

Small coast town with lots of style

Phil Hawkes discovers that Kiama on the NSW South Coast has more than just a blowhole.

THERE was a time, not long ago, when Kiama on the NSW South Coast was a place known for its famous blowhole plus the camping ground with ocean views, and not much else. I remember those days spent with assorted relatives quite well, including the old cinema where we would roll Jaffas down the wooden aisle unconcerned about the noise... or the waste.

What a change has taken place... and yet it hasn't. Kiama is still a small coastal town, unlike Nowra which has succumbed to the inevitability of traffic congestion, shopping malls and industrial precincts. Kiama still has that authentic "village" feel, which is often what tree changers are looking for, with a really cool bookshop and more recently, a raft of new cafes springing to life.

Popular for great coffee are the Penny Whistler café below the Sebel Hotel; The Brooding Italian (should that read Brewding?); Hungry Monkey; and the Little Blowhole Art Bar, a terrific spot for art, food, and yes, coffee.

These little gems go to illustrate not only a growing-up Kiama, but an entire coastal district with much to offer visitors. Just further down the coast are smaller villages like Gerroa and Berry, which the Pacific Highway is about to bypass, which

means they'll hopefully retain their old-style character and charm.

It's the restaurant scene which has also changed... for the better. Forget the Chiko Rolls and Pluto Pups and think creative cuisine from chefs trained in the Big Smoke, bringing their skills to the regions. Take a restaurant like South on Albany in Berry, for example, where John and Sonia escaped to a few years ago and now command a loyal local following as well as knowledgeable Sydneysiders. South on Albany is a classic case of combining modern Australian tastes with fresh local produce and wines.

Similarly there's Blue Swimmer at Gerroa, the name presumably referring to crustaceans rather than the winter surfing crowd. This is rather oddly located in a suburban street close to the river, a restored old house with a cosy ambience much beloved by Gerroans and the black-clad city crowd. As you'd expect, seafood reigns here and also some great veggie choices created by chef Lauren Brown.

All very on-trend. Where to stay in the area? Big changes there, too. In addition to the famous camping ground on the Kiama headland and various oceanfront cabins and guest houses from the past, plus the usual assortment of motels and hotels, there's a new kid on the block... nine kilometres away at

Jamberoo. It's "new", in the sense that it's a beautifully restored and furnished country house called Terragong which dates back to 1858 and now operates as a classy B&B.

The owners, Darryl and Simon have impeccable taste and eyes for detail... the four guest suites have every mod con including heated bathroom flooring, and Simon's hearty breakfasts are legendary. This is country living at its finest, in a house with so much fascinating history in the most pleasant surroundings. Definitely worth more than a one night stand, if you can... you won't want to leave.

There's another aspect of Kiama that is worth mentioning, and experiencing... the Kiama Coast Walk.

If you have legs that can do more than push a supermarket trolley, this walk will tick all the boxes for views, fresh air, and a sense of achievement. The full walk is 22 km, from Minnamurra River to Werri Lagoon, but is divided into stages and can be done over several days of sheer cliff-top enjoyment.

Whether you're a blowhole tragic or not (and frankly, if you've seen one, you've seen them all), Kiama is worth the two-hour car trip or train from Sydney just to see how an old coastal village has managed to retain its natural charms with a modern touch.

www.kiama.com.au
www.visitnsw.com.au

The writer was a guest of Destination NSW.



The Little Blowhole Art Bar is a terrific spot for art, food and a beverage.



STYLE AND CLASS: This restored and beautifully furnished countryhouse that dates back to 1858, now operates as a B&B called Terragong. PHOTO: CRAIG POWELL

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