

Best Of ..... STORY BY SARAH REID

# BYRON BAY REGION

Best Italian  
**Belongil Beach Italian Food**

It was never going to be easy opening a new restaurant during the pandemic. But renowned Sydney restaurateur Maurice Terzini (of Bondi’s Icebergs Dining Room and Bar fame) persevered to unveil this pastel-pink oasis of relaxed, seafood-centric fare just in time for last summer. It’s the kind of place you can arrive at fresh off the beach across the street for gamberetti fritti and a glass of prosecco (that’s if you’re lucky enough to snag a walk-in table).

○ 33-35 Childe Street, Byron Bay; (02) 8090 6962; bbif.com.au

Best all-day restaurant  
**Shelter**

Just south of Byron in low-key Lennox Head, newly renovated Shelter ticks all the boxes: smart yet laid-back seaside setting; friendly service; and interesting breakfast, lunch and dinner menus using local produce. There’s even an aperitivo hour from 4pm. Don’t bother ordering the plump Hervey Bay scallops with XO, preserved lemon and wild rice individually – you’ll want all six in the standard serve.

○ 41 Pacific Parade, Lennox Head; (02) 6687 7757; shelterlennox.com.au

Best neighbourhood hangout  
**Barrio**

This large, airy restaurant spills out into the main courtyard of the Habitat complex in Byron’s Arts and Industry Estate. Centred on a woodfired oven and grill (with Argentinian chef Santiago Socrate at the helm), dishes are designed to be shared (and frankly, with options such as Bangalow pork belly with nashi pear and mustard jus, you won’t have much say in the matter). There’s also a coffee counter with pastries and excellent salads.

○ 1 Porter Street, Byron Bay; 0411 323 165; barriobyronbay.com.au

Best Mexican  
**La Casita**

Mexican eateries have mushroomed in the shire but few can hold a tamale to La Casita, the sister restaurant of two-hatted Fleet (currently closed). Memorable evenings at this rustic, semi open-air “little house” kick off with a spicy Benny’s Margarita (mezcal, orange, ginger and chilli) and antojitos (little cravings). Follow up with a serving of tacos – the slow-cooked pork with achiote, pickled pineapple and pig’s ear chicharrón is essential.

○ 5/3 Fawcett Street, Brunswick Heads; (02) 6685 1223; lacasita.com.au

Best breakfast  
**Bayleaf**

Bayleaf’s owners transformed this centrally located café into a must-visit after taking over a decade ago and it has stayed that way ever since. Come for wholesome dishes that taste as good as they look (the scrambled special, laced with salsa verde, is always a winner) and the efficient service that keeps the inevitable queue for a table moving. Hit up the adjacent takeaway section for a quick fix.

○ 2A Marvell Street, Byron Bay; bayleafbyronbay.com

Best pub meal  
**Eltham Hotel**

The 40-minute drive deep into the hinterland is well worth the effort to reach this cracker of a pub. Not only is the historic watering hole chock-full of character but Melbourne’s Tim Goegan (ex Supernormal and Gimlet) now heads up the kitchen. The specials board is ever-changing and there’s a bistro menu of familiar comforts such as burgers and eggplant parmy. If you can’t bear to leave, there are five rooms upstairs, each with a story to tell.

○ 441 Eltham Road, Eltham; (02) 6629 1217; elthampub.com.au

Best for a night out  
**Bang Bang**

Have you even been to Bali – sorry, Byron – if you haven’t had dinner and cocktails at Bang Bang? Bringing together well-executed South-East Asian favourites and on-trend mod-Oz dishes (crunchy tempura soft shell crab sliders, a rich and creamy massaman curry of braised Wagyu brisket) with a cool cocktail list to match, this loud, moodily lit corner restaurant is a guaranteed good time.

○ 4/1 Byron Street, Byron Bay; (02) 7204 5324; bangbangbyronbay.com

Best fine-diner  
**Raes Dining Room**

If Byron people-watching peaks in one place, it’s at Raes on Wategos’ intimate Dining Room overlooking the shire’s famous beach. Formerly of Sydney’s Pilu, executive chef Jason Saxby presides over the Med-influenced menu – a three-course affair with four choices in each (with dishes such as fregola pasta with local shiitake, black garlic, porcini, macadamia and saltbush). There’s also a tasting menu plus vegetarian versions.

○ 6-8 Marine Parade, Byron Bay; (02) 6685 5366; raes.com.au

Best for light bites  
**Bar Heather**

Byron’s contentious new Jonson Lane precinct redeems itself with this new bar-restaurant from James Audas and Tom Sheer, the sommeliers-turned-wine importers behind Luna Wine across the road. While the emphasis is on the natural wine list, the lively snack-style food menu by chef Ollie Wong-Hee (ex Sydney’s Ester and Sixpenny and Hobart’s Franklin) is not to be overlooked. Graze on the likes of zingy betel leaf wraps between vinos. ●

○ G9/139 Jonson Lane, Byron Bay; 0400 444 944; barheather.com



(Clockwise from above) Shelter in Lennox Head; Argentinian chef Santiago Socrate at Barrio; Raes Dining Room



Jess Kearney