

Overnight at Kululapa

Somewhere between the Midlands mist and a Mugg & Bean muffin...

Kululapa wasn't the final destination of the trip. It was the overnight stop. The let's-not-drive-through-the-night compromise before hitting the coast. But thanks to a nudge from our friend Justin Ponder, we decided to make a bit of a birding mission out of it too. He'd said it was rustic. Which is either code for "don't expect five stars" or "you're going to love it." In this case, it was both.

The road in already had character. Not far from Benvie Gardens, but far enough off-grid that we were told to drop our off-road trailer at the neighbour's because, well, there was going to be no chance of squeezing it into the Kululapa parking. No problem. We're nothing if not adaptable. Trailer off, snacks intact, and back on the road we went.

We'd come prepared. Which is to say, we didn't feel like cooking, so we stopped for pizzas on the way. A genius move, if I may say so, because it meant the evening was free for exactly what it needed to be, mist rolling into the valley, windows slightly fogging up, that glorious in-between light, and birds still calling long after the sun dipped.

Kululapa, true to its name, has that wrapped-in-nature feel. You sleep in it, breathe it, and wake up with it. Mom and I took the main bed downstairs, while Dad - self-declared bush-whacker and always up for a "different" experience - claimed the upstairs loft. He emerged the next morning a little worse for wear, claiming bats had kept him up half the night. Whether he meant the animal or the cricket kind remains unclear. He was grinning though, so we suspect he didn't mind too much.

Now, summer birding comes with one major perk and one minor inconvenience. The perk? The dawn chorus. The inconvenience? It starts well before 4am. Like clockwork, the birds began. I noticed Mom had climbed out of bed and was standing half-out the window, phone in hand, holding it in the strangest position. At first, I thought she was trying to get signal. But nope. She was recording. Turns out she'd realised how loud and clear the calls were and didn't want to miss the moment.

By five, the name of our cottage, "Birdsong", felt like a prophecy fulfilled. We gave in to the noise (joyful noise, let's be clear), got up, and made tea. Thanks to the previous day's prep and a quick Mugg & Bean stop, we had giant muffins at the ready. Out into the garden we went, wrapped in hoodies, tea in one hand, muffin in the other, birds all around.

And then came the morning ritual. When Luca is not with us, Mom plays post box. She collects every call she hears, records it, and sends it straight to him on WhatsApp. "Any idea what this one is?" "Is this the Olive Thrush or the Chorister Robin again?" "Definitely not a White-starred, right?" It's become her way of learning. Not just seeing a bird and checking it off, but hearing it, recording it, and then having Luca gently nudge her in the right direction. And it's working. She's recognising more, picking up differences, noticing who calls from where.

There's something quite special about learning like that. Quietly, over tea and mist, not in a rush to tick off a list, just watching, listening, asking, and enjoying.

We didn't stay long that morning. The gardens of Benvie were calling, and we still had the coast to reach. But Kululapa left its mark. Not in the obvious ways - no luxury bathrobes or breakfast baskets - but in that deep, calming, soul-slowng way that some places manage without trying. You arrive stressed and leave smiling, even if you've had three hours of sleep and a bat in your ceiling.