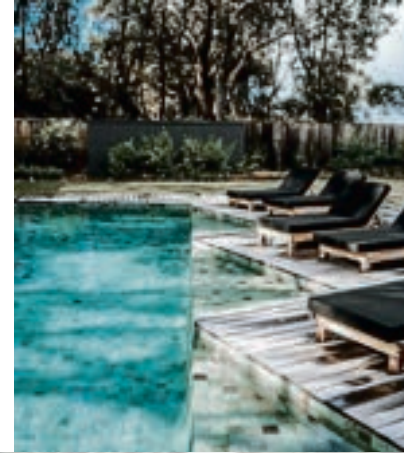


HOTEL REVIEW BANGALAY LUXURY VILLAS, NSW



Clockwise from main: Villas in a native landscape; the heated pool; dinner is served; room with a view.

Chic and cosy in a coastal forest

Fine dining is the cherry on top. By Sarah Maguire

THE BACKSTORY

Opened in September 2018 and no stranger since to awards (nor the perils of bushfire and pandemic), the family-owned Bangalay Luxury Villas is the passion project of Tom and Michelle Bishop, a builder and interior designer duo who grew up on the South Coast and, with their four kids, live there again after moving back from Sydney to run the villas - there are 16 of them, plus restaurant Bangalay Dining, which has scored its first Good Food hat.

THE SETTING

Shoalhaven Heads is a classic beach holiday town on the NSW South Coast, and Bangalay is set against the dunes of Seven Mile Beach, which begins its spectacular sweep 12 kilometres north in Gerroa and ends right near here, at the Shoalhaven River mouth. On a rainy Saturday afternoon, I sit with a book on the verandah of our villa, the fairways of the Shoalhaven Heads Golf Club just beyond a curtain of eucalypts and

shrubs. The wind is in the trees, insects chirp and I can hear the waves crashing nearby.

THE STYLE

I'd never heard of Bangalay Sand Forest, a South Coast ecosystem that is home to coast banksia, white blackbutt, lilly pilly and swamp oak, as well as an eponymous eucalyptus and so much more besides. And it is inspiration for not just the name, but the ethos of this place, described as being "grounded in honouring our beautiful natural surroundings". The villas nestle in their sand forest landscape, pared back and close to nature yet visually stunning, their ironbark and custom black cladding a perfect match with the khaki, olive and emerald shades of the native greenery that is all around. It feels earthy and fresh. You want to take long, deep breaths, and exhale slowly.

THE ROOMS

Our one-bedroom villa, at the end of a banksia- and palm-lined walkway, is chic yet super homey. Given its size, it could be



SNAPSHOT

Where: Bangalay Luxury Villas, 30 Staples Street, Shoalhaven Heads, NSW

How much: From \$620 a night

Explore more: bangalayvillas.com.au

home: a generous all-in-one dining and living area includes a kitchen and laundry, and the king-sized room has built-ins. It's fully self-contained and we are so keen to make the most of it that we forgo the many restaurant options hereabouts, and dine in on our second night. I love the artworks that reflect the landscape outside; the gas fireplace that bespeaks of how cosy a winter visit would be; the geranium and quandong shampoo in the sleek-as bathroom; and the mini-bar stocked with cocktails in groovy bottles, local wines and French champagne.

THE FOOD

A spray of Christmas bush is on the table when we sit down for a seven-course tasting menu at Bangalay Dining. The venison, served with blackberries and parsnip, is from Ulladulla, about 60 clicks down the

coast, as is the bonito, now charred and with a cheeky oyster emulsion. We tear the butterflied quail apart with gusto; glazed in rosella flower with black pudding and smoked olive, it is delicious. But the Moreton Bay bug steals the show. A sweet and salty, pop-in-the-mouth treat, it comes with bug head custard, salmon roe, finger lime and a smidge of genuine caviar. Ingredients like saltbush and nasturtium are locally foraged, one of many things we learn about the menu as our waiter explains each dish.

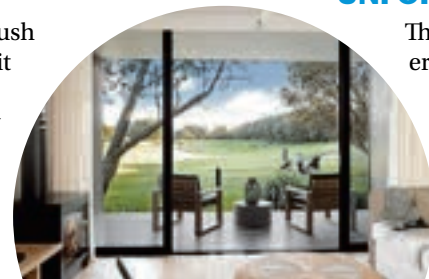
THE ACTION

The yoga mats in your room hint at a wellness focus, and you can book a private yoga and meditation session, as well as in-room massages that use organic oils. The heated pool is a come-hither stunner, and you can burn off your Bangalay Dining feasts on local walking tracks.

UNFORGETTABLE

The restaurant's chicken liver parfait "cornetto" indeed looks like a cornetto, but is rich and creamy in a totally different way. Instant classic.

The writer was a guest of Bangalay Luxury Villas



HUNGRY TRAVELLER SINGAPORE FOOD COURTS

A roaring success

AT GARDENS By The Bay in Singapore, they don't think small. The 101-hectare green space has long been a favourite with families thanks to attractions such as the giant greenhouses containing the Cloud Forest and the Flower Dome, and the soaring illuminated structures known as the Supertrees.

Add another one to the list, with the park's freshly-refurbished food court now offering the opportunity to dine with the dinosaurs. Rechristened Jurassic Nest, it is the only place in Singapore where animatronic dinosaurs - including a prowling velociraptor - roar into life every hour.



UTE JUNKER

Food fans have another reason to pay Jurassic Nest a visit. Some of Singapore's most acclaimed hawker stalls have outlets here including Tsuta, the world's first Michelin-starred ramen, and Bismillah Biryani, the first biryani to receive recognition in a Michelin guide.

And then there is Hawker Chan, surely Singapore's most successful food stall. Chan Hon Meng was the first hawker chef to gain



a Michelin star back in 2016 and he has spun that success into a global empire. He now has 30 outlets around the world, from Melbourne to Kazakhstan. The menu at this outlet has all his favourites, including not just his famous chicken rice but also pork

Chan Hon Meng was the first hawker chef to gain a Michelin star.

rib rice, braised beef noodle and roasted duck rice.

Some chefs dislike sharing the spotlight but Chan has no qualms about working with co-stars - both of the cold-blooded dinosaur and warm-blooded chef species. He loves Singapore's food court tradition and the freedom that it gives customers.

"The good thing about a food court is that you are not restricted in your options," Chan says, adding that visiting food courts is still his favourite dining experience. "It is great to get together as a family and to allow children to enjoy different types of food."

gardensbythebay.com.sg/en