



IN THE KNOW

Mollymook is two hours and 40 minutes by road from Canberra, and three hours from Sydney.

Motel Molly has standard suites from \$299 a night, oceanside balcony/garden suite from \$389, spa suite \$389, one-bedroom apartment \$439, two-bedroom \$549, and three-bedroom \$699.

motelmolly.com.au
shoalhavenfloat.com
milkhaus.com.au
cupittsestate.com.au

PRETTY IN PINK

A refurbished South Coast motel revels in nostalgia

ANDREA BLACK

Today is going to be a scorcher. It's 9am at Mollymook Beach, on the NSW South Coast. Lifesavers are placing the flags in the sand, surfers are paddling out to the breaks, and already bathers are basking on the beach. One swimmer, fresh from the ocean, plonks on the sand in a scene straight out of a Max Dupain photograph – the Sunbaker (1937) was shot nearby in Culburra.

Across the road, I'm presiding over the glittering waterfront from my pink-hued garden suite at the new Motel Molly. Anyone visiting the coastal town this summer would have noticed its freshly painted pastel sorbet colours in what's known as the golden triangle – the block right on the beach and across from the golf club. Inspired by Mediterranean coastal towns such as Portofino, those across the Amalfi and along the Cinque Terre (think Miami's South Beach, too), it is the latest in the great motel makeover revolution.

The former Surfbeach Motel, a standard-



The newly refurbished Motel Molly, top; heated swimming pool and spa, above right; Rose room, left; Milk Haus cafe, below left

looking 1980s establishment (tan bricks, utilitarian grey carpet) with polite but passionless online reviews ("neat, tidy and pleasant") was taken over by Knox Developments last year. The company tasked interior design and architecture practice Richards Stanisich with the multimillion-dollar transformation. The result is candy-hued coastal chic with a nod to nostalgia, though they have eschewed the full retro look – no winking neon signs here.

Each building has its own name and colour. I'm staying in the pink confection they call Rose, there's also Limoncello (yellow), Olive (green) and Capri (blue) with a mix of three, two and one-bedroom apartments and several king suites. The bones, as they say, are good; high ceilings, good natural light, generous space and walkways framed by arches.

Kirsten Stanisich, director of Richards Stanisich, tells me they wanted to instil a bit of fun into the hotel suites, playing on the curves and softness of the whole space and the relaxing atmosphere of coastal living.

"Each detail lends itself to the overall design of the room, so the handle details of the wardrobe can also be found in the joinery pieces of the kitchen, and the curved profiles of the doors can be found in the outline of the shower glass or the bedheads," Stanisich says.

The natural textures and creamy tones are elevated with these intricate details. The fittings and cabinetry are all custom-designed, and hand-

made Moroccan ceramics and textiles are by Lrnce, a Marrakech-based brand. Even the Smeg appliances integrate with each building's colour scheme. My pink fridge is filled with Aperol Spritz, canned negroni, and wine sourced from the nearby Cupitt's Estate.

"It was important to us that every detail formed a cohesive design story, meticulously refined to offer a unique and comfortable coastal stay," says Stanisich.

On the grounds, lavender and olive trees have been planted, and the outdoor barbecue pergola area will soon be bougainvillea-festooned. Nearby, I find a perch by the heated kidney-shaped pool and spa next to a puppy called Velma. There are three pet-friendly suites on site. Velma looks very relaxed spending the morning lounging under a tassel-trimmed, scalloped umbrella with her human companions.

In recent years, there's been a flurry of refurbishments on the South Coast, including The Berry View in Berry, The Isla in Batemans Bay and soon, the Merivale-owned Whale Inn in Narooma. Anyone who has watched the Netflix series Motel Makeover (where a dingy Canadian roadside motel in Sauble Beach is transformed into The June) can't help but slow down when seeing a "for sale" sign outside a rundown property hiding in plain sight and picture what magic could be performed. One can spend hours perusing motels for sale on resortbrokers.com.au imagining the possibilities. Even the Robin Boyd-designed Black Dolphin Motel in Merimbula is for sale right now.

Steve Piper, who is running Motel Molly (or MoMo as I have taken to calling it), says that as well as road trippers from Sydney, Canberra and the Southern Highlands, the place is attracting Melburnians tempted to drive farther

up than the usual southern NSW beach towns of Eden and Merimbula. He tells me of grand plans to expand across a nearby property, making room for a tapas bar and outdoor venue with live music. For now, guests can take advantage of the culinary choices within Mollymook, including Asian fusion at Gwylo and various Bannisters restaurants.

The nearby town of Milton has long been a foodie haven. I stop in for breakfast at Milk Haus, where the impressive menu (which includes lunch) is full of locally sourced whole foods. This former dairy and cheese factory was taken over by Sydney corporate escapees Kitty and Nat, who felt the pull of a complete lifestyle change during the pandemic. After a meal, you can wander their kitchen garden, shop at the Motion Ceramics store onsite or book in for a cooking class.

Cupitt's Estate, the celebrated winery on the outskirts of Ulladulla, has been open to the public for more than 15 years. Here, tastings begin with a pinot gris from Orange, move on to a selection of roses and end with rich reds. Segue from cellar-door tasting to a long lunch looking out to the verdant vines and beyond to Pigeon House Mountain, known as Diddul in Yuin.

Those feeling energetic can climb the mountain. I'm opting for a more relaxing afternoon, cycling to Ulladulla (Motel Molly offers free bike hire) for magnesium float tank therapy at Shoalhaven Float. Each private suite contains a pod-like spa bath with a lid. After a shower, I recline in the chamber with water heated to skin temperature and feel the weightlessness. At first, it feels slightly claustrophobic, but after a few minutes stretching, taking deep breaths and listening to the piped music, I feel fully relaxed.

The hour-long cocooning experience flies by. It's also said to be good for the muscles. Just as well. I need to limber up, as I plan to tackle the surf on one of Motel Molly's Mick Fanning softboards, named the Beastie.

After a few clumsy stacks on the tiny waves directly across the road, I give up and make the easy barefoot stroll back. Overhead corellas coo, and salty towels draped over balconies flap in the late afternoon breeze. My pink palace awaits, as does a colour-coordinated glass of Aix rose.

Andrea Black was a guest of Motel Molly and Shoalhaven Tourism.
shoalhaven.com

