

The Simple Pleasures

The beautiful small coastal town of Brunswick Heads offers a wonderful inexpensive holiday.

Story and photography by VIVIENNE PEARSON



A lot of fun, it's hard to take a bad photo at Bruns surf beach.

Are you interested in all the good bits of a Byron Bay holiday for a third less cost and a tenth of the hassle? Simply veer north and you can trade-in traffic snarls for easy walking and swap crowds of backpackers for a smattering of visitors.

If this sounds good, Brunswick Heads may just be the place for you. With a resident population of 1,613, Bruns (as it is

known to the locals) boasts three water-side caravan parks, a great surf beach, a plethora of fishing spots, a vibrant café culture and enough shops to cover the essentials and more.

I decided it was the place for me so, after holidaying here several years in a row, I have taken up residence! I now know the town well enough to be a reliable guide but not so long that I have

lost the pleasure of living somewhere so beautiful.

'Simple Pleasures' is the catch-cry of Brunswick Heads. For once, a tourist slogan has got it right. Simple pleasures are exactly what await you, whether they come in the form of relaxing, fishing, boating, walking, beaching, or simply watching the world go by from your campsite.

Before we get onto details of the campsites, here is a quick geographical overview.

The hub of Bruns is a square of shops and cafes – think of this as 'the block'. From here, two bridges take you across Simpson's Creek to the surf beach. Both are old, wooden and full of character. One is for pedestrians and the other is for cars (with a green carpet lined side-bridge for

walkers). The tidal Simpson's Creek runs into the Brunswick River, which is only visible from a couple of spots in town, including the picturesque boat harbour, which is on the way north out of town. This road is Tweed Street, marked on most maps as the Old Pacific Highway.

Useful landmarks around the block are the pirate ship, moored in the creek near the car bridge and the library, a co-

lourfully painted converted church.

There endeth the lesson, so now back to the caravan parks. All three are located alongside water (river or creek), two are within a short walk of the beach and one is spitting distance from the town centre. All are run by North Coast Holiday Parks, though you need to contact each separately for booking.

Terrace Reserve, with creek-front



Lunchtime at the Hotel Brunswick.



There are some great cafes.



A pelican checks out the boats at the harbour.



The sheltered and beautiful Torakina River beach.

cabins and sites, is across the road from 'the block' and next to the footbridge that takes you to the surf beach.

Massey Green lines the river between town and the boat harbour and has its own river beach. Depending on which end of the park you land in, you are a five to ten minute walk from town.

Ferry Reserve is a three-minute drive/20-minute footpath walk from the main town, situated in an area that feels like a satellite community, separated from main town by the Pacific Highway. Some prefer this park exactly because of this distance and it is a clear choice for anyone who likes to travel with their 'best friend' (dogs are welcomed in off-peak times). This campground also has its own boat ramp, making it the place to go for serious boaters or fisher-people.

It seems there are many serious fisher-people in town, perhaps because the town used to be home to a significant fishing fleet. I confess to not being a fisher-person but I reckon the fishing must be good around here because even my hubby, world-famous for *not* catching fish, has caught a couple. One was even big enough to eat! I especially admire ocean fisher-people who catch bounties where I

have swum countless times without spotting a single fish. You can take your pick from creek, river, rock-wall or beach fishing, all within a five-minute walk of each other.

If you prefer your wildlife not on a hook, Bruns has plenty to offer. Butcherbirds serenade the town each morning with their melodic call. The Norfolk Pine trees near the pirate ship become 'party trees' each evening at dusk, filled with rainbow lorikeets and galahs all trying to outdo each other in volume. There are several bird of prey pairs in the region, including two pairs of osprey.

The best way to see these birds of prey is to take a trip up river in a flat-bottomed boat with Byron Bay Cruises. You'd be unlucky not to see the pair of white bellied sea eagles who live near the boat harbour and you'll have the best seat in the house for spotting whatever other wildlife would like to show itself that day. On a recent tour, we had the privilege of following an azure kingfisher for over five minutes as it darted its way along the riverbank. An alternative way to explore the river is by hiring a tinny or canoe from the iconic pirate ship, moored just near the road bridge, though you'd miss out on the knowledge

and sharp eyes of the two guides.

You don't need a guide to find places to eat if you tire of campground fare. Your only difficulty for daytime eating out will be choosing from the dozen or so cafes around the block. Dinner options are fewer but, on a first visit at least, it will be hard to go past the Hotel Brunswick, an iconic place for dinner since the 1940s. The pub is basically one big beer-garden, with tables well protected from sun and light rain by big brunswick-green coloured umbrellas. It took me four visits before I even realised there are inside sections!

If you like a dash of sophistication with your simple pleasures, check out two new eating establishments that are on-trend enough to be reviewed in the Sydney and Melbourne dailies. Table View café, on 'the block' offers specialty coffee with a delicious selection of brunch and lunch meals. Fleet is a tiny restaurant and wine bar that is across the road from The Terrace caravan park. This is city chic Bruns style; there's no need to dress up and the owners have a special affinity with RVers, having lived at The Terrace Reserve caravan park prior to opening earlier this year.

Nestled in amongst the eateries, very handy if anyone in your party likes a spot



The iconic pirate ship, moored in Simpson's Creek.



My hubby and kids actually caught a fish!

of shopping, are lots of boutique style clothing and homewares shops. Whether you prefer window or actual shopping, the Bruns block will not disappoint. There are so many gorgeous clothing stores that, if I had the means, I could happily buy a new outfit a day. I should qualify that this is mainly for women; the gents' selection is rather more limited. Unlike Byron Bay though, you won't see any chain stores.

After all that shopping and eating, you will be keen to get out in the great outdoors. Swimming options include the surf beach (check for patrol times) and the tidal Simpson's Creek (share the water with the odd small ray). The real Bruns gem though is Torakina, a sheltered river beach with just enough small wave action to keep you (or the kids) interested. I find it delightfully ironic that you can swim in such calm water whilst looking out to one of the most dangerous river mouths in Australia.

Watching the boats carefully navigate this river mouth before heading out to sea provides free entertainment most days at 6am. From this spot, the ocean beach stretches for 12 kilometres all the way to the Byron Bay lighthouse. You can walk the whole way (all on sand apart from one creek crossing towards the end). You can even do the trip at low tide by bicycle.

The Byron Bay lighthouse, at the eastern most point of Australia, is certainly lovely but the bustle of people and traffic may send you scurrying back for the qui-

etude of Bruns. Looking inland is another option for daytrips and bush walking. Consider a 45-minute drive along the scenic Tweed Valley Way to Mount Warning, named by Captain Cook for its finger-like point wagging at sailors-of-old to beware of dangerous reefs. Or head the same distance south-west to Minyon Falls, a spectacular 100m straight drop waterfall.

If you find, as I did, that one trip to Bruns is not enough, you can return for one of the annual events that are eagerly anticipated by locals and visitors alike. The nearby town of Bangalow supplies a suitably steep straight hill for May's Billy Cart Derby, a cracking day out. A regular participant I know describes the run as the 'most fun you can have lying down without taking your clothes off'. May is also the month for the 'Mullum to Bruns Paddle', a 10km stretch of river that is plied with hundreds of canoes, kayaks and stand up paddle boards. The less hardy can cheer on their entry in the rubber duck race.

The Old & Gold Festival in June sees the entire town morph into a huge trash and treasure stall. The Hot Rods hit town in mid-July. I'm into cars even less than fishing but watching two neighbours lovingly build and tend to their hot rods has increased my interest.

If you find you don't want to leave at all, you can join me in moving in. Or simply keep returning to the pleasures of Brunswick Heads.



FACT FILE

Location: Brunswick Heads is on the coast of New South Wales, 15-minutes north of Byron Bay and 30-minutes south of the Queensland border.

Camping/Caravan Parks: Three parks, all part of the North Coast Holiday Parks network.

Fuel and supplies: Caltex fuel on Tweed Street has an ANZ ATM and there is a Commonwealth branch on 'the block'. An IGA is open 7-days from 6.30am-9pm. A bigger supermarket and small Target are located in Ocean Shores, five-minutes to the north. Fishing needs are taken care of by Brunswick Surf & Tackle on 'the block' or by the BP servo on Tweed Street.

Best time to visit: Even though crowded is a relative term in Bruns, January and public holiday long weekends see the caravan parks booked out a year in advance. Come during school term time from April-October for cooler, non-sticky weather or November-March for subtropical warmth.

Contacts:

Brunswick Heads Visitor Information

Centre: 02 6685 1003, www.brunswickheads.org.au

North Coast Holiday Parks:

www.northcoastholidayparks.com.au (click on Brunswick Heads on the map for specific contact numbers or online booking)

Byron Bay Cruises & Kayaks: 0410 016

926, www.byronbaycruises.com.au

Hotel Brunswick: 02 6685 1236,

www.hotelbrunswick.com.au

What's in name?

Brunswick Heads takes its name from the adjacent river, named by Captain John Rous, of the British Royal Navy, in 1828. It took some digging to find that this name was chosen in honour of English royalty. Queen Caroline was part of the House of Brunswick, also known as the House of Hanover, an important family in European royal history. The Prince of Wales who would later

become King George IV, was forced to marry Caroline, his cousin, in return for Parliament ignoring a previously unlawful marriage and paying off his astronomically sized debts (up to today's equivalent of 600 million pounds!). Unfortunately for him, history records that Caroline was ugly, tactless, and poorly acquainted with personal hygiene. After fulfilling his duty by producing an heir, George effectively banished Caroline, though he failed in his attempts to bribe her to stay out of the

country and asking the House of Lords to dissolve the marriage. Caroline died just weeks after being barred from her own coronation, claiming she had been poisoned. Now that's what I call a good story! Around 40 places in the British Empire were named Brunswick. Not all of them have such a direct connection to Queen Caroline but I wonder whether any that do are brave enough to include her story in their historical pamphlets.