



THE RANGE  
BYRON BAY, NSW

## Hinterland hacienda

THIS SPANISH-STYLE RANCH  
IS AN EXCLUSIVE RETREAT

**W**e're driving through a landscape outside Byron Bay that's so lush you wonder if it's been spray-painted in luminous green. The sun is out, leavened by a gentle southerly breeze, cool and soothing after the heavy heat of Brisbane, two hours north. Our hosts, Annabel and Craig, are waiting to help with the bags. "We're in heaven," my wife says.

Far be it from me to argue. This really is quite the destination. The idea, Annabel explains, as we settle in to chat and graze on a selection of local cheeses, is to provide a taste of Europe minus the 20-hour plane ride. The accommodation is inspired by a Spanish *finca* – ranch – and is dotted with fireplaces, airy and open. The Byron Bay lighthouse stands tooth-like on the horizon, framed against the blue Pacific.

The homestead and outbuildings contain six bedrooms, all with thoughtfully appointed ensuites, that sleep up to 14 if the top berths in the bunkroom are made up. It's a space where the old and luxurious new blend seamlessly. We slip off our shoes to feel the rustic texture of 300-year-old Croatian roof tiles

repurposed as flooring. Flick a switch and the underfloor heating system kicks in.

Outside, there's plenty to see and do. My wife slides into the magnesium horizon pool, spa and infrared sauna while Craig shows me through the grounds. It's nice to know that our not-so-guilty pleasures are balanced by seriously green offsets: the 50ha property has a working 4500-tree macadamia farm and is mostly self-sufficient in power, water and waste handling. Bush regeneration zones are bringing back lost native rainforest and koala habitat. "Try this," Craig says, handing me a wild raspberry from a spiky bush. It is tart and startlingly fresh.

As the afternoon fades, we're taking in the view and tantalising aromas emanating from the *parrilla* in the courtyard. Belfast-born private chef Anthony McGaughey is cooking on the wood-fired grill. He produces a pink Stone Axe wagyu scotch fillet, so buttery it falls off the fork, with sides of charred greens, tangy Burringbar yoghurt and roast Dutch cream potatoes. What a spread. The steak we're raving about rarely hits an Australian plate,



# Life

## TRAVEL

BY JAMIE WALKER



Yours for \$8500 a night:  
The Range Byron Bay



PHOTOGRAPHY: ALCIA TANG FOR BENITO MARTIN  
ONE OF THE HOMESTAY ROOMS. PHOTO: BENITO MARTIN

McGaughey says; the Japanese pay too well. He was at the farmers' market at 7am to beat the crowd.

The following morning, he's back before we're up to prepare a breakfast of homemade grain-free muesli, fruit and sourdough, which we share with the property's co-owner Tom Lane. He tells us what led him to this idyllic corner of the nation. On leaving the family's designer goods business, Oroton, he decided to take time out in Spain with wife Emma and the first of their four children. So captivated were they by *finca* living, they decided to reprise it back home.

It took a while, but eventually Lane, 51, found the site he was looking for atop Picadilly Hill and went to work. The tired farmhouse gave way to a sleek, rendered building folded into the ridgeline, set up to be the family's forever home. Showing the kids the world was a passion, and they were off at every opportunity. One day, a neighbour enquired about renting the property in their absence and Lane, ever attuned to a business opportunity, started accepting bookings. Two old work sheds were converted to guest accommodation and Annabel

and Craig jumped ship from crewing luxury yachts to managing the place. But it still remains the Lane family home, used by them on weekends and in school holidays when they're not away. "I try to offer a different experience," Lane says. "It's top-end, so we are very particular about who comes to stay."

After breakfast, he heads off to a site outside nearby Bangalow where he's building the second of what he hopes will be a chain of Range Estates, with a third one planned for the NSW Southern Highlands. We go to pack, reluctantly. "I don't want to leave," my wife says dreamily, right on the money.

Be warned, this is not the place for everyone. Hardly anyone, actually, given the eye-watering tariff of \$8500 a night, with a minimum seven-night stay. True, it buys the run of the property and can be spread across a number of wallets. Lane makes no apology for the pricing, which "helps define the customer", he says.

"Most properties around here throw you the keys and say, 'See you at the other end,'" he adds. "That's not how we do it: we want to curate the stay."

Perfect for: Family groups, corporate retreats, travelling gourmands.

Must do: Drop in a line from the fishing "shack" on the main dam or let the kids loose chasing yabbies. If you're game, Craig will fire up the *parrilla* or the wood-burning Portuguese oven by the swimming pool so you can try your hand at cooking over an open flame. Our tip: leave it to the expert.

Dining: Why would you leave home when the chef comes to

you? But if you insist, join the locals in the know for coffee and cake at Harvest in Newrybar, a short drive away.

Getting there: The Range is two hours' drive from Brisbane, an hour from Coolangatta Airport or 20 minutes from Ballina Byron Gateway Airport.

Bottom line: \$8500 per night for the entire property, with a minimum seven-night stay.

therangebyronbay.com.au