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# *Australia 2016*

WE'RE CALLING IT:  
DESTINATION OF THE YEAR



First swim of  
the day at  
Murray Rose  
Pool, in  
Sydney's  
Double Bay.

# IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN YET, LUCKY YOU.

(NO ONE FORGETS  
THEIR FIRST TIME.)

And if you've traveled here before, well, you won't believe what you've been missing since. Something curious and remarkable has taken hold in the antipodes: At this moment, on all fronts, Australia is simply—as the kids say—crushing it. ¶ Why does this remote yet familiar culture have such a lock on our imagination? Simple: *Because they're doing it better.*

That elusive, undeniable thing we

call “lifestyle” has become Australia's calling card, an effortless cool the rest of us try to appropriate but never truly can. It's that frontier spirit sparked by true isolation, a why-not ingenuity born of self-reliance, a lightness tempering the shade of the Commonwealth, a worldliness informed by years of roaming the globe. (Here, the walk-about is a birthright, travel a veritable mandate.) At home and abroad, Ozzies meet the world with an enviable blend of edge and ease, an aesthetic rigor free of pretense, and an embrace of the outdoors paired with urbane sophistication. (You taking notes, California?) ¶ *Relax*, says a whole sun-kissed continent. *No worries*. This, in 2016, is not just how we want to travel, it's how we want to *be*. Australians have been living that life for a while now, which, of course, is how they make it look easy. ¶ It starts, as the best days do, with flat whites and avocado toast—and it only gets better from there. Australia's food culture is as inventive and influential as any today, and that old paradigm of Aussie cooks heading overseas to make their names has lately been reversed, with marquee chefs beating paths here (g'day, Heston and René!). ¶ The country's style quotient is on a similar trajectory—just ask Sydney tastemakers like Sibella Court, Maurice Terzini, Justin Hemmes, and Megan Morton. (Actually, we did it for you—see page 98.) Hotels, too, are upping their game. Two newcomers in Sydney are engines of change for entire neighborhoods, while others are demanding attention from as far afield as Tasmania, Perth, and Canberra (Canberra! Believe it—page 109). ¶ As if you needed further incentive to book a trip to Australia, there are now countless more reasons to go. (And with the Aussie dollar's recent drop, it's also a great value.) The following pages are just the beginning—you'll find much, much more online at [cntraveler.com](http://cntraveler.com), where we'll tell you how to sail and scuba the Great Barrier Reef, explore the Outback, or simply plan the perfect weekend in Melbourne or Sydney. All of which is our way of saying: Australia is our choice for 2016. Do yourself a favor and get down here as soon as you can.

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January is Australia month at [cntraveler.com](http://cntraveler.com). Follow the hashtag #MyAustralia on our social media channels (that's @cntraveler on Twitter and Instagram) for personal posts from our team of Australian tastemakers.



**Right:** Chef Mat Lindsay's kingfish crudo with burnt mandarin and nori charcoal, at Ester in Sydney.

# Sydney



The harbor-facing dining room at Bennelong, inside the Sydney Opera House.



## RENÉ REDZEPI'S Must-Eats

“They’re searching for something in Australia,” says the chef-owner of Copenhagen’s Noma. “They’re not food preservationists—they’re on the verge of creating something mind-bogglingly new.” René Redzepi is such a believer that he’s relocating his restaurant to Sydney this month for a ten-week stint (reservations sold out in less than 90 seconds). Australia’s a natural fit for the world’s most famous forager, who spent much of 2015 combing the continent for obscure native ingredients: “We found spiders that taste like crabs, bizarre bush fruit, and magpie geese that feed on water chestnuts and mangoes.” Redzepi also scoured Sydney for culinary inspiration, finding it at these eminently relaxed, quintessentially Aussie standouts.

### BILLY KWONG

“She’s not well known internationally, but [owner] Kylie Kwong is one of the cleverest people in the chef world—showcasing her immigrant-Chinese background in a marriage with native Australian ingredients to create a new reality of food. Her dumplings stuffed with warrigal greens? Brilliant and delicious.”

### SPICE TEMPLE

“Neil Perry is probably the best restaurateur on the planet. At his Chinese place, Spice Temple, they take cooking very seriously—creating spicy, authentic Chinese food the likes of which we just don’t have anywhere in Europe.”

### ESTER

“Like Relæ in Copenhagen or Estela in New York, this is one of those modern restaurants that’s really nailing casual dining right now. The cooking is always spot-on, reliably seasonal, and there’s always lots to choose from—a sure bet.”

### PORTEÑO

“This one goes close to the heart of Australians. Everywhere you travel around the country, they’ll tell you they have the best beef or the best lamb—and here you can have that wonderful meat cooked over the fire. Porteño’s inflection might run a bit more South American or European, but at its heart, this is like being at a super-fun Aussie barbecue.”

### EDITION COFFEE ROASTERS

“It doesn’t really matter if you’re here or in Brisbane or Darwin or anywhere else—Australia’s most ‘alive’ food culture is in its cafés, which are unique in the world. Wherever you go, you can always find friendly people serving great-quality food and coffee. For me, Edition is the best café in Sydney.”

## The NEW CLASSICS

Couldn’t score a table at the Noma pop-up? Three other fine-dining entrants have been generating similar buzz—particularly chef Peter Gilmore’s relaunch of **Bennelong**, which occupies a soaring, elegant space inside the Sydney Opera House. Dishes like a whole head of John Dory smeared in *umami* butter—served with Tokyo turnips and the curious desert plant salt-bush—offer a nuanced mix of indigenous and immigrant flavors. Around the bay, near Darling Harbour, Martin Benn and Vicky Wild’s **Sepia** pairs flawless service with a fresh and novel take on Japanese-Aussie fusion. (In Australia, fusion was never a four-letter word.) And after a quarter of a century, Neil Perry’s pioneering **Rockpool** relocated to the magnificent colonial-era Burns Philp Building downtown, with its Mod Oz spirit and mad soul intact.

# Finally, Sydney Gets a CHIC HOTEL. (Make That Two)

*In 2015, a pair of world-beating properties turned the Harbour City's hotel scene on its head—and put their neighborhoods squarely on the style set's radar.*

## THE OLD CLARE

**The Hood** For over a century, Chippendale was known as a half-square-mile nexus of iniquity. Today, its late-Victorian terraces are filling up with makers, bakers, artists, and chefs, while Kensington Street is being reinvented as a “lifestyle” laneway à la Melbourne's.

**The Heritage** The hotel occupies two landmark buildings: the former Clare Hotel Pub (Functionalist style circa 1940) and Carlton & United Breweries HQ (late Oz-Victorian circa 1915); the former's bar was an infamous boozier in Chippendale's seedier days.

**The Look** Wall tiles, parquet floors, and the original moldings and beams were all meticulously under-restored by local architects Tonkin Zulaikha Greer. Mid-century chairs from owner Loh Lik Peng's personal collection are found in nearly all 62 guest rooms.

**The Food** The Old Clare's trifecta of restaurants—Jason Atherton's Kensington Street Social, Silvereye (from ex-Noma sous chef Sam Miller), and Automata (from Momofuku Seiobo vet Clayton Wells)—have raised Chippendale's profile as much as the hotel has.

## HOTEL PALISADE

**The Hood** Miller's Point, an inner-city suburb between The Rocks and the newly developed Barangaroo Reserve, had been a scrappy longshoremen's enclave, albeit characterized by seriously pretty Federation Filigree architecture; it's now decidedly on the upswing.

**The Heritage** Built in 1912, the five-story Palisade Pub is another glorious relic of old Sydney, where, during World War I, Anzac soldiers shipping out to Gallipoli from Sydney Harbour came to sink their final pints.

**The Look** Über-stylist Sibella Court (see page 98) was conscripted to renovate the pub and repurpose its utilitarian upper floors into nine unique guest suites, two private lounges, and a knockout rooftop bar. Think Soho House on an Olde Good Things budget, filtered through a sepia lens.

**The Food** Chef David O'Brien's simple-yet-stellar menu—steak sandwiches, house-made salt-and-vinegar chips, and all the trad pub dishes you crave—keeps The Palisade's spirit alive, while famed mixologist Mikey Enright's cocktails are fully of-the-moment.



## SUNNY Side Up

*Chef Bill Granger and the cult of the Aussie café*

Twenty-three years ago, a college dropout named Bill Granger opened a cheery, no-frills breakfast joint in central Sydney named, simply, **Bills**. From a tiny kitchen, the chef turned out dishes

that were straightforward, fresh, occasionally indulgent, and just plain delicious: avocado toast, ethereal scrambled eggs, ricotta hot-cakes with strawberries and buttery streaks of honeycomb. Such defiantly unpretentious food made Bills feel like an extension of home—and launched a whole new culture of eating in Australia. Thanks to Granger, the café came to rival the pub as Sydney's beloved “local,” and his uniquely Aussie take on informal dining has been oft-imitated and exported around the globe. Today, the maestro has outposts in London, Tokyo, Seoul, and Honolulu, plus another two in Sydney, including a fab new location in Bondi.

As ever, the lines run down the block—so if you can't snag a table, check out one of these Granger-inspired cafés around town.

## GET YOUR BREKKIE HERE

**Bread & Circus, Alexandria,** for lemony banana pancakes and a flat white.

**Mecca, Alexandria,** for poached eggs and farm-raised ham with red-thyme ricotta.

**Room 10, Potts Point,** for the brown rice breakfast bowl.

**Ruby's Diner, Queen's Park,** for slow-cooked porridge with baked quince, pistachio crumble, and buttermilk.

The raw breakfast salad at Ruby's Diner: kale, avocado, feta, broccoli, almonds, and poached eggs.



... BUT OUR FAVORITE ROOM IN SYDNEY JUST MIGHT BE SUITE 204 AT THE GORGEOUS NEW PIER ONE HOTEL, BESIDE THE HARBOUR BRIDGE.

A sunrise swim—a daily ritual for so many Sydneysiders—at the 69-year-old Ross Jones Memorial Pool, one of the city's beloved saltwater rock pools.





## “We weren’t TRULY HOME till we dipped our feet in that water...”

*Novelist Anna Funder on the nostalgic allure of Sydney’s iconic rock pools.*

**Apart from certain** living creatures (aged 13, 11, and 6), the rock pools of Sydney are my favorite things on the planet. As with all great loves, there’s something primal and irrational about it. Visiting once from New York, I returned to Wylie’s Baths, an oceanside pool seemingly carved by surf from the rock below, and was so overcome by its beauty that I kept snapping photos with my phone.

“You’re not from here?” a stranger asked.

“I am,” I replied. “And I still can’t believe it.”

After years of living away, we moved back. The first thing we did was take our made-in-Brooklyn children to Murray Rose Pool and throw them in, rechristening them as Australians. We weren’t truly home till we dipped our feet in that crystalline water at the edge of the continent and felt the sky rise to its rightful place, way higher than in the Northern Hemisphere. It wasn’t just any water we needed: It had to be a Sydney rock pool, a holy place of worship for what’s essentially an Australian religion.

You reach Murray Rose through a library, of all things, then via a sunken garden, under majestic Moreton Bay fig trees. The swimming area is enclosed by a pier/walkway, beyond which pleasure boats bob and the ferries to Manly cruise by. At one end is a cyclone fence with a gate marked PRIVATE, curtailing access to Seven Shillings Beach, a millionaires’ row. But the gate is never, ever closed, and everyone happily ignores the sign.

The rock pools are a juncture of everyday pleasures and unexpected miracles. At Bondi one weekend, a group clustered at pool’s edge, where a man held in his hands a small horn shark. She’d given birth there and was banging against the rocks; he held her gently underwater until the waves rose high enough for her to swim out.

We’ve since given in completely and enrolled the children at Nippers, the surf lifesaving club at Bronte. Sundays are now spent with other parent volunteers, cheering our children through laps. As the surf crashes into the pool and our six-year-old comes up for air, I realize what is happening here. The kids are learning a lesson as basic as the gospel: To be your best is to be able to look out for others. Then it strikes me what this pool really is—one of the few instances where something man-made dares to improve on nature, and in doing so honors it. Where something free and open to all still feels precious and rare. Holy and secular. Secret, but the most democratic thing in the world. Lifesaving.

# The TASTEMAKERS' Black Book

Sydney's agenda-defining restaurant and design scenes are now celebrated around the globe, thanks to the likes of these innovative style-setters—all four at the top of their game. Here, they share their favorite hometown haunts.



## MAURICE TERZINI

*The Italian-Australian restaurateur is the creative force behind the legendary Icebergs Dining Room and Bar, the Bondi Beach go-to since 2002.*

"My dear friends Gio and Enrico Paradiso and Marco Ambrosino opened up **Fratelli Paradiso** 15 years ago in now-chic Potts Point. (It sure wasn't back then.) Fratelli has a great Italian vibe, with all-day dining, excellent coffee and pastries, and a very fine wine selection."



## JUSTIN HEMMES

*Through his ever-expanding Merivale hospitality brand, the raffish impresario oversees some 60 nightclubs, restaurants, and hotels across Sydney.*

"In Paddington, the small, candlelit bar **10 William Street** is consistently jam-packed, for good reason: The waitstaff are fantastic, the food is spot-on and completely free of pretension, the wine list is an interesting mix of well-known and unusual varietals . . . and they do a mean Negroni."



## SIBELLA COURT

*The interior designer's unique brand of eclectic chic is on display all over town, from the new Hotel Palisade (page 95) to her own fabulous home store, The Society Inc.*

"The talented textile artisans Pepa Martin and Karen Davis hand-dye all the cushions, curtains, and rugs at their decade-old studio and gallery, **Shibori**, and they can custom-design *anything*. I've called on them for so many projects, including the DJ box and blue-striped curtains at Palisade."



## MEGAN MORTON

*A dedicated booster of Australia's homegrown artisans, the interiors stylist recently launched The School, a crafts-focused teaching studio in the inner-city area of Rosebery.*

"The furniture and design firm **Koskela** launched its concept store here in industrial Rosebery in 2012. I love browsing the light-flooded showroom for salvaged hardwood picnic tables and items from local artists, like woven pendant lights fashioned by our indigenous Yolgnu community."

# Tasmania



Ready for a lunch of  
lobster, local oysters,  
and Tasmanian  
wine on the jetty at  
Satellite Island.



## The LITTLE ISLAND That Could

It's the **ultra-antipodean** bit of the antipodes, the unlikely outlier that, in recent years, began punching above its weight on the food and culture fronts. There are myriad reasons to visit Tasmania: the nascent dining scene in Hobart, the island's capital (home to the rightly lauded restaurant Franklin); the weirdly wonderful Museum of Old and New Art (the largest privately funded museum in Australia); the homegrown ciders and whiskeys that are now the stuff of lore, and the cool-climate wines—savory pinots, crisp sauvignons—that have quietly gained cult status. But the real star is Tasmania's landscape: magnificently varied, sparsely populated, replete with protected tracts of mountain wilderness and pristine coastline. Now, two hotels are leveraging the island's natural beauty with strikingly original takes on design.

### PUMPHOUSE POINT

Set within Lake St. Clair National Park—a World Heritage wilderness in the Central Highlands—this extraordinary retreat is the labor of love of Simon Currant, who's cast his hotel as a model for sustainability and environmental awareness. Its 18 rooms and suites are divided between two buildings: the Art Deco-inspired Shorehouse and the curious circa-1940 Pumphouse, formerly a hydroelectric plant. (Angle for a room in the

latter, set in the heart of the lake, at the end of a 700-foot-long flume jetty.) The aesthetic is understated industrial-chic: Task lamps and large wooden tables mix with built-ins of warm Tasmanian oak. Nearly every room has a picture window with views of glacial mountains or the indigo-blue lake itself.

**CLOSER THAN YOU THINK:** QANTAS NOW FLIES NONSTOP FROM L.A., DALLAS, AND SAN FRANCISCO TO SYDNEY—FROM THERE IT'S ONLY A 2-HOUR



**From far left:** A garden table at the Agrarian Kitchen; inside the Shorehouse at Pumphouse Point; morning mist on Lake St. Clair, in Tasmania's Central Highlands.

## SATELLITE ISLAND

In late 2013, the Alstergren family opened their remarkable 76-acre salmon farm for overnight stays. Thirty miles south of Hobart—accessed by helicopter or private speedboat—Satellite Island was used by eighteenth-century French explorers for astronomical observations; the island remains a dream of rocky coastal paths and still coves, with a three-bedroom “summer house” atop a hill and a two-bedroom boathouse tucked below. Interiors are flawless seaside-country—coir

mats and heavy, nubby linens in grays, blues, and naturals; a boathouse lamp upcycled from driftwood. Take a morning hike on a mile-long track to Last Glimpse Point with a thermos of coffee and fresh-baked pastries; come sunset, shuck your own oysters from the shallows in front of the boathouse. The quiet, you'll realize, is astonishing, and reason alone to have come.

## Where ALICE WATERS Learned to Cook (Again)

*How the Bay Area icon left her heart in Tasmania.*

● For each of the 44 years I've had Chez Panisse, I've traveled for inspiration, and I admit it took me some time to make it to Australia. When I finally did arrive, in 2014, I encountered such beautifully pure ingredients and cooks of such great integrity that I wish I'd gone sooner—this is truly one of *the* great gastronomic destinations. But it's the **Agrarian Kitchen**, 45 minutes outside Hobart, that will stay with me forever—my dream cooking school made real, run by a former chef turned magazine editor turned farmer named Rodney Dunn. The setting

lives up to the name: a beautiful old schoolhouse on a working farm with mulberry trees and boysenberries and rare-breed Berkshire pigs. Rodney's classes are as much a celebration of Tasmania's abundance and agricultural traditions as they are lessons in the fundamentals of great cooking. I still dream about his take on bacon and eggs—a glazed and roasted suckling pig with par-boiled eggs from the farm's hens. And Rodney is that rare combination of a deeply talented cook and a generous teacher. He and his wife, Séverine, made me feel so at home that I never wanted to leave.” -A.W.

FLIGHT TO HOBART, TASMANIA.

# Melbourne





## Second City ASCENDANT

*Innovative chefs, design-savvy restaurateurs—and, oh yes, that legendary coffee.*

**Take our word for it**—or just take Heston Blumenthal's. "Melbourne has, without a doubt, one of the world's most exciting restaurant scenes," says the British chef, who recently opened his first venture outside the U.K. here (an outpost of his smash London restaurant, Dinner). And while its profile has risen among food-world cognoscenti—thanks to local heroes like Attica's Ben Shewry—Melbourne has been, for some time, a phenomenal place to eat. The city has long drawn a broad mix of immigrant cultures, with every community bringing its culinary A-game. Isolation forced each to bend and borrow from neighbors; techniques and traditions integrated by necessity as much as by choice. This bowerbird approach evolved unself-consciously, forged not in the fusion experiments of high-end restaurants but in the quotidian eating habits of open-minded Melbournians. (For proof, look to the historic Queen Victoria Market, where tatsoi, Thai chilies, za'atar, and pomegranate molasses have been sold under one roof for decades—long before they became fashionable in New York, L.A., and London.) Today, a typical Melbourne line cook might be a third-generation Greek who is trained in Cantonese technique, has staged in kitchens in Denmark and Spain, and dreams of opening a native-ingredient-driven *pho* joint. Relaxed sophistication defines the dining scene—which owes an equal debt to the design community, whose collaboration with restaurateurs is another Melbourne hallmark. Here it's not enough to recycle furniture, dim the lights, and pump in the beats: In Australia's most progressive city, thoughtful and elegant spaces are a common priority, manifested in the clever utility of a tiny laneway café, a gorgeously reinvented pub, and the high design of a fine-dining destination. Whichever setting you choose, Blumenthal's point is spot-on: This is one hell of a food town.



**Clockwise from top left:** The Melbourne skyline as seen from the Yarra River; chef Ben Shewry of Attica; the entrance to Brae, in a colonial-era cottage southwest of Melbourne; the dining room at Moon Under Water.

# Melbourne's ESSENTIAL Restaurants

## THE GAME CHANGER

Don't let the deep-suburbia location fool you: **Attica** is one of Australia's finest restaurants, and certainly its most directional, with chef-owner Ben Shewry emerging as the standard-bearer for a new national cuisine. Celebrating once-shunned native ingredients, he's introduced a bold and novel flavor profile with showmanship but not a trace of gimmickry. The ever-changing menu might include a tail of marron (similar to freshwater lobster) and hunks of pearl meat paired with lilly pillly (a tangy crimson fruit); a delicate King George whiting wrapped in paper bark; or an astonishing cured red kangaroo with purple carrots and shaved bunya-bunya nut purée, its vermilion palette evoking the terrain of central Australia.

## THE BRILLIANT OUTLIER

Chef Dan Hunter made his bones cooking in rural, not urban, restaurants—first at Spain's Mugaritz and then at western Victoria's Royal Mail Hotel. So when he opened **Brae** in 2013, it made a certain sense that he chose a colonial-era cottage on 30 acres 90 minutes southwest of Melbourne. The setting might suggest nostalgic "paddock-to-plate" fare, but Hunter's next-gen techniques and intricate presentations offer a radical evolution of the locavore ethos. A recent ten-course tasting culminated in an eminently craveable braised short rib, scattered with shiitakes, baby kaffir lime leaves, and rock samphire. And a dessert of apple-and-parsnip custard—housed within the crisp, golden skin of a whole parsnip—was at once earthy and innovative, much like Brae itself.

## THE REBORN RELIC

Until recently, the Builders Arms Hotel was a classic rough-and-tumble Aussie boozier. Then Andrew McConnell took over, and a notorious dive pub somehow metamorphosed into a bastion of good taste. Just the miracle we expect of McConnell, who's spent his career changing the way Melbourne eats and drinks—from the refined Cutler and Co. to his packed pan-Asian Supernormal. But **Moon Under Water**, at the new Builders Arms, may well be his masterpiece. With white wood cabinetry and Thonet chairs, the dining room makes a fitting stage for food that's both honest and beautifully executed. A recent starter of delicate, barely adorned raw scallops segued into Parmesan-Gruyère puffs filled with spanner crabmeat. And a roasted veal with sunchokes was made modern by a deeply nuanced, shockingly good coffee rub.

## THE SHINING PEARL

Unlike fickle Sydney, Melbourne is a city that values its institutions. Decades-old stalwarts—when they're good—are still relevant in the dining scene. Prime example: **Flower Drum**, tucked above the fray of Chinatown and now entering its fifth decade. Combining the lacquer-and-red-carpet glamour of a Hong Kong dim sum palace with the refinement of a Michelin three-star, this would be one of the finest Cantonese restaurants anywhere if its style weren't more aptly called "Canto-stralian." Here, what appears to be a typical double-boiled soup is made with wallaby tail, to deliriously rich effect. Dumplings are stuffed with the sweet, delicate flesh of Queensland mud crabs. And the traditional abalone has been replaced with native Australian pearl meat, sautéed with asparagus and chives and served in its lustrous shell.



## About That COFFEE

Melbourne's culinary renaissance began in the same way almost every Australian now starts the day: with great coffee. In the 1950s, the first Italian immigrants opened espresso bars, introducing not only a new style of beverage but a profound cultural shift—and kick-starting the city's transformation from a tea-sipping Anglo outpost to the cosmopolitan, coffee-obsessed town it is now. ¶ The spiritual home of Melbourne's coffee culture—and by extension the entire country's—is **Pellegrini's**, a time warp of red vinyl and ristretto, where, so the story goes, Melbourne's first espresso machine was installed in 1954; today, its seminal status makes it a sentimental choice. ¶ And the newer breed? Melbourne never needed a so-called third wave of coffee (it was already doing quite well, thanks), so next-gen coffee bars here transcend mere hipsterdom. Instead, at cafés like **Seven Seeds**, you'll find an easy, eclectic mix of all ages and types. What sets the current scene apart is not the quality of the beans or superior roasting skills but the baristas' mastery of milk. Perfectly tempered, mixed to the proper ratio, the typical Melbournian flat white, latte, and cappuccino deliver an optimal mix of *crema* and creaminess, exemplified by those at the terrific standing-room-only café **Patricia**. And while café-goers once came for the coffee, now they stay for the food, not least the ubiquitous avocado toast—prepared with particular flair at **Pope Joan** in Brunswick East.

**Above:** An Americano at Patricia in Melbourne.  
**Right:** Peking duck in handmade pancakes with cucumber, spring onions, and plum sauce at the 40-year-old Cantonese institution Flower Drum.

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## FIVE VICTORIA WINES TO GET BUZZED ON

**2013 Crawford River Estate Riesling**

**2014 Moon Marsanne**

**2014 Patrick Sullivan Fruits of the Sky Pinot Noir**

**2012 Cobaw Ridge Chardonnay**

**2014 Latta Malakoff Young Skin No. 1 Non Dos (Zero SO2) Nebbiolo**



# BYRON Shire

## The BOHEMIA Beyond the Beach

**Known for its** spectacular headland and near-perfect waves, the slightly shabby subtropical beach town of Byron Bay, 480 miles north of Sydney, has for decades lured surfers and backpackers seeking a louche seaside getaway. Lately, a cohort of hoteliers and chefs have balanced that laid-back beachy goodness with a dose of sophistication, opening new ventures—both along the shore and in Byron Shire's lush hinterlands—that are drawing attention off the waves. Take the lads from Sydney's Three Blue Ducks, who've brought their winning brand of low-key locavore dining north with **The Farm**, an 80-acre working ranch and restaurant where the food travels the shortest possible distance from field to fork. Like a lot of things in Byron Shire, it's quirky, smart, and unerringly cool. Here, a few other bright spots in one of our favorite parts of the country.

### FOLK

It's a café. In a trailer park. From that dubious premise, Folk turns out to be a most charming surprise: a weatherboard cottage where the cheery, tousle-haired staff do a healthy breakfast-lingering-into-lunch trade. Sure, the nasturtiums adorning those (emphatically Aussie) grain bowls are as much about peace and love as they are about flavor, but Folk is dead-serious when it comes to good food—and the saltwater-and-sun-kissed vibe is a major plus.

### THE ATLANTIC

Ex-Sydneysiders Kim Amos and Steve Eakin took over a collection of bayside cottages, spruced them up with whitewash and 1960s surf kitsch, and launched their boutique hotel in 2012, filling the niche for a stylish weekender option beyond Byron's long-term rentals and backpacker dives. They've won devoted fans from Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne, and established the Atlantic as a sort of antipodean answer to Ace Hotels.

**Clockwise from top left:** Maritime ephemera in a guest room at The Atlantic in Byron Bay; the hotel's Airstream trailer suite; coconut scrambled eggs and spelt toast with avocado at Folk; a view of The Farm's pecan orchard.

### FLEET

The town of Brunswick Heads (population: 1,636) has all the Byron requisites: beach, pub, fish-and-chips shop. Now it also has Australia's best new regional restaurant. This tiny 20-seater, opened last year, is a two-person operation run by host/server/sommelier Astrid McCormack and her partner, chef Josh Lewis. Economy leads to brilliance in the kitchen: Oft-maligned mullet is smoked and transformed into a dip laced with dill, accompanied by crisps of potato and fish skin. Like Brunswick Heads itself, it's an unassuming revelation.

### HALCYON HOUSE

Half an hour north of Byron, on Cabarita Beach, this breezy 21-room sleepaway is where seaside nostalgia meets Oz's trademark unfussy-chic, with bamboo fixtures, upholstered walls, and a Capri-esque palette of blue and white against a backdrop of powdery sands and the endless Pacific. Chef Ben Devlin—holy smokes, another Noma alum!—leads the restaurant with modest but inventive flair. And thoughtful details, like a scoop of passion fruit ice cream at check-in, make Halcyon feel like a return to childhood shore-side holidays.

### MIDDLE PUB

For all its newly scrubbed-up appeal, Byron still revels in that rugged Aussie spirit embodied by the old-school pub—which is why we'd be remiss not to mention our favorite local. A short drive north of the bay, in Mullumbimby (try saying that after a few pints), this tin-and-timber watering hole has a veranda that's provided refuge from the afternoon sun for more than a century. Grab a coldie, then settle in for a session by the faithful piano, still *plink-plinking* after all these years.





Another sun-drenched afternoon at The Pass, one of Byron Bay's most celebrated surf breaks, just around the headland from Wategos Beach.



## Where To Go NEXT

*If you have more than two weeks, consider one of these farther-flung emerging destinations. Or start planning your return, then hit every last one. (Trust us: They're worth the journey.)*

### ADELAIDE: THE NEW WINE COUNTRY

Some of the oldest producing vineyards in the world can be found around the southern coastal city of Adelaide, which was spared the late-nineteenth-century phylloxera outbreak that devastated most of Australia's old-growth vines. Today, the Adelaide Hills, and the Basket Range in particular, are capturing global attention for first-rate natural wines. The area has attracted top viticultural talent, including James Erskine, a former *Gourmet Traveller* Sommelier of the Year, who's making an inventive, on-the-nose grenache at his acclaimed Jauma vineyard.

### PERTH: THE FRONTIER TOWN MADE CHIC

It's called the most isolated city on earth, but Western Australia's capital is now basking in the glow of major investment, ambitious development, and some glossy high-profile openings. Leading the charge is **COMO The Treasury**, the COMO brand's first Aussie outpost, which debuted in October in a clutch of Victorian-era buildings. Nearby, Thai cooking maestro David Thompson's month-old **Long Chim** is already the hottest table in town, while fresh-shucked oysters and Margaret River chardonnays are luring the in-crowd to **Print Hall**. And **Cottesloe Beach**—perhaps the country's finest stretch of sand—is just eight miles away.

### CANBERRA: CAPITAL OF COOL

Australia's formerly humdrum capital is having an unlikely but undeniable moment, courtesy of its rich culture scene (don't miss Tom Roberts at the National Gallery through Easter) and a re-appreciation of Canberra's epic master-plan architecture. But it's the 68-room **Hotel Hotel** that's become a destination in itself. The entrance alone—a grand staircase with 2,250 pieces of sleek salvaged timber—proclaims it to be more bold than beige. The drama continues in a lobby of untreated concrete, punctured with round skylights and softened with supple leather loungers, shaggy stools, and bespoke artwork. This is Australia's most accomplished and eye-popping hotel, bar none.

### ... AND THE LODGES WE DREAM ABOUT

For two decades, Australia's trans-Tasman neighbor, New Zealand, has dominated the highest end of the region's resort market, thanks to a clever coalition of its ultra-luxurious wilderness lodges. • Emulating the Kiwi model, Luxury Lodges of Australia (LLOA) was formed in 2010—an exclusive collection drawing together 19 independent properties from all corners of the country. Want to explore the Outback? Spend three days in the wild isolation of Western Australia's Kimberley region at **El Questro Homestead**—or wake up to the staggering beauty of Uluru (Ayers Rock) at the newly renovated **Longitude 131°**. Diving the Great Barrier Reef? Beach yourself at Queensland's award-winning **Qualia**, or hit **Lizard Island** for superlative snorkeling. You can spend a few nights tasting Barossa Valley wines at **The Louise**; soaking up mineral springs at Victoria's **Lake House** spa retreat; or taking in the windswept drama of Kangaroo Island's **Southern Ocean Lodge**. LLOA can suggest a multi-stop itinerary for seamless travel between camps and lodges. As your hosts say, No worries.



### FIVE AUSSIE BEACHES TO WASH UP ON

**Wategos Beach**  
Byron Bay

**Cottesloe Beach**  
Western Australia

**Bondi Beach**  
Sydney

**Bells Beach**  
Victoria

**Whitehaven Beach**  
Whitsunday Island

From Sydney's vibrant cocktail scene to thrilling new adventures in the Outback, explore everything the country has to offer at [cntraveler.com/australia](http://cntraveler.com/australia).

### Your CULTURE FIX

*2016 highlights from around the country.*

**Bangarra Dance Theatre**  
*Sydney; year-round*  
The renowned Indigenous Australian company (above) spins a uniquely modern—often powerfully political—take on traditional dance.

**MONA FOMA**  
*Hobart; January 13–18*  
Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art hosts the bizarre-yet-brilliant Festival of Music and Art; the Flaming Lips top this year's lineup.

**Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art**  
*Brisbane; through April*  
Co-sponsored by GOMA, Australia's leading modern art museum, this year's exhibition focuses on figurative painting, kinetic art and sculpture, and live-action and video art from luminaries around the region.

**Festival of Dangerous Ideas**  
*Sydney; September*  
Held at the Opera House, the annual conclave gathers global provocateurs for a series of headline-grabbing talks and panels.

**GET HERE NOW:** AUSTRALIA EXPECTS NEARLY 8 MILLION VISITORS IN 2016—A 35 PERCENT INCREASE FROM JUST 5 YEARS AGO.