

FLYING HIGH IN THE EUROBODALLA, NSW

Travel writer, *Toni Krasicki*, explores diverse and fun ways to experience the New South Wales south coast's enthralling offerings.

As long as I can remember, the pretty south coast of New South Wales in Australia, has always played second fiddle to balmy north coast destinations. Maybe that's why it still retains its down-to-earth vibe and its untapped natural beauty is only shared with a few others.

The locals call it 'God's own country', and after at least ten annual visits exploring different regions, I have to agree with them. It's a step back to a simpler and less rushed pace, where visitors come for fish 'n' chips rather than kale and quinoa salads (not that you can't get one).

The Eurobodalla kicks in just south of Ulladulla and stretches down to historic Tilba Tilba. Once you settle in you'll realise that a long weekend is barely enough time to take in the untouched hinterland and the pristine beaches. But here are a few ideas to get you started.

From the sky

On Saturday's, the weekly Moruya Country Markets bring sleepy Moruya to life. At 10am, the queue for the pizza van (the slices are massive and look delicious) is almost into the river and locals happily tap away to a duo banging out tunes. It's here, among stalls selling a mix of old and new, edible goodies and plants that I pick up my ride with South Coast Seaplanes for a 15-minute flight over the beach-scalloped coastline.

The tiny four-seater plane takes off smoothly from the Moruya River, passing over unseen quarries that once supplied the granite used in the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. We cross the

blue vanilla swirls of the river mouth then head south passing over rocky headlands, crystal clear seas and empty beaches. Tuross Heads is the turnaround point where we retrace our flight but over lush farmland and dense bushland.

The following day I get a hit of adrenaline and soar like an eagle 15,000ft above the Moruya River. Skydive Oz's base at Moruya Airport is buzzing and I watch as four people lying on skateboards practice for a four jump formation to be later performed at 15,000ft. I'm soon prepped, pumped and hooked up to my tandem instructor, Phelix, and watch pods of whales migrating north as our plane climbs higher. The 70-second free-fall rush goes on forever, and just as I'm settling into the 360-degree spins, the chute opens and we pirouette back to the airfield. Sky dives usually land on the beach, but today we're fighting a westerly breeze.

For those who have time to spare, Skydive Oz has teamed up with Paul from Nature Engagement Tours to offer a yin and yang type of experience that takes you from the adrenaline fuelled skydive to a four-hour nature walk through a south coast national park. For the Scones In The Forest walk (yes there are homemade scones on offer), I was treated to a patch of wilderness west of Moruya in Deua National Park. It's definitely off the tourist trail, and feels untouched. It's neither difficult nor strenuous, but rather an opportunity to connect with the forest and its inhabitants.

The waterways

Hang out at any of the rivers, big and

small, feeding into the Tasman Sea, and you'll see more than just fishing folk casting a line. The upper reaches of the Clyde River are home to 16 oyster farms, which is one of eight regions on the South Coast Oyster Trail.

To get in amongst the oyster farms, take an oyster tasting kayak tour with Josh from Region X Tours. The two-hour tour starts on the north side of the Clyde River at On The Pier and moseys up the river through some of the oyster beds growing Sydney Rock and South Pacific oysters. Don't expect to give the guns a workout, as this tour is all about the oysters and covers a small section of the river.

We've hardly found our rhythm before pulling up 200 metres from the start at Bray Street Oyster Shed, where fourth generation oyster farmer, Jade, is waiting for us on the jetty. We learn the ins and outs of growing Sydney Rock and South Pacific oysters and how extreme weather conditions and floods can send a farmer broke. By the time we leave a leisurely hour later we have learnt how to shuck and swallow oysters, and loaded the kayaks with several dozens for later.

The coast between Batemans Bay and Moruya is a treasure trove of pristine bays, beaches and river mouths that are popular with surfing, stand up paddle boarding and snorkelling. Robert from Broulee Surf School escorts me on a stand up paddleboard (SUP) tour up the Tomar River. We glide through crystal clear water passing over giant stingrays and tiny fish. This is flat water SUPing at it's finest, and Robert challenges me to go out the heads for some waves. Maybe next time during a summer visit.



Explore on foot

I am told that walking across the bridge in Batemans Bay is obligatory for any visit to the area. One to follow orders, I wander over to the north side stopping to marvel at giant jelly fish and a shoreline full of people beach fishing. For a longer walk keep heading to Surfside and Cullendulla Creek Nature Reserve to wander through the wetlands and view ancient mangroves.

Back in town take an easy 4km stroll east along the bay to Batehaven. Runners might want to join in the weekly Saturday Parkrun that does a double loop from the Marina to The Esplanade Hotel.

North of Mossy Point, the Banksia Walk at Burrewarra Point is an easy 1.5km walk through a Banksia forest. At the start of the walk look north over Guerilla Bay, a popular snorkelling spot, and once at the light station you can see up and down the coast. Although I don't spot any whales, I do see pods of dolphins and a few playful seals frolicking in the calm seas. Further south walk out to Broulee Island, which is accessible by a sandbar from the mainland, and an even better vantage point to see migrating whales.

For a true wilderness experience venture into Deua National Park that's accessible west of Moruya. There aren't many marked walks, but just being in the forest and visiting a few lookouts along the way is enough to fill the lungs. More strenuous walks to try are the 13.5km (one-way) Bingi Dreaming Track in Eurobodalla National Park, Mount Gulaga (Mount Dromedary) walk in Mt Gulaga National Park, or one of the many coastal walks in Murramarang National Park further north.

Animal encounters

Mogo Zoo is more than a delightful diversion for animal lovers. This intimate and privately owned zoo offers many opportunities to get up-close-and-personal to primates, big cats, pandas and the adorable meerkats. Better still, become a zookeeper for a day and venture behind the scenes for an insight into zoo life. Make use of the animal talks presented by the zookeepers as they are not only interesting but introduces you to the quirks of the individual animal and their life journey. Before you leave Mogo, wander around the village. It's on the kitsch side but pleasant nonetheless.

TRIP NOTES

Getting there: Batemans Bay is four hours drive from Sydney and two hours from Canberra.

Stay: The region offers a range of accommodation options including rustic camping in National Parks to the more plush ensuite cabins in holiday parks. The recently refurbished The Esplanade Motel in Batemans Bay is centrally located and has uninterrupted views of the Clyde River. Check for off-peak accommodation deals.

Dining: For stunning locations, you can't beat On The Pier and JJs at the Marina in Batemans Bay, or The River Moruya in Moruya. For fresh oysters visit Wray Street Oyster Shed or Farmgate at Batemans Bay Marina.

For more information visit:

- eurobodalla.com.au
- southcoastseaplanes.com.au
- skydiveoz.com.au/skydive-batemans-bay
- brouleesurfschool.com.au
- region.com.au
- mogozoo.com.au **OH!**