

# LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

The new Hotel Marvell brings luxury to the centre of Byron Bay

SUSAN SKELLY

**W**e're driving from Ballina Airport to Byron Bay, past gnarly Lennox Head Point and the lust-for-life Suffolk Park, in a high-shine chamois-coloured Kombi with number plates 58 LOVE, a nod to both its year of manufacture and its surfer-hippie aesthetic. At the wheel of the head-turning bronchial beast is Alex Bosin, a mechanical engineer and Kombi tragic who arrived in Byron Bay from Germany 14 years ago with his Swedish partner, Brita. The Kombi, says Bosin, who spent his uni years living in one, embodies freedom. Like Byron, in fact. He appreciates its endurance, sense of self, and mechanical precision. The Kombi makes people smile. Or maybe it's just Bosin's peace sign greeting. These days, he's focused on establishing a fleet of electric Kombis, tapping into the sustainable tourism you'd expect of Byron. The one thing about this town you can always guarantee is evolution, no matter how much people may resist.

Right now, the accommodation is evolving. We arrive at what's claimed to be Byron's first five-star hotel, the Hotel Marvell, also earning bragging rights with the town's first rooftop bar and swimming pool. This temple to ambition opened in early August. Its owners are part-time Byron locals Scott Emery and Scott Didier, developers who are also custodians of the Great Northern Hotel, which they bought in 2021 (with a motel) for a reported \$80m.

Emery describes the \$18m Hotel Marvell as "a haven for those seeking refined luxury in Byron Bay". It is an elegant, compact hotel, more boutique than bossy. It makes the most of concrete, golden-hued wood and terracotta-coloured floor tiles. There's trailing greenery longing to be a living wall. At the hard-won rooftop bar (yes, there was a tussle with council) on a Friday evening, locals and guests alike are enjoying Marvellini cocktails (vodka, passionfruit, apricot, and pineapple) and a Barbie-pink sunset over the Byron Bay hinterland.

Hotel Marvell has 24 guestrooms, all with balconies. The establishment was built by Harley Graham Architects on the site of a medical centre in the heart of town a few blocks from the beach. It's set between Vinnies (volunteers welcome) and a pathology practice. An incorporated pedestrian laneway links Marvell Street to a lane beyond, traversing ground floor reception, a bar and the restaurant.

The rooms upstairs are chic. Mine, 101, is spacious, with lots of wood, caramel leather, a block-out blind, and a sun-drenched balcony facing east. Both fine-woven and looser slubbed linens are the featured fabrics in bedding, cushions and robes. There's a large bathroom, separate toilet, but no tub. Fragrant, nicely packaged Leif products are made in Australia and uptick bush flora (flannel flower, lily, lily, Kakadu plum, wild rose, and blue cypress). Towels by Bemboka are thick, luxurious and evocative of a Turkish hammam. The bar fridge tempts with craft brews, organic ginger beer, lemon lime and bitters. There's fancy chocolate, pre-mixed negroni and martini, and a cheeky pinot noir.

But there are teething problems. Missing are tissues, sugar and coat hangers. The room lights are like trick candles on a kid's birthday cake. You turn them off and several seconds later they're back on. The GM, James Pearce, finds a workarounds until the electrician turns up in the morning. Raw sugar cubes arrive in a nice jar in due course.



Rooftop pool, top; sumptuous linen, above; welcome nightcap, right; the hotel, frontage, far right and Bonito, below

## IN THE KNOW

Rooms from \$650 a night. There are 16 rooms, six suites and two two-bedroom retreats. Bonito is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The rooftop bar is open noon-8pm. [hotelmarvell.com.au](http://hotelmarvell.com.au)



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Hotel Marvell's drawcard is Bonito, a restaurant manned by chef Minh Le (ex-Spicers Peak Lodge, Byron at Byron, Harvest). His food is light, clever and modern. Best of the degustation of share plates include Hiramasa kingfish wing with spiced soy glaze; brown rice congee and mushrooms with chilli oil; octopus with piquillo salsa, radish and curry leaves; and sweet slices of duck with carrot butterscotch. Breakfast is granola, yoghurt and fruit and a board of baked goods including a luscious pastry dusted with crushed pistachio. A full breakfast is also on offer to guests and locals.

Foodies exploring beyond the hotel can dine on native ingredients at Karkalla, black mussels at the one-hatted Beach Byron Bay, modern Japanese food at Moonlight Hibachi Grill, glam grilled market greens and whole fish at Barrio, or the artisan wizardry at Harvest in Newrybar.

Hotel Marvell's collaborations with locals include ceramic tea and coffee mugs in guestrooms by potter Brooke Clunie; botanical spirits come from Camille and Mark Awad's Winding Road Distilling Co at Tintenbar, and compostable Nespresso-compatible coffee pods are made at Zentveld's trailblazing coffee farm and roastery near Newrybar. Lots of the local artisanal wizardry turns up as cool hotel merchandise.

Around the well-located hotel, much feeds into the Byron vibe. It's still possible to cross a road inappropriately. To browse streets with clothing labels you've never heard of. To vanish into

The Book Room and never be seen again. To recalibrate with a walk to the Lighthouse that marks Australia's most easterly point. Expect sightings of whales, Hemsworths, and authors and musicians in town for their respective festivals, plus fierce debate on house prices, development, Airbnb, health, tourists, and celebrity.

Good times are never far away. We burn the midnight oil at the Great Northern Hotel, jam-packed with Instagrammable revellers who've come from the Matildas penalty shootout with France for the famous duelling pianos, ready to raise the roof with such songs as Taylor Swift's Love Story. Back at Hotel Marvell, a nightcap awaits. There's a bucket of ice and a baby decanter of limoncello to pour over fresh lime, dried blood orange and a sprig of lemon myrtle. A luxury coda.

Susan Skelly was a guest of Hotel Marvell.

