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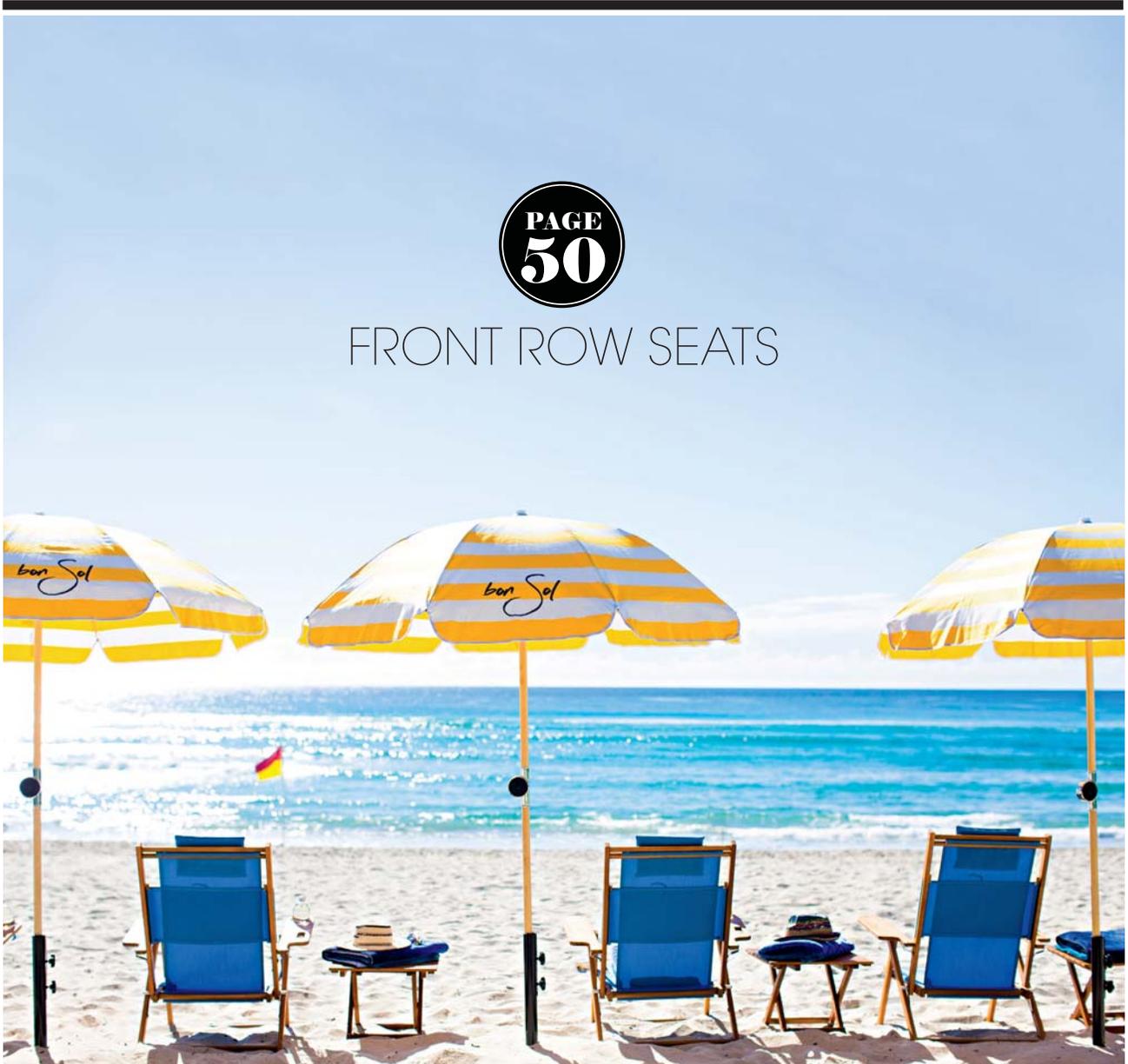
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FRONT ROW SEATS





BON SOL,
BURLEIGH HEADS, QLD

Golden days

HIGH LIFE AMID THE LOW-RISES

South of Surfers Paradise, down Burleigh Heads way, the high-rises fall away and there among the shiny new things you can still see the sun-bleached bones of the “old” Gold Coast. In broad streets of shops and low-rise brick apartments, worlds collide in sometimes head-spinningly close quarters. Fourex and chips at the surf club. Officially sanctioned evening drumming and fire-twirling in the park, a stone’s throw from one of Queensland’s finest restaurants. Places to get tattoos or kebabs or board wax cheek-by-jowl with a moody new yakitori restaurant and a speakeasy bar, both so super-cool they conceal or completely eschew front doors. And from the green, breezy headland west to the lush Currumbin Valley, secret spots in which to escape the hubbub.

Newcomers in this mix-n-match holiday spot are the Bon Sol luxury apartments, two properties in an original 1960s red-brick block so

unassuming that upon arrival I drive past it three times, sure I have the wrong address. It’s an unbeatable spot in this stretch of the coast, where The Esplanade is flanked by houses and squat apartment blocks on one side, a ribbon of nature reserve, walking track and beach on the other. (If you prefer your holiday apartments in the clouds, just head north.) Entry is via a modest lobby and tiled stairwell; the neighbour’s landing with its neat array of thongs lends a rather down-to-earth vibe. But cross the threshold of Pandanus apartment – the second, Hibiscus, opens in 2018 – and you’re in an altogether different Burleigh Heads.

The original layout is fundamentally untouched, since it works: open plan living/dining kitchen with sweeping views to the east; two bedrooms, bathroom, ensuite and a big laundry accessible by a rear stairwell (perfect for soggy returns from the beach). The décor, however, is a brand new work of art. Designer Anna Spiro, who created the fabulous interiors of Halcyon House in Cabarita, has applied her “well-travelled Hamptons” style here in Ikat textiles, Moroccan-style mosaics, thick seagrass rugs on light green tiles, pretty wallpapers, vibrant oil paintings and art books. The overall impression is of a light and lovely concert dominated by greens and blues. A bottle of Krug is on ice for our arrival – encouragement enough to take to the corner balcony and enjoy the afternoon sights.

Thoughtful touches throughout the apartment include beach towels, hairdryers, toiletries, not one but two Cloud Nine hair defrizzers, Bang & Olufsen sound, three big TVs and a washer/dryer. But in a brand new fit-out, the lack of a USB port is a little disappointing and the noisy bathroom fan needs a rethink. Longer-stay guests will appreciate



THE WRITER STAYED AS A GUEST OF THE OPERATOR. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES





A BOTTLE OF KRUG IS ON ICE FOR OUR ARRIVAL



Charms: Burleigh Beach; Pandanus; local treats

the seriously well-appointed kitchen, kitted out with high-quality everything including chef's knives and dishwasher. We're only here for the weekend, though, and everyone's been talking about the transformation of the wining and dining scene at our doorstep.

Brunch is at an alfresco table at buzzing Barefoot Barista, a short drive south in Palm Beach; and craft beer o'clock doesn't get much more relaxed than in the big open windows of Ze Pickle, Burleigh Heads. For dinner, it's off to the restaurant at the top of my shortlist of must-do places – Rick Shores, where dishes such as the famous bug rolls and pan-roasted John Dory with burnt seaweed butter come with world-class service and a front-row beach setting.

On Sunday morning I point the car south to Currumbin then southwest along Currumbin Creek Road, which tunnels through the cool, lush hinterland (blink and you'll miss the rock pools where the locals

go to chill). I'm in search of Currumbin Valley Harvest on the recommendation of a local, but the café and markets are for earlier risers than me. And anyway, at the end of the line, a pleasant surprise: the Mount Cougal section of Springbrook National Park, where an 800m walking track winds gently uphill, tracing the course of a rushing creek studded with rock pools and waterfalls. It's a magical location for a deep breath and a mental detox; thank heavens for hidden places where nothing ever changes.

Perfect for: Couples with friends; small families with teens (Bon Sol is not suitable for children under 13).

Must do: Enjoy the sun and sand. As part of Bon Sol's "Beach Club" service (\$150 a day), the manager will set up your personal umbrella, sun lounger and icebox of drinks on beautiful Burleigh Beach. Take a walk through nearby Burleigh Head National Park; discover local markets and the hinterland by car.

Dining: Book ahead for lunch or dinner at Rick Shores or The Fish House in Burleigh Heads; Jimmy Wah's is the place for top mod-Vietnamese. Make a beeline for breakfast, lunch or brunch at Barefoot Barista, Palm Beach.

Bottom line: Pandanus apartment from \$590 per night May-August; \$690 per night Sept-April; peak season \$790 per night (minimum three nights). Special rates for seven nights or more.

Getting there: Bon Sol is on The Esplanade, Burleigh Heads, a 20-minute drive from Gold Coast Airport and 90km from Brisbane.

bonsol.com.au

