



## HEAD TO THE HINTERLAND

Rural luxe beyond the Noosa seaside gloss

ROBYN IRNSIDE

**K**in Kin in the Noosa hinterland of southeast Queensland's Sunshine Coast feels about as far from a tourism mecca as you could reasonably expect. Its name in the local Kabi Kabi Indigenous language has several meanings, including "plenty black ants", and the main strip consists of little more than a pub and a general store. Despite being part of Noosa Shire, the tiny town is closer to Gympie than glamorous Noosa Heads, and barely amounts to a fuel stop for most travellers, who motor through without pausing to take in the grandeur of the rural landscape. Yet Kin Kin has emerged as a star of the pandemic era, largely because of one extraordinary attraction that almost didn't happen.

Mayan Farm Luxe Villas, perched atop a steep and bumpy driveway, has been embraced by crowd-wary tourists seeking isolation, space, fresh air and a massive dollop of luxury. Originally conceived as a new home for owners Jodie Williams and Brett Gowley, the couple decided to offer the property as a bespoke, eco-tourism experience when the pandemic disrupted their other businesses. Using rammed earth, recycled timbers and repurposed metal, Gowley spent two years creating the three pavilions that make up Mayan Farm on a big slab of his sprawling landholding in Kin Kin where cattle, quarter horses, sheep and ducks roam free. The results are breathtaking from every angle, thanks to a clever design that allows guests to drink in the glorious view to the hilltop pool from the bedrooms, kitchen and dining area. Every piece of outdoor furniture, the kitchen island, TV cabinet, window frames and castle-worthy front doors have been handmade from old bridge timbers, which lend a weight and solidity that screams they've been built to last.

Arriving on a sunny Sunday afternoon, it's quickly apparent this property is wasted on a solo traveller. Sleeping up to eight, there's ample room for many more to gather around the fire pit and enjoy a barbecue or something much fancier, with the dream kitchen boasting a fully kitted-out butler's pantry. Each of the outer pavilions, known as east and west wings, have heavenly kingsize beds, spacious bathrooms stocked with an abundance of towels and Glow Lab products, plus private decks for sitting and soaking up the silence. There are ample blankets available, plenty of wardrobe space, and the east wing comes with the added bonus of an outdoor claw-foot bath and shower.

None of the buildings has airconditioning and nor is it needed, such as the extraordinary insulation qualities of the rammed-earth walls. Despite the evening temperature dipping to single digits during my stay earlier this year, the rooms are sufficiently toasty to warrant a cool blast from the ceiling fan to



keep from roasting under the bedcovers.

It's the sort of place where you instantly feel nagging shoulder tension disappear without the aid of a massage therapist or yoga workout. There is no gym to tweak the conscience or long list of "house rules", simply an unspoken understanding you will respect the exquisite craftsmanship and take appropriate care of the property. And as wonderfully isolated as it feels overlooking grazing cattle and

ginger crops, Mayan Farm is just a few kilometres from the tiny township if there's a need to stock up on snacks and drinks.

Williams's catering business, Black Ant Gourmet, at the Kin Kin General Store, offers products that reflect the region's amazing food bowl, from Kenilworth cheese and Cooloola berries, to lemon myrtle ice cream and iron bark-smoked beef brisket. There are substantial breakfast, lunch and dessert menus from which to order, and if guests prefer to stay put at Mayan Farm Luxe Villas, delivery of partly or fully prepared meals is an option. Picnic hampers are available, too. Fortunately the fresh country air and a walk up and down the steep driveway are enough to invigorate my appetite for the hearty supper Williams delivers to me. Slow-cooked lamb shank with tomatoes from Noosa Reds Farm and mash is perfect for a crisp, star-filled Kin Kin evening.

Although it would be easy to revel in the space and solitude of the farm, there is much to discover in the local area. For the energetic, there's imposing Mt Cooroora in Tucheoi National Park, with spectacular views at the peak. At 2.4km, the trail sounds easily do-able but hikers are encouraged to allow four hours for the round trip due to the difficulty of the climb when the dirt trail turns to rock. Some-

Clockwise from main: Mayan Farm Luxe Villas; Pomona Distillery; Amrita Park Meadery; Kin Kin General Store; relaxing at the villas



what less strenuous options are visits to Amrita Park Meadery and Pomona Distillery, both within 10-15 minutes by road from Mayan Farm. As the name suggests, Amrita Park produces the alcoholic beverage known as mead by fermenting honey with water and sometimes various fruits, spices, grains or hops. More to my taste, Pomona Distillery is famous for its handcrafted spirits including a vodka and signature dry, pink and butterfly pea flower gins. Housed in a former bakery more than 100 years old, the distillery is a major source of local pride, boasting the original brickwork and heritage timbers, and surrounded by lush subtropical gardens.

Not too much farther away is Cooloola Berries Farm and Cafe, where between June and November visitors can pick 10 varieties of strawberries grown on site. Outside of picking season, there are still farm tours, berry parties and no shortage of strawberry-themed cafe menu treats, from pancakes and sundaes to sodas. As I prepare to depart on the delightfully leafy drive to Noosa Heads, I pause to write in the Mayan Farm Luxe Villas guest book. With page after page of superlatives and pledges to return, such feedback is confirmation that this property is a rare gem, offering decadent luxury without the heavy carbon footprint to match.

Robyn Ironside was a guest of Tourism Noosa and Mayan Farm Luxe Villas.  
[visitnoosa.com.au](http://visitnoosa.com.au)

### IN THE KNOW

Kin Kin is in the Noosa Biosphere Reserve, Queensland's first recipient of the 2021 UNESCO Michel Batisse Award for management excellence. The Mayan Farm Luxe Villas property is about two hours' drive from Brisbane. \$950 for two nights, Monday to Thursday, for four guests; Friday to Sunday, \$1100. Extra guests, \$50 each a night, maximum eight. Pets allowed.  
[mayanfarm.com.au](http://mayanfarm.com.au)  
[noosabiosphere.org.au](http://noosabiosphere.org.au)

