



THE Eurobodalla Coast, New South Wales

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY
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Still beaches, languid historic settlements, lakes festooned with swans and seabirds – a carefree isolation you'd imagine only possible in the most remote parts of the continent – welcome to the wilderness coast all within 'cooee' of major settlements. This is the wonderful region of Eurobodalla on the New South Wales South Coast which I find both alluring and accessible.

Just imagine having a beach to oneself for days on end. That's pretty much the order of the day, every day – even in the summer months – on the Eurobodalla Coast. If you've ever despaired at being privy to the conversations or, worse still, smoke emissions of fellow beachgoers, the stretch of coast splashing out from the towns of Moruya and Narooma will surely salve.

We've spent an entire day savouring the untrammelled beaches around Mullimburra Point, have come within metres of wallabies, sea-eagles and dolphins, and snorkelled amid legions of fish darting through velvety seagrasses. We've even spotted a penguin. Our blissful solitude has been marred by neither sight nor, blessedly, sound of another human. It seems pointless to even bother with swimming costumes!

It is a replenishing and very privileged sense of escapism that welcomes us in our home here – Mullimburra Beach House. It is a haven which combines the restfulness of the bush, wrapped as it is in five acres of bird-rich forest, with the revitalisation of having a selection of untrammelled beaches just a short stroll away. And what a stroll! You pass through forests of gnarly Banksias and casuarinas bristling with birds where kangaroos and wallabies peek out at us from behind grasses and low branches.

While the house is extremely comfortable, the ultimate luxury here is space and privacy. As we relish our breakfast or lunch on one of the decks, we are regaled by the antics at several kangaroos sunning themselves on the grounds. Dreamily, we spend several days floating between the ethereal, bush-fringed beaches and chilling out at Mullimburra Beach House, barely encountering another soul. By night, our heads are massaged by a soundtrack of crashing waves, owls and frogs.

At Mullimburra Point, the trees have been so covered by overbearing winds that they resemble giant bonsai. Several beaches radiate from here. Some, such as Grey Rocks, feature polished granite boulders and deep rock pools and are fringed by swamps bristling with birds. At others, such as silky-smooth, crescent-shaped Honeymoon Bay, we tiptoe

upon grassy patches dotted with wallabies. A pod of dolphins and several hawks appear as we launch from the rocks.

The house nudges up against the Bingi Dreaming Walk – a 7.5 km trail that takes in spotted gum forests, heath, wetlands and a wealth of wilderness beaches, all part of the Eurobodalla National Park which encompasses over 30 km of coast.

Vividly volcanic, this is a coastline that's tender one moment, tempestuous the next. The canvas is crowded and richly textured, the colours nuanced by sea-spray. Bathwater-still bays brush up against roaring surf. Wind-swept shrubs mingle with oversized, gnarled Banksias drooping with black cockatoos and gargantuan flowers.



While so much of Australia's east coast groans under an onslaught of apartments and suburbia, this region is remarkable for the unbroken tracts of fringing green and the necklace of lakes, tranquil inlets and habitat-rich wetlands. Settlements are sparse, typically understated and strongly suggestive of a grazing, God-fearing, gold-mining past.

Sure, the surf can be invigorating, but I prefer the dreamy pleasure of levitating on a silky ocean, which is why we began our South Coast sojourn by ensconcing ourselves at Guerrilla Bay, a ten-minute drive north of Moruya. Here there is a crenellated gigantic rock pool that, as part of a marine sanctuary, is renowned for its snorkelling. Raucous black cockatoos welcomed us to Seahorse Cottage, an unassumingly groovy, 1960s beach house, where the slow *swoosh* of the bay soon turns tense muscles to jelly.

Banksia-flanked tracks lead to Nuns Beach and Tranquil Bay. Untouched and hidden, yet easy to access, these typify so many of the beaches along this coast. At the end of the street, Burrewarra Point offers glorious views down an untrammelled coast tightly hugged by escarpment.

At Mossy Point inlet, a five-minute drive south, the pelicans frequently set up a picket line. 'Mossy', as it is locally called, occupies a small promontory and is beguiling for its sorbet-coloured 1950s and 60s style cottages and the atmospheric Muffins and More Café set in an early 1900s general store. A short stroll around the point skirts rock shelves that step directly into deep, still sea that's perfect for meditative swims.

Situated by a magnificent river is the town of Moruya which, graced with tell-tale old buildings, is a country town to its core. Here people smile, invite conversation and apologise if they bump you. Proudly defying homogenisation, Moruya features a Crazy Willies for bargains, Allan's for attire and a Saturday morning country market. From the hill, narrow roads can be seen trickling towards the nearby escarpment. Gothic churches lord it over the skyline but, in their shadow, a vibrant arts and alternative scene thrives. At Moruya's well stocked supermarket we set ourselves up for several days of blissful cocooning at Mullimburra Beach House and the unfettered freedom of endless swathes of empty beaches.

A half-hour drive south through a patchwork of rolling hills and lakes thick with cormorants and swans is Narooma, a low-slung settlement of timber bungalows and early 1900s shops with hitching rails extant. The town hugs the gin-clear, cerulean waters of Wagonga inlet, best appreciated by kayak or a boardwalk that overlooks schools of fish and stingrays. This 'CBD' is like no other. At Casey's Café we marvel at the



background of layer-upon-layer of glistening beaches.

Come sunset, Wagonga inlet assumes the appearance of molten metal. The best way to soak up the amber-hued magic is to stroll along the boardwalk, which winds its way to the beach, and pause for a picnic at one of the many benches *en route*.

Unfurling south is a landscape that inevitably inspires reverie. If you follow unmarked gravel roads, negotiate a few farm gates (and perhaps a stubborn cow), you will find yourself discovering secret beaches viscous with sea-mist.

South from Narooma a big sky meets a coastline where rock formations look as if they're still molten. At Mystery Bay Cottages – our very spacious and private abode – we look out onto grazing horses and paddocks that segue straight into surging sea.

Coffee mugs in hand and sharing our path with swamp wallabies and an echidna, we follow a sea-scent palpably distilled from great depths. A few minutes walk through silvered Banksias brings us to Billie's Beach, our private playground. Here it seems as if the earth threw an almighty tantrum, hurling boulders and upturning rock layers to create cavernous nooks,

swirling rock art and pools brimming with marine life. I take a 'spa' by reclining in a pebble-bottomed bathtub, submitting to invigorating jets of super-salty sea water.

Mystery Bay, with its string of beaches laced with aquamarine pools and sandy nooks segmented by curtains of granite, lay a short stroll away. We walk and dip for hours, again with entire stretches of sand to ourselves, bar an inquisitive sea-eagle which swoops so low that we can make out its talons.

A ten-minute 'chocolate-box' scenic drive inland reveals the heritage villages of Tilba Tilba and Central Tilba, seemingly snap-frozen since the days of the gold rush. This picturesque little town now offers fine tea-houses, atmospheric eateries, artisan galleries, aura-readings and a fresh food market in the timber hall on Saturday mornings. There are excellent walks amidst the rolling, granite-dotted hills and outcrops as well as the rainforest trails of Mount Dromadery

Back at our cabin, more than twenty shocking crimson rosellas await our return. As an arrow-head of black swans streak through the dusky sky, we toast the fact that primal escapism lies within striking distance of the humdrum of our city lives. ▶





Quintessential Eurobodalla Coast

If you've driven down along the coast road, be sure to visit Pilgrims' Wholefoods at the historic town of Milton, just north of Ulladulla.

Hire a sports car and, hood down, cruise the bucolic byways. Moving through tunnels of fragrant gums and over rattly timber bridges, you almost touch the big grey kangaroos. A few minutes drive inland, coiling ribbon-roads swoop into valleys dotted with granite outcrops, tiny timber churches and voluble dairy farms. www.vroomvroomvroom.com

Paddle to Aegean-like, boat-access-only coves and relish pristine lakes and inlets. Delicious, hearty meals included, bespoke adventures welcomed. www.regionrivers.com

Giggle at the puppy-like antics of the fur seals at Montague Island, a wildlife and marine sanctuary that's also home to seabirds, little penguins and a historic lighthouse. It is even now possible to stay there overnight. www.montagueisland.com.au

Take in a flick at Narooma's art deco Kinema.

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More Musings

For detailed Eurobodalla Coast information.

Phone 1800 802 528
www.eurobodalla.com.au

To find secret slivers of sand, the beaches of Batemans Bay and the Eurobodalla Coast, be sure to call in at Narooma Visitors' centre. ◆

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