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Shoalhaven

With its rolling green fields, white-sand beaches and thriving design scene, the south-eastern region of NSW is back in business – and supporting it should be at the top of your bucket list

Riding a horse along a lush green trail leading to Shoalhaven Heads' iconic Seven Mile Beach, it's hard to believe that, only a few months ago, the region was under threat from some of the worst fires our nation has known. But now that the flames are extinguished and there's been some much-welcomed rain, the Shoalhaven is back doing what it does best.

Approximately three hours' drive south of Sydney and a relaxed two-and-a-half hours in the car from Canberra, this vast region takes in areas such as the magnificent bushland of Kangaroo Valley, the white-sand beaches of Jervis Bay Marine Park, the waters of Berringer Lake and Lake Conjola, the artsy township of Milton and the honeymooners' go-to of Mollmook.

On this trip, we're visiting Shoalhaven Heads and nearby Coolangatta and Berry. With rolling green hills only seconds from pristine beaches, this pocket of the Shoalhaven boasts luxe accommodation, a thriving food and wine scene and more design and homewares stores than any interiors aficionado could hope for.

Arriving late afternoon at Bangalay Luxury Villas in Shoalhaven Heads, we're escorted by owner and interior designer Michelle Bishop to a stylish one-bedroom Golf View villa, decorated in a contemporary black and white palette with weaves and wall hangings made from flora by local artist Marina Strode.

As we stroll the outdoor hardwood corridor, she reveals some of the unique design features the villas and onsite restaurant, Bangalay Dining, share. The property was built using sustainable hardwood, which ensured that construction waste was minimised throughout the build. "There can be a lot of waste in construction," says Michelle. "Planning the design and build gave my husband Tom and I control over them and ensured every material was well considered. We also found creative ways to incorporate leftover materials into things like restaurant signage and furniture, which Tom actually made himself."

This ethos flows into the restaurant's dinner menu, created using ethically sourced produce and native Australian ingredients such as Davidson plums, desert lime and lemon myrtle. After a feast of flavours paired with incredible local wines, it's time to roll off to bed, ahead of the next day's early horseride.

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THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The swimming pool at Bangalay Luxury Villas. Private entrances to the villas. One of the property's many palm trees. A table at the resort's restaurant, Seven Mile Beach is across the road. The villas are linked by a picturesque timber boardwalk. Locals come on foot, on two wheels or four wheels to sample the region's renowned food. Outside a two-bedroom Garden View villa. **OPPOSITE** Solitude and tranquility are all yours on the sand.



CLOCKWISE White Shoalhaven sand dune. Cocktail hour at Bangalay Dining. Shopping at Moss Nest in Berry. Grabbing a bite at The Garden Berry. Monique Miller of Regal Riding School and her horse, Tex, guide tourists on a beach ride.

The following morning, as the sun creeps into the sky, we're greeted by Monique Miller and Bernadette Robinson from Regal Riding School, a short drive from the resort. My beautiful horse is Ebony, a placid bay mare, and we all duly trot along a rainforest trail to Seven Mile Beach, past wallabies, water dragons and fern fronds glistening with morning dew.

Following the ride, it's back to Bangalay Dining for breakfast before heading to a wine tasting at Mountain Ridge Wines. The sustainable winery and its restaurant sit on a mountain in Coolangatta, some eight kilometres south of Berry. The cellar door also acts as an art gallery, showing works from local artists.

The most awarded winery in the region is historic Coolangatta Estate, which dates back to the early settlers and boasts 10 varieties of grapes onsite, making the wines truly unique to this location. After tasting their vast selection of whites and reds (and purchasing a bottle of the Tannat so thoroughly enjoyed the previous evening), it's off to Berry for lunch at The Garden, a lovely indoor-outdoor cafe that caters to all kinds of dietary requests. Our vegan beetroot pasta with cashew parmesan supplies plenty of fuel for the long, lazy afternoon ahead, shopping and sourcing accessories on the vibrant high street and quaint side lanes of this gorgeous country township. 📍

Visit bangalayvillas.com.au; [@strodehouse](https://www.instagram.com/strodehouse); [readysstrot.com](https://www.instagram.com/readysstrot); mountainridgevines.com.au; coolangattaestate.com.au; [facebook.com/TheGardenBerry](https://www.facebook.com/TheGardenBerry)



Shoalhaven design addresses

Cabana Jo's

87 Queen Street, Berry;

[@cabanajos](https://www.instagram.com/cabanajos)

Take a late stroll into summer. Think beach towels, umbrellas, shell-encrusted mirrors, cotton throw rugs, printed lampshades, tropical-scented candles and floaty linen clothing.

Moss Nest

69 Queen Street, Berry;

[@mossniestore](https://www.instagram.com/mossniestore)

If you could live in a shop, you'd pick this one. The owner has an eye for style, selling imported furniture, iron fire pits and one-off artisan wares from India, as well as locally produced items.

Amara Home

83 Queen Street, Berry;

[@amara_home](https://www.instagram.com/amara_home)

A curation of one-off furniture, homewares and decorative pieces from across the globe, as well as fashion and fragrance brands such as Tom Ford, Celine, Jac + Jack and Trudon.

Few & Far

133 Queen Street, Berry;

www.fewandfar.com.au

With designer pieces from far and wide, this store encourages a 'slow shopping' experience that entices all the senses with aroma, colour, texture and sound.

Mrs Red's Shed & Co Emporium

49 Queen Street, Berry;

mrsredsshed.com

A treasure-trove of antiques, pre-loved toys, furniture and bric-a-brac, this vast shed also has local wares and edible goodies. Ideal for lovers of retro and those with a hankering for restoring things.

This Old House Studio

81 Queen Street, Berry;

thisoldhouwestudio.com.au

A quaint store stocking architectural hardware from leading Australian designers: Tradco Hardware, Designer Doorware, Hepburn Hardware and The Society Inc, plus more. It's also the local distributor of Pressed Tin Panels and hosts regular craft workshops.

Shoalhaven Regional Gallery

12 Berry Street, Nowra;

shoalhavenregionalgallery.com.au

This creative hub has a vibrant exhibition program showcasing leading Australian artists, some community-based exhibitions and works from the Shoalhaven City Art Collection. The gallery store also supports local artists.

The Collective Beat Gerringong

105 Fern Street, Gerringong;

thecollectivebeat.com

Fashion, furniture and eco-finds from local artisans make this multi-business studio an eclectic place to shop and browse.

Kinghorne Traders

90 Kinghorne Street, Nowra;

kinghornetraders.com

A retail centre displaying local businesses and makers. The collective comes to life with ceramics, scented candles, teas, jewellery, furniture and more.

Fern Street Art Gallery

2/131 Fern Street, Gerringong;

fernstreetgallery.com.au

Owned and run by professional artists, this gallery rotates exhibitions of working photographers and artists from across the Shoalhaven region.

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