

Byron Bay

You have probably heard of the beautiful Byron Bay, most have! 'Byron' as it's known by the locals is preceded by its reputation as a super relaxed, funky little town, a place to chill, surf, get in touch with either your holistic or artistic side, soak up the musical vibe, or take part in some fantastic adventure activities.

Byron Bay is the most easterly point in Australia, with the town centre situated below the big white Cape Byron lighthouse. Surfers love Byron and were really the first to start the huge popularity of this small town, there are always waves at one of the seven popular surf spots and the beaches are stunning for those after something less active. The waters are also perfect for snorkelling and diving, Spotting the local marine life is a local past time with fantastic whale watching to be done midyear and dolphins can be seen frequently from the beach.

Byron Bay is renowned as a bit of a hippy town, due to its colourful mix of residents from all over the world. Also there is a predominant attitude here of getting back to nature and the land, and it's easy to see why, when you visit the nearby Arakwal National Park and the kilometers of stunning coastline.

Byron Bay is located on the Far North Coast of NSW. If driving here, your best way to Byron Bay is via the Pacific Highway (Highway 1) from either Sydney or Brisbane, or other points in between. Byron Bay is only 100 kilometres south of the Queensland border and 800 kilometres north of Sydney. If you're taking a bus to Byron, all the major bus companies stop here. Or you can fly into the airport at Ballina, only 30 minutes drive away. Byron is a holiday destination for all sorts of travelers and the selection of accommodation reflects this. There are numerous backpacker hostels, hotels, resort and camping grounds available to suit everyone.

History

The original inhabitants of this region were the Arakwal and Bundjalung people. They were here for thousands and thousands of year before Captain James Cook claimed the area for Britain in 1770. He named it after navigator Vice Admiral John Byron (grandfather of the poet Lord Byron). The first white settlers moved to the area in the late 1840's. The settlement slowly grew, with its main industries of timber and agriculture, however the value of land rapidly increased following the prosperous period after World War II. Whaling became a main industry in the 1950's, though after only eight years, whale numbers dwindled to the point that it was no longer sustainable.

In 1954 a cyclone demolished more than 180m (600ft) of the Byron Bay jetty. This had devastating effects on the local fishing industry but was instrumental in raising people's awareness and attitude to environmental issues, which have since become entrenched in the fabric of Byron's society. From there and particularly in the 1970's the primary industries became ecotourism, permaculture, alternative medicine, bush tucker farming, music and the arts. The hippies swarmed to the area after the Aquarius festival in Nimbin in 1973 (and have stayed) leaving a colourful, peaceful vibe in Byron Bay.

Sights & Attractions

Byron Bay has something for everyone. It has become the home of many festivals throughout the year. The Blues & Roots Festival, every Easter attracts world renowned musicians from all over. A Taste of Byron is a food festival, held during August, as is the Writers Festival and Surf competitions, Ocean Swim and Triathlons throughout the year. It's worth finding out if there's anything on when you plan to travel as accommodation can completely book out for these events. There are plenty of local galleries to check out as there are many local artists living in the region.

Apart from the many beautiful beaches to walk along, swim or surf at, there are many of activities for those after some more action. There are options for skydiving, hangliding, scenic flights, sea kayaking with the local dolphins, horse riding, mountain biking, snorkeling or scuba diving. There are also a number of surf schools to have a go at that quintessential Aussie past time. Or if you're into the more peaceful, holistic activities, yoga and pilates are very popular, you can book in for a 3 or 4 day yoga retreat to cleanse and restore the mind and soul. There's any number of treatments available from Ayurvedic, Japanese acupuncture, therapeutic massage, Shiatsu, Intuitive bodywork and more. Or for an insight into your future, maybe try some tarot or psychic reading or astrology. Byron is famous for its alternative way of life and this is reflected in the local galleries, boutiques and craft shops.

While in Byron, you must see the views from the town's famous lighthouse at Cape Byron. You can take a picturesque hike up to the Cape or drive up. This is also a great spot to watch for passing whales in season (July, then again in September) as they migrate north to the calm waters of Hervey Bay. If you're lucky you may even catch sight of 'Migaloo', who's apparently the only white humpback whale in the world! There are many pretty national parks in this area, however they are most easily visited with a car. There are plenty of nice walks to do from Byron's town centre, with many stunning beaches and rocky headlands to choose from. The town of Nimbin is also worth a visit, for a taste of the true hippy village and to try any number of local cakes and cookies, famous for their relaxing, though not strictly legal ingredients! For live music, Byron Bay has a host of places to visit. Byron is a popular spot on many band's circuits, for the many reasons highlighted above.

Climate

Byron Bay enjoys warm summers and mild winters, which partly explains why so many people are moving from the southern cities to this beautiful region. Average daytime temperatures in Byron in summer are in the late 20's (°C); though it's also the time they receive their most rainfall. Winter temperatures range from the late teens to early 20's (°C). There is less rainfall in winter, which makes it a popular place to visit at this time; it's also far less busy than in the summer months.

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