

TRIPPING OUT in the DEEP SOUTH

PHIL HAWKES FINDS A ROAD TRIP TO THE NSW SOUTH COAST TURNS INTO A GRANDE BOUFFE EXPERIENCE.



Seahorse Inn Boutique Hotel, Boydtown



BY PHIL HAWKES

“Not another road trip!” These were the words of encouragement that greeted my suggestion to re-live some (very) old childhood memories with a drive through the picturesque southern coast of NSW, definitely True-Blue territory. Not a place to sport your maroon sweater or XXXX Beer cap.

Not only that, but in the middle of winter too, with just an 8 day window for our holiday.

Undeterred, I came up with a fiendishly clever, irresistible plan: fly to Sydney, then connect to Rex Aviation’s one hour

flight to Merimbula, rent a car, and drive back to Sydney over a week. Simple.

The plan worked perfectly. Road conditions on the Pacific Highway have improved since 50-plus years ago, when it was a single lane each way; you had to queue for the punt at Bateman’s Bay and brave the Bulli Pass with the car radiator boiling.

Apart from the beautiful coastal and inland scenery, with lakes dotting the landscape, there was another surprise in store. The whole region has become a foodie haven, the emphasis being on fresh farm produce, cheese, artisan bakeries, excellent coffee in the many new cafés and of course, seafood.

The clean southern waters provide a bounty of fish, lobster, mussels and naturally OYSTERS. These are some of the best we’ve ever eaten, and that’s after touring Tasmania several times. The main variety is Sydney Rock oysters, big and plump compared with those grown on the north coast thanks to the cool fresh waters and cleansing tides.

Couple that with the new wave of wineries springing up all over the place, and you now have what is arguably Australia’s most enjoyable foodie tour, from Eden to Kiama. Here are just a few of the highlights:

ACCOMMODATION

The delightful Seahorse Inn is a lovingly restored building on the shore of Twofold Bay near Eden, close to the site of the whaling industry from 1828 until 1930. This 10 room boutique hotel is in a class of its own in the Eden district.

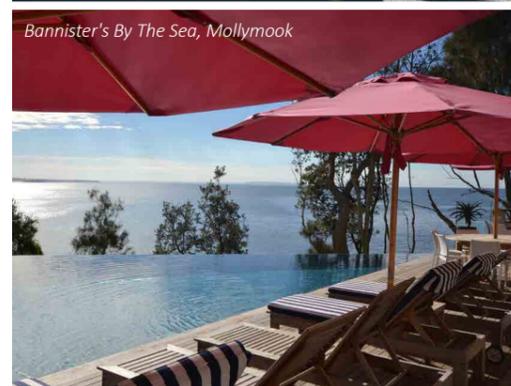
In Mollymook just north of the fishing port of Ulladulla is the legendary Bannister’s By The Sea with luxury rooms and suites.

Here, guest rooms are front-loaded with magnificent views of the ocean and yes, whales in abundance during the season from August to November. And just 800 metres away is Bannister’s Pavilion, a modern building with 34 rooms.

At Jamberoo, 9 km inland from Kiama, an unforgettable B&B experience awaits at Terragong, a country house dating back to 1858 and now restored to more than its former glory with four superbly Darryl Gordon-furnished ensuite rooms. The pièce de résistance is surely the lavish breakfasts served by co-owner Simon, and the chatty hospitality of the charming hosts with Daisy the puppy holding court.



Rex with crew



Bannister's By The Sea, Mollymook



Rick Stein's Lobster Ravioli



Eden Killer Whale Museum



Stan at Edén Smokehouse



Happy chef Simon at Terragong



Glenn at Mimosa Winery



Organic Garden at Cupitt's (Wally and Adrian)



Oysters at Wharf Road Restaurant, Nowra



Wheeler's Oyster Farm Restaurant, Pambula



Terragong 1858 Guest Room

FOOD AND WINE

The list of great food experiences could fill a few pages, but a few highlights were

- *Bettina's at Seahorse Inn* where chef Julie cooks up a storm using locally-sourced produce, and veggies from their own gardens.
- *Drift* at Eden's Snug Cove Wharf featuring fresh seafood in a quirky, casual atmosphere.
- *Edén Smokehouse* where Stan, of Polish descent, creates award-winning smoked fish, eels and other seafood.
- *Sprout Café* in Eden's main street, all natural and organic produce from local farmers.
- *Oaklands Nano-Brewery* near Pambula, where Rob is making excellent craft beers... try the Fatty Arbuckle Dark.
- *Wheeler's Oyster Farm* in Pambula, the go-to place for the best oysters and lobster in the area, plus a good wine list.
- *Dulcie's* in Merimbula, where burgers and oysters are served from an old caravan in the garden. Cocktails at the bar in the old house.
- *Mimosa Winery* between Tathra and Bermagui with a fine restaurant as well as interesting wines like a chambourcin/tempranillo blend, very palatable.
- *Rick Stein at Bannisters By The Sea*. What more can anyone say about this fine dining experience? It's one that you'll remember forever. Tip: try the plumpest mussels in the world, better than any we've had in Belgium.
- *Cupitt's Winery* near Milton, a prime example of a local family business who run not only a fine winery but a craft brewery and boutique cheese factory. A tour with Wally is great fun.
- *Wharf Road* on the riverbank at Nowra, where the Pacific oysters from Greenwell Point rival those from further south. The \$60 tasting menu is great value.
- *South on Albany* in the pretty town of Berry, where Sonia and John have created a restaurant to rival any in Surry Hills. Much loved by locals and Sydneysiders who appreciate a fine menu and wine list.
- *Blue Swimmer* in nearby Gerroa, similarly popular with locals who pack the place every night...their vegetarian specialities are outstanding.

OTHER MUST-SEE ACTIVITIES

- EDEN KILLER WHALE MUSEUM
- CAPTAIN SPONGE MAGICAL OYSTER TOUR, PAMBULA
- DISCOVER JERVIS BAY... ECO DOLPHIN CRUISES
- MINNAMURRA RAINFOREST CENTRE
- KIAMA COASTAL WALK

THERE'S MUCH MORE TO THIS STORY, BUT THOSE WERE SOME HIGHLIGHTS. ANOTHER KIND OF EXPERIENCE NOW AWAITS...BACK IN QUEENSLAND, STRAIGHT TO THE GYM TO SHED THOSE KILOS, THE RESULT OF A FOODIE TOUR THAT WILL LEAVE YOU WONDERING WHY WE HAVEN'T HEARD MORE ABOUT THIS RELATIVELY UNDISCOVERED REGION...UNLESS YOU LIVE IN SYDNEY. THEY SHOULD NOT HAVE IT ALL TO THEMSELVES.

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