



dining

A Place called Peats Bite

There's something special about arriving for lunch by boat, particularly at Peats Bite restaurant, which is accessible only by water. By Brian Jensen.

Tucked into Sunny Corner, at Peats Bight, the cleverly named Peats Bite restaurant overlooks the Hawkesbury River near the entrance to Berowra Creek, about six miles up river from Brooklyn.

Run by the Miljoen family, this restaurant is renowned for long, lazy, laid-back weekend lunches. The combination of a magnificent location, great food and relaxed atmosphere is what makes it unique. All tables overlook the lawn and the water with views extending to Bar Island and beyond. Regardless of whether the river is glassy and sparkling or dark and moody, it's a truly stunning panorama.

That's what Rod Miljoen thought 25 years ago when, having sold his engineering business, he sailed past the rundown property, saw a for sale sign and bought it on the spot. He planned to build a family home, but when wife Tammy, a professional singer, saw the place she realised the potential for a restaurant. "And it meant I'd never have to look for a gig again," she jokes.

An engineer by profession and builder by nature, Rod says he had to think outside the square to turn the property, which had no power, water or sewage, into a restaurant. This involved reclaiming land, building a pipeline to access town water, developing a septic system and installing generators.



Peats Bite is more than a restaurant; it's a lifestyle location where we're all invited to lunch. Tropical plants surround the giant outdoor chess set and swimming pool where diners can dip between courses. Children play on the lawn within eyesight and you can take your coffee down to the river's edge.

The clientele is as eclectic as the vessels they arrive in. Locals come in battered tinnies wearing shorts and thongs, while party groups, in dresses and jackets arrive by water taxi. Others come by houseboat, speedboat, luxury cruiser or seaplane.



Everyone is made to feel welcome and the sense of camaraderie is evident. "There's no pretence here, it's something we're very proud of," says Rod; recounting the time an uppity English Lord enjoyed an engaging conversation with the local bus driver.

The food is modern Australian cuisine and the five-course lunch starts with fresh bread, dips and dukka, followed by a small mixed seafood plate to share. An individual entrée taster plate features a variety of textures and flavours. The a la carte mains include seafood, red and white meats and a vegetarian option. My Persian spatchcock with fattoush was delicious and my husband was impressed with the barbequed salt and pepper jewfish fillet on

fennel mash. There are a variety of desserts and you help yourself to tea and coffee.

Courses are delivered at an unhurried pace so you can linger, savouring the food, wine,



company and view. Daughter Tanya now manages the restaurant and son Kim, who has his own landscaping business, helps out. During the afternoon Tammy joins the musician, either brother Rick or friend Tony, at the gazebo.

“If she can’t sing she gets in a really bad mood,” says Kim jokingly. Her vocals soon have guests reminiscing, singing along or up dancing.

While ‘water access only’ has special appeal, it also has drawbacks. “Everything that comes in is triple handled,” says Rod. “Boating in particular is a huge cost, running backwards and forwards to pick up staff, pick up goods.” And it’s hard work – I saw Tammy unloading the day’s supply of ice from her boat early one morning.

Business can be inconsistent too. On sunny days bookings can suddenly increase, which means urgently finding more staff, yet a hint of bad weather brings lots of cancellations. “Years ago we lost thirteen weekends because of rain,” says Kim.

Peats Bite also caters for weddings and small corporate functions. They have six loft-style units overlooking the river and hired houseboats are tied to the pontoon for more accommodation. Nearby Sunny Corner Cottage can be rented for a bridal party or company executives.

Eighty percent of diners at Peats Bite are return guests, so if you haven’t been for a while, it’s probably time to pay Tammy and Rod a visit again. If you haven’t been at all, it’s definitely time to go.

Peats Bite Phone 02 9985 9040

www.peatsbite.com Closed July and August.

Water taxi Ph 0400 600 111

www.hawkesburycruises.com.au

Sunny Corner Cottage Ph 02 9481 9981

www.stayz.com.au/18644