

Byron Bay – Funky Chic!

BY MICHAEL MURRAY



Byron's iconic light house

Byrone Bay did not have to do much extra to get popular. It was already blessed with some of the world's most beautiful beaches and countryside. Discovered by surfers and hippies in the 60's, this small country town on the east coast of Australia has gradually morphed into one of the world's premium travel destinations. Its origins as a working class meatworks and whaling town still shows through in the small amount of unrenovated architecture.

These days it is home to a diverse variety of international travellers, wealthy retirees and a passionate group of locals fiercely committed to preserving the natural environment and the illusive "vibe" of the town. Hard to define - but lets call it Funky Chic! It can be seen when multi millionaires share coffee with dreadlocked rastas in one of the many great cafes. It can be seen in street buskers, bikinis as street wear, vibrant farmer's markets and great shops. It can be seen when the sun sets over Mount Warning while catching a wave at The Pass.

This popularity has now saddled it with some of the most expensive real estate outside of the capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne. An old weathered, weatherboard home in Byron Bay regularly sells for over a million dollars. A dream home in the Byron hills with rural or ocean views will set you back at least twice that. The area has regularly been in the top 10 list of property price increases. Tourism surveys indicate that Byron Bay is the 4th most recognised destination in Australia after Sydney Harbour, Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Melbourne.

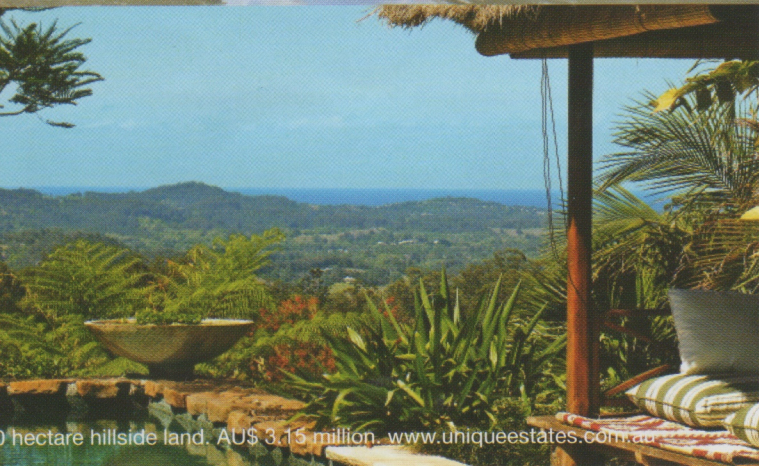
Although Australia fared very well economically during the recent global downturn, tourism and luxury property prices have taken a major



Intracole. Byron hinterland AU\$6.5 million. www.uniqueestates.com.au



0.16 ha estate. AU\$ 5.5 million. www.uniqueestates.com.au



0 hectare hillside land. AU\$ 3.15 million. www.uniqueestates.com.au

hit. There are also internal dilemmas facing the town. Holiday letting, where investors or homeowners rent out urban homes to tourists, is under attack. Belongil Beach, one of the premium beachside suburbs is facing huge erosion problems and the local council has adopted a "Planned Retreat" policy. Wealthy landowners there are not relaxed about watching their three million dollar plus property dissolve into the sand and the council has a fight on its hands.

The jewel in the crown of Byron is Wategos Beach. A delightful small, north facing cove, Wategos is the most easterly suburb in Australia. A few recent sales there have exceeded the ten million dollar mark and most homes are very tightly held. Here, and a few select headlands and hilltops in the surrounding Byron area, attracts some of the most discerning property buyers. Places like Broken Head, Coopers Shoot, Myocum Hills, Possum Creek, Bangalow and Brunswick Heads are very favourable addresses. Even small rural towns like Federal and Mullumbimby, previously backwater hick towns, are feeling the heat as old time cow farmers sell out to cashed up new settlers.

Even with the town and environs going through a relative slump, long term locals and recent arrivals still stay passionate about beautiful Byron Bay. They will not surrender it to over development or allow it to bland out and become just another holiday resort town like so many others. The town of Mullumbimby just lost a long drawn out fight attempting to stop the multinational supermarket chain of Woolworth's opening its doors. Byron residents want it to remain different and unique. It will always retain its individual, vibrant personality.

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