



Gerringong to Huskisson

Voted "most adorable town in the state" by us, Berry, 142km south of Sydney, is charming without being twee. The centre of this tree-lined rural service town is full of lovely National Trust-classified buildings housing good cafes, balconied pubs, brimful antique stores, galleries and yes, bric-a-brac and crafty stores. It retains a down-to-earth atmosphere despite the number of Sydneysiders snapping up the picturesque real estate for weekend escapes.

A complete contrast lies just 20km down the road. We wandered in to the Fleet Air Arm Museum quite by chance and with no expectations. What we found was a stunning collection of naval aircraft covering everything from WWI biplanes through to Vietnam War helicopters and the current ship-borne choppers operating in the Royal Australian Navy, displayed in a huge hangar right next to a very active navy airfield. A must-see.

But the main event on this leg of the trip was Jervis Bay. The bay itself, which is eight times larger than Sydney Harbour, is a marine park and its unbelievably clear turquoise waters are home to an extraordinary variety of sea life so the fishing, diving and dolphin/whale/seal-watching are excellent.

The surrounds are wild and beautiful so you can easily get away from it all but every comfort – great food, accommodation and shopping – is also close by. We were lucky

enough to spend a night in the bush, in a secluded luxury safari tent in the middle of 100 acres of Aussie bush at Paperbark Camp. It was an unforgettable experience – equal parts luxury and back-to-basics, complete with a possum but minus any nasty creepy-crawlies. It wasn't exactly quiet: drops of condensation falling from the trees above sounded like someone throwing Jaffas at the roof, I swear the frogs tweeted rather than croaked all night and one pre-dawn bird sounded exactly like a crook motor-mower.

We were bedazzled by the world's whitest sands, which squeak underfoot because of their high silica content, and we went bush in the Aboriginal-run Booderee National Park. We got up close and personal with dolphins and penguins on a stunning Dolphin Watch Cruise that took in a huge area of Jervis Bay. We swam in the clearest jade water – average visibility 30m – and hiked to sandstone ruins teetering on the edge of towering cliffs with the ocean roaring far, far below.

The day ended with a couple of beers with the locals at the legendary, down-to-earth waterfront Husky Pub in Huskisson. Bickering flocks of bright parrots fussed in the tropical foliage and pelicans soared serenely above as the sun went down on a perfect day, and we resolved to return.

