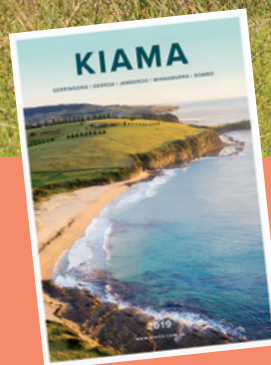


KIAMA

Find out
why families
love the
Kiama area

GERRINGONG
GERROA
JAMBEROO
MINNAMURRA
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SHOWCASE

Clean & green Kiama

Katrina Holden revisits childhood memories of Kiama with her own children, and discovers amazing food, forests and friendly faces.

My most vivid childhood memories of the Kiama region are of expansive, rolling green hills that hug the winding roads, on occasion parting to offer views of the deep blue waters of the Pacific Ocean. Decades later I'm driving to Kiama from Sydney for a weekend away with my own children, whose gasps of delight from the back seat, as they spy the almost-iridescent green hills dotted with grazing cattle, remind me that the journey may be quicker than in my youth – thanks to the M1 Princess Highway – but the breathtaking scenery is unchanged.

We start our weekend of discovery at Blowhole Point, home of the famous Kiama Blowhole, formed from volcanic lava flows about 260 million years ago, and best viewed in south east winds. We wait patiently for the right-sized swell to roll in and then, whoosh, up into the air shoots a powerful jet of sea spray, drawing thrills and laughter from onlookers of all ages. On the headland, Kiama Lighthouse, built in 1887, stands tall and proud, unmistakable within the spectacular 360-degree view from the Point. ▶

Kiama
Lighthouse

The streets of Kiama have retained all of their coastal and regional charm, with a number of original heritage buildings and structures still standing, including the Memorial Arch, first unveiled on Anzac Day in 1925; the Post Office of 1878 and Kiama Court House of 1860. Terrace houses, first built as modest housing for local quarry workers in 1886, line Collins Street.

It's Saturday lunch time and we wander into one of the old converted terrace houses – The Hungry Monkey. With its industrial styling, vibrant music playing and quirky touches including a giant monkey face on the wall, it has appeal for friends, families and couples. Kids' Oreo shakes are a winner, and the children's menu includes bacon and eggs, three-stack pancakes, chicken strips or cheeky monkey



Kids pancakes at The Hungry Monkey

burgers. From the main menu, I opt for the Southern Fry burger with southern fried chicken, red cabbage, Monterey Jack, jalapenos and monkey hot sauce. It's a flavour explosion!

Setting out to explore local attractions, we make our way to Illawarra Fly Treetop Adventures, which promises adventures in a temperate rainforest setting – whether you want to keep your feet on the ground or not. The easy 1500 metre walk through the rainforest along the Illawarra Escarpment is suitable for all ages. Armed with pencils and a puzzle to solve, the kids set off to unscramble the letters to a mystery word, with each new letter revealed across ten fairy and elf houses positioned throughout the rainforest. We venture onto the springboard cantilevers that are suspended 25 metres above the forest floor. If a strong wind is blowing, it's possible to feel a wobble along the pathways, which thrills my sons, who try to create even more bounce along the walkway, despite my protests. Other visitors choose to zipline through the forest (with trained guides), whizzing above us on elevated cables, flying from one landing platform to another.

We continue our ascent to the 45-metre spiral tower. At the top, broad views of the whole district emerge, and the suspension walkways now seem so very far down beneath us.

For a more subdued and quiet rainforest experience, we explore the Minnamurra Rainforest Centre in Jamberoo, where the only sounds emanate from the lyrebirds and whipbirds and occasional flowing streams. On a 1.6-kilometre loop walk, we pass blue butterflies, and giant boulders in creek beds, crossed via Indiana Jones-style netted bridges. My daughter hugs the ancient vines that are dangling around enormous tree trunks. There is a longer and steeper walk option, the Falls Walk, which is a continuation of the Loop Walk along the canyon cliff edge to the Minnamurra Falls. From here, visitors can recharge afterwards at the Rainforest Centre's café.

Our accommodation for the weekend is at Frangipani House, a rental property on acreage, not far from the Minnamurra Rainforest.



Minnamurra Rainforest



Kiama Lighthouse with water spraying out of the blowhole

KIAMA FACT

The Kiama Visitor's Centre on Blowhole Point Road is open every day (except Christmas Day) from 9am until 5pm.
kiama.com.au

1887
The Kiama Lighthouse,
built in 1887, stands proud
on the headland



Illawarra Fly Treetop Adventures

And while there are plenty of fantastic accommodation options in the heart of town, and within walking distance of great cafes, shops and attractions, there was something about staying among thick lush green hills and peaceful valleys that appealed to this city slicker.

Frangipani House is a modern, three-bedroom home with a full-sized and fully equipped kitchen, laundry, indoor and outdoor fireplaces, in ground swimming pool overlooking the valley and, possibly my favourite feature, a parents' retreat dwelling, just steps from the main house, with its own large bedroom and a bathroom with a freestanding tub. I'm also pleasantly surprised to discover that the home's owner, Louise Adam, has a love of vintage, and the house is tastefully decorated with a number of original and restored 1950s pieces – there's even a 1958 Globetrotter caravan parked in the carport which we are welcome to go inside for a glimpse of family holidaying more than 60 years ago.

We take a dip in the pool, with the sound of cows mooing in the distance and for dinner we try Penny Whistlers, and enjoy magical views ►



Quarry worker terrace houses

and a sunset over Kiama harbour. My 5-year old son isn't convinced he will like the kids' nachos, but in the end he eats the lot, while my eldest devours his ham and cheese quesadilla. My partner loves the flavours in their signature Mocequa (a Brazilian stew with mussels, calamari, scallops and fish); while Pete's Belgian chocolate mousse with poached berries and biscotti is flawless.

A beautiful sunrise across the valley, and a symphony of birds and cattle moving about in the fields, greets us the next morning. Feeling energetic, we tackle the Kiama Coast Walk (that runs from Kiama to Gerringong), from Werri Lagoon. The track stretches for several kilometres, with some parts along unprotected cliff tops – (keep your eyes on little ones.) Between May and July, and September to November, you may even spot migrating whales along the coastline. The flat, roadside stretch alongside Werri Beach itself is beautifully scenic, and is suitable for younger children to ride bikes or scooters. We fossick about the Werri Lagoon, finding feathers and shells and wading in the shallow lagoon waters, framed on one side by surf and on the other, more sloping



Werri Lagoon

green fields. My daughter spontaneously scrawls 'I ♥ Kiama' in the sand.

For one of the best local coffee stops, drop in to The Blue Swimmer at Gerroa where locals are spilling onto the streets, Sydney-style, waiting for their takeaway coffee. We dine indoors, sampling the decadent fresh cakes, and enjoying views over Gerroa and of the kids' park across the road. A stroll around nearby Gerringong also reveals more character-filled heritage buildings and lifestyle shops as well as chic eateries. We loved the brand new The Hill Bar and Kitchen in Fern Street opened in December 2018. Offering sweeping beach vistas as well as outdoor

KIAMA FACT

Kiama is approximately 90 minutes' drive south of Sydney; 3 hours from Canberra; and 2 hours from the Blue Mountains.

Trains run from Sydney to Kiama on the South Coast line every hour. The trip takes 2 hours.

lounges and deck seating, it has some of the most generously sized children's meals I've ever seen.

Across the road is The Collective Beat – an emporium of more than 40 diverse local businesses selling their homewares, arts and creative goods. I loved the pottery made by local lady and former high school teacher Zeynep Testoni, who we had met earlier that day in her studio in Gerringong. The colourful and lively Zeynep runs adult pottery classes and while she currently doesn't run kids' classes, her casual classes are proving popular on weekends for out-of-towners who can purchase a two-hour or four-hour 'Pottery Day Out' voucher, followed by home-made scones by Zeynep's husband, Marcus. During the first weekend of each month, several artists open their homes and workshops to visitors as part of the Kiama Arts Trail.

The Jamberoo Pub and Johnny Warren Museum is a short drive from our accommodation. The family-owned and operated traditional Aussie pub has been the watering hole for locals since 1857. Catch live music in the beer garden on Sundays between 2 and 5pm.



Werri Lagoon

As we drive out of Kiama after a weekend of walking on sands and in rainforests, swimming, filling our bellies with quality food and more, my five-year-old calls goodbye to the cows through the car's open window. My daughter announces she will be sharing her Kiama adventures with the class on her upcoming school News Day – including that she spotted a classmate sitting at the next table to us in a café! Clearly, Kiama is the place to be. **CEA**



At top of The Tower at Illawarra Fly Treetop Adventures



Head to Kiama in Winter for a perfect cool-weather weekend away.