

THIS QUEENSLAND COAST WITH THE MOST IS ALL ABOUT LAID-BACK, NATURAL LIVING. NO WONDER THE LOCALS ARE WALKING ON SUNSHINE, WRITES **CATHERINE GIN.**

SERVE SUNNY SIDE *Up*



Naming the Sunshine Coast after a force of light and life seems fitting – things just appear to thrive in this corner of the world. From Caloundra, an hour's drive from Brisbane, to Cooloola in the north, there's a bountiful harvest of fresh produce year-round, with organic the byword throughout the region from farm gate to plate.

The green scene is spreading from Sunshine's heartland, Noosa – known for its population-capped, low-rise focus on sustainability – and eco-friendly practices are now reaching farms and B&Bs.

Foodies and barefoot executives flock to gatherings such as the Celebration of Australian Food & Wine – Noosa Style, in May; The Noosa Longweekend in July; and seafood festivals in September. Cooking classes book up fast and markets brim with goods grown and crafted by an army of talented locals.

It's time to get off the beaten track of Hastings Street – undergoing a \$7 million makeover – and start exploring the Sunshine Coast's farm-fresh offerings, award-winning restaurants, unique retreats, luxurious day spas, romantic gondola rides, and walks showcasing nature's best.

educational stroll around the farm that has been certified organic for 12 years.

At Kybong Crayfish Farm, get stuck into freshwater redclaw crayfish (similar to yabbies). Owners Hilton and Meaghan Kotzur offer the chance to net and touch a catch at one of 42 ponds on their 40-hectare aquaculture farm, before chowing down on a few freshly cooked, succulent crays.

The trip wouldn't be complete without sipping the region's wine wonders at Dingo Creek Vineyard, Noosa Valley Winery and Maroochy Springs Wines. Tours stop for lunch at Dingo Creek or Maroochy Springs – at the latter, owners Jack and Margaret Connolly lay out a homemade feast showcasing local gourmet goodies and their range of verdelho, rosé, chambourcin, red and dessert wines. Produced using biodynamic principles, the wines are low in chemicals and preservatives, said to lead to fewer headaches.

STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE

Follow your tastebuds from home soil to tabletop, and try more premium local produce at River



DOWN ON THE FARM

To discover the source of the regions fresh produce hop onboard the bus for Noosa Hinterland Tours' Noosa Food & Wine Tour, run by Terry Sampson and Noeline Croft. During this off-the-tourist-track experience, you'll meet growers and producers who'll happily take you on tours of their farms and let you sample the fruits (and fish) of their labours.

First stop is Noosa Reds, which supplies many of Hastings Street's top restaurants with tasty tomatoes. Step into 'artistic director' Rob Gibbs's greenhouse of around 3,000 plants to see how these vine-ripened beauties are hydroponically grown, then put them to the taste test.

Further fruity delights are to be had at Gary and Glenda Coleman's organic tropical fruit farm. High in the hills of North Arm, enjoy a morning tea of seasonal produce (such as avocado, papaya or guava); brandied bananas straight off the barbie; plus pikelets and pumpkin scones made by Glenda to Flo Bjelke-Petersen's famous recipe, slathered with cream and homemade jams. Afterwards, Gary leads the way on an

House Restaurant in Noosaville. Co-owner and head chef David Rayner is so dedicated to serving up the freshest available harvest from the Sunshine Coast's boutique growers and fisherfolk that the eatery's menu changes daily. An *amuse-bouche* (small serve) of soup is a constant and you can pair your choice of the day's offerings, which may include hand-picked Noosa spanner crab or a chargrilled aged grain-fed Wagyu rump, with a wine from the extensive list. It's easy to see why, since it opened in 2004, accolades such as one Chef's Hat in the *Brisbane Times' Good Food Guide 2008* and two stars in *The Courier-Mail's Food + Wine Guide Queensland 2008* have been awarded to River House.

At fellow one-Hatted, award-winning Yandina restaurant Spirit House, satisfy body and soul with mouth-watering East-West fusion offerings such as soy-braised duck breast with five-spice honey, peaches and ginger shallot relish or lemongrass and lime-cured salmon with nashi pear and watercress salad. The dining experience, in an open-air pavilion set amid tranquil tropical gardens, ponds and statues, will leave you in high spirits indeed. ▷

Opposite: Stroll along a Sunshine Coast beach. Inset: Net and eat your catch at Kybong Crayfish Farm. This page, above left to right: Sit down to the region's fine food and wine, make a pit stop at Maroochy Springs Wines, and join Noosa Hinterland Tours on a wine-tasting trip.



SUNSHINY SPOTS

:: Berkelouw Books
87 Memorial Drive, Eumundi
+61 7 5442 8366
www.berkelouw.com.au

:: Eats at Eumundi
86 Memorial Drive, Eumundi
+61 7 5442 8555
www.noosaeguide.com/eats

:: Eumundi Markets
Memorial Avenue, Eumundi
+61 7 5442 7106
www.eumundimarkets.com.au

:: Gondolas of Noosa
+61 412 929 369
www.gondolasnoosa.com

:: ikatan day spa
46 Grays Road, Doonan
+61 7 5471 1199
www.ikatanspa.com

:: Modern Primitive

101 Memorial Drive, Eumundi
+61 7 5442 7946
www.modernprimitive.info

:: Noosa Hinterland Tours
+61 7 5446 3111
www.noosahinterlandtours.com.au

:: River House Restaurant
301 Weyba Road, Noosaville
+61 7 5449 7441
www.riverhouserestaurant.com.au

:: Spirit House
20 Ninderry Road, Yandina
+61 7 5446 8977
www.spirithouse.com.au

:: Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk
www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/great_walks/

If you're inspired to create your own culinary delights but don't know chives from coriander, sign up for a Spirit House cooking class. There are more than 20 on offer, from Asian Seafood BBQ and Exotic Thai Curries to Restaurant Award Winners. Be warned, they're so popular you may need to book four months in advance. The House also has guided gastronomic tours to Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Can't make it? The next best thing is travel cookbook *Travels with Thai Food: A Journey with Spirit House*.

To help you become an at-home star chef, take a trip to the renowned Eumundi Markets – a 20-minute drive from Noosa – to source a cornucopia of fresh regional produce. Here, you will also find works by local artists, fashion accessories, homewares and an array of knick-knacks, bursting from over 600 stalls. Operating every Saturday and Wednesday to a philosophy of 'make it, bake it, design it, sew it or grow it', the markets also host camel rides, massage therapists, live bands and street entertainers.

While in the historic township of Eumundi, check out the shops (Berkelouw Books is a treasure trove of new, second-hand and rare tomes) and cafes [Eats at Eumundi has tasty tucker at its restaurant and gourmet deli]. Go wild at Modern Primitive over a tapas or pizza lunch or deliciously eclectic dinner menu that makes the most of local growers' goods.

Sleep it off at Musavale Lodge, a luxury B&B minutes from Eumundi. At this Eerwah Vale getaway, you'll be well looked after by husband and wife team Joe and Chris Russell – who were both former captain and purser on private yachts catering to the whims of movie stars and corporate bigwigs. Relax in suites with nautical touches, then wake to birdsong and breakfast on the wraparound verandah before taking a dip in the pool or spa.

R&R & ROMANCE

In this state of bliss, next head for ikatan day spa, a slice of Bali in Doonan, less than 10 minutes' drive from Eumundi and Noosa. Feel the serenity while receiving treatments such as a pedicure, manicure or head massage in an open-air pavilion surrounded by tropical gardens, sipping on herbal tea or a glass of bubbly. Retire to a private villa for more pampering, ranging from traditional Balinese body treatments and facials to the five-hour Kharma Rejuvenation package consisting of a coconut wrap, 60-minute massage, advanced performance facial, lunch and deluxe pedicure.

After this, you'll feel like you're floating – and you can turn this feeling into a reality ▷

Go for a morning dip in Musavale Lodge's pool (top left) before enjoying breakfast on the verandah (above left). Receive the star treatment at ikatan day spa (above far left).



SLEEP IT OFF

:: Currimundi Lakeside Bed & Breakfast

1 Rosea Court, Currimundi
+61 7 5493 9123
www.currimundi
lakeside.com.au

:: Lake Weyba Cottages

79 Clarendon Road,
Peregian Beach
+61 7 5448 2285
www.lakewaybacottages.com

:: Musavale Lodge

55 Musavale Road,
Eerwah Vale
+61 7 5442 8678
www.musavalelodge.com.au

on a cruise with Gondolas of Noosa. In an elegant vessel that would easily upstage its Venetian cousins, you'll glide smoothly along the Noosa River to an operatic soundtrack. Throw in a sunset, BYO Champagne (and perhaps a diamond ring)... it doesn't get any more romantic. Seek fuel for love by sailing up to a riverside restaurant or opting for a breakfast, romantic dinner or moonlight cruise catered for by one of Noosa's eateries.

Continue that loving feeling at Lake Weyba Cottages, 15 minutes' drive from Noosa. Hidden away near Peregian Beach, Philip and Samantha Bown's lakeside retreat – set on eight hectares of gardens – offers luxury self-contained accommodation utilising solar principles and rainwater systems, swimming lagoons and lily-filled ponds. Equipped with double spas, wood fires and only wildlife – frogs, koalas and kangaroos – for company, the secluded cottages are ideal for couples wanting to get away from it all. The pavilion centre makes a stylish wedding venue for up to 100 guests, or a picturesque spot for functions and conferences.

THE VIEW FROM HERE

If you are the get-back-to-nature sort and want to stretch your legs in scenic surrounds, it's time to saunter along the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk. As you wander through the Blackall

Range, you can gawk at gorges, waterfalls and rock pools, and spy 100-plus species of birds, about 70 reptile types and more than 30 kinds of frogs. Enjoy leisurely half-day strolls or tackle the full 58-kilometre hike of around four to six days, traversing warm subtropical rainforest and open eucalypt forest en route.

To combine the quintessentially Australian attractions of bush with beach, hit the Caloundra Coastal Pathway. On this stretch of more than 26 kilometres from Golden Beach in the south to Point Cartwright in the north, you can meander beside watersports-friendly Pumicestone Passage, drop in to hang ten at Moffat Beach, check out the shipwrecked *SS Dicky* and sink your toes into the clean sands of Currimundi Beach.

Give your feet a break and take a turn off the pathway to Currimundi Lakeside Bed & Breakfast, where owner Ellen Te Riele welcomes guests to her unique B&B with homemade afternoon tea. The spacious Rotterdam room, with prints of tulips and traditional fisherman's scarves transformed into cushion covers, reflects her Dutch heritage. Meanwhile, the Val Thorens room contains vintage skis and chic French furnishings. All that's left for you to do is sink into bed, lie back and think of the three Rs – rest, relaxation and returning to the Sunshine Coast as soon as possible.

Above, left to right: Rest your weary bones at Currimundi Lakeside B&B, take a romantic sunset cruise on the Sunshine Coast's waterways, and be at one with this natural paradise.

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