

VOYEUR//TOYOTA

# THE SPIRIT OF BYRON

*Known as a place of healing, you don't need to embrace singing bowls to centre your qi here.*

A sacred meeting place for the Aboriginal tribes of the Bundjalung nation — particularly women — for generations, Byron Bay is widely considered to be Australia's spiritual centre. But while you can find a healer to meet your every need without leaving the main street these days, striking out into nature with the help of Byron's alternative ecotourism operators might be all the spiritual healing you need.

Nothing recalibrates quite like strolling the 3.7-kilometre walking track that loops Australia's most easterly point, yet few know it's possible to enlist an Arakwal Aboriginal Discovery Ranger to guide you. You'll learn about Cape Byron's deep spiritual significance to its traditional owners, the Arakwal people, en route, which adds a new dimension. The walk passes the lighthouse Cape Byron Light, and after years of dragging your own snacks and blankets up to this sunrise spot, you can now savour the moment over an ultra-gourmet, locally sourced sunrise picnic crafted by Wild Goat Events on the lawn.

If the Cape crowds mess with your Zen, there are plenty of other excellent, lesser-trodden walks in the area, says local wildlife ecologist and environmental educator Caitlin Weatherstone, who runs workshops on 'rewilding' through her company Wild Search Australia.

"Just 15 minutes from Byron, the Three Sisters track that curls around Broken Head is a lovely walk," says Weatherstone. "To really immerse yourself in nature, take a scenic drive to Nightcap National Park, less than an hour from Byron, which has some spectacular waterfall hikes, including Minyon Falls and Protester's Falls."

No wheels? Environmental scientist and outdoor adventure leader Shaunti Sun of Back to Nature Journeys offers half- and full-day retreats designed to help you reconnect with nature beyond the typical ecotour. Think wild swims, mindful rainforest walks, yoga and more. You will also soon be able to connect to nature through your stomach in Byron, with Tessa Cookson of Forage Byron Bay due to launch foraging and preserving workshops in the region this spring.

It wouldn't be a trip to Byron without taking in a yoga class. Free classes are now often held on the beachfront (check Facebook events for upcoming sessions), and if you're bedding down at Elements of Byron — which opened new villas, an adults-only pool, and a beach bar earlier this year — don't miss its complimentary beachfront morning yoga classes. The resort offers pranayama and meditation, too. The Byron region's most famous wellness retreats also harness the healing powers of nature in many of their treatments.

Tucked away in the hinterland, you can even indulge in some equine therapy with renowned 'horse whisperer' Sue Spence of Horses Helping Humans. "It's not really horse therapy that I do, I actually teach life skills and communication skills because we are making people aware of their personality, their body language, and we're teaching emotional regulation," she says. "It's a really bold move for people to stand up and admit that they've got anxiety and emotional health issues and actually take control and move forward and seek help and continue to get that help and continue to grow." And who doesn't want to keep growing? Especially in such a beautiful setting.



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