

POSTCARD.


COAST IS CLEAR

Between sand dunes and expansive bushland sits Bangalay Luxury Villas, a coastal getaway connected to its environment in more ways than one, writes **Phoebe Wood**.

LIKE THE REST of the world, Australians are re-thinking the way they travel, and for Sydney-siders looking for epicurean escapes close to home, there's no better time to explore the South Coast. The past year has seen the once-pristine region face unprecedented adversity, from the bushfires that ravaged townships and coastline, to devastating floods that coincided with an ominous standstill in local tourism due to the global pandemic. It's a critical time for local communities, with many of the businesses relying on an unpredictable tourism trade. But they are all banding together as they embark on the road to recovery, says Michelle Bishop, owner of Bangalay Luxury Villas in Shoalhaven Heads, through creative thinking, supportive partnerships and good-old-fashioned resilience.

The idyllic Seven Mile beach is the backdrop for the property that features 16 self-contained villas nestled behind the dunes of the destination beach, an easy two-hour drive from Sydney. Built by husband-and-wife team Tom and Michelle Bishop, the villas offer a serene immersion into the coastal surrounds.

"We wanted the villas to fit subtly into the landscape, and our love for modernist architecture led the overall aesthetic. The materials we selected weather naturally and we've made the buildings and the operations as sustainable as possible," says Michelle. "The site was bare when we started, and we set out to recreate what would have been the natural landscape of the Bangalay sand forest flowing through the property. The concept was built around the villas being linked by the boardwalk and the bush track to the beach."

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"INDULGE IN A FEW HOURS BY THE POOL, SURROUNDED BY COASTAL BANKSIA AND EUCALYPTUS, WITH A SALTBUSH MARGARITA IN HAND."

While the contemporary, light-filled rooms are spacious and pared back, there are bespoke furnishings and sculptural art pieces by local artists that showcase the region's natural materials.

In such a tranquil space, the agenda is to simply unwind. Indulge in some downtime by the pool, surrounded by the native coastal banksia and sweet-smelling eucalyptus, with a saltbush margarita in hand. And you don't have to go far for dinner. Helming the kitchen at the on-site restaurant, Bangalay Dining, are new chef recruits, Simon Evans and Thomas Chiumento, a well-known duo formerly of Caveau in Wollongong, while the floor is expertly run by Ronnie Gorman, most recently from Saint Peter.

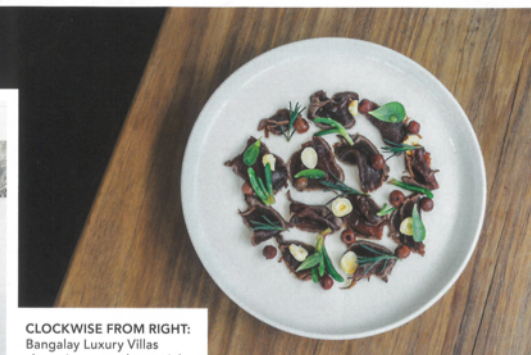
The a la carte menu highlights the conscious connection to the surrounding bushland and coastline, and the food works these elements with much thought minus the tokenism. The menu, listing bunya nut, beach vegetables, muntries and Warrigal greens as ingredients piques the diner's curiosity. Warrigal greens bind a bright pesto to dress grilled asparagus, while pickled muntries, a native berry, offset the rich flavour of grilled kangaroo. The bunya nut is served with barbecued zucchini and peppery red elk lettuce.

These native delights aren't just reserved for the food. A local beer is presented with theatrical flourish at the table under a cloche, revealing a plume of bunya nut smoke that has lightly infused the ale, while the wild-growing succulent known as coastal pig face flavours a classic mojito. It's a menu that celebrates the connection to the surrounding environment, and supporting local producers and farmers.

It's impossible not to be beguiled by this beautiful destination, proving the greatest escapes aren't far from home. ✕

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PHOTOGRAPHY BANGALAY VILLAS



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Bangalay Luxury Villas champion natural materials; a luxe bedroom; the on-site restaurant draws from the surrounding landscape; the Bangalay team; poolside; gardens immerse villas in their environment; grilled kangaroo with pickled muntries.

