar and Planter's cafe.

Visitors can take a guided tour of the distillery and learn the art of creating these unique craft spirits, play lawn games or simply kick back on a blanket with a tippie in hand and take in the beautiful surroundings and faultless hospitality of the Messenger family and their warm, attentive staff.

To mark Ink Gin's fourth birthday, Husk have also just released a sloe and berry gin, a fresh take on the traditional English recipe with an Australian bush flavour twist.

huskdistillers.com



GET FIT IN BALI

There's no denying most of us need to gently spring-clean our bodies after winter, so those looking to get ready for summer while basking in luxury are in luck. Hosted by fitness guru Mikaela Di Blasio, the Empower Retreat will be held from October 14-20 in north Bali and will combine sunrise workouts with vegan food, sunset movies and self-nurture sessions in a picturesque setting at The Villas, 10 minutes from Central Lovina.

A keen environmentalist, Di Blasio has also included enviro-workshops in the program. thevillas.holiday/empower



LIFE'S A BEACH

Australian sea essentials brand, The Beach People, have teamed up with hip eyewear label Sunday Somewhere to create some seriously chic tropical pieces. The three-piece collection, the Palm Capsule, includes a travel towel [\$89] and jute bag [\$25] as well as the brand's first foray into eyewear, the Palm Sunglasses [RRP \$260].

Designed in Australia, each piece features a subtle hand-drawn palm print as an ode to the seaside minimalist – ideal for those long lazy days on a palm-lined beach. thebeachpeople.com.au