



A ferry travelling through the everglades on the upper reaches of Noosa River

WALKING ON SUNSHINE

Amy Stewart explores Australia's Sunshine Coast and discovers there's plenty of good food to be found.



Noosa Main Beach

Sitting low in an old ferry, cruising along the water at sunset with the Eagles' *Take It Easy* blaring and the thick tangle of everglades that line the water fading to black, our dinner destination could easily be a clam bake on the bayou. Unexpectedly though, this is the Weyba Creek, a tributary of the Noosa River, and we're on our way to eat and drink in Noosaville. It's a pleasant surprise to find that, despite its reputation for being a playground for the rich, this part of the Sunshine Coast still has a bit of a Wild West feel.

The ferry runs along the Noosa River, providing an excellent view of the cafes and restaurants that line Gympie Terrace - the street issues from Noosa Heads' bustling Hastings St through to Noosaville. It's not long before we're reminded of the area's

food and wine pedigree, as the ferry docks alongside two swish white buildings perched on the water's edge. Ricky's (rickys.com.au) serves modern Australian dishes, such as lamb loin with pumpkin, quinoa and wild rice. Next door, the Japanese-influenced Wasabi (wasabisb.com) has a fantastic whisky list and specialises in elegant degustations.

Another few stops on the ferry will take you to the Noosa Boathouse (noosaboathouse.com.au), which our captain refers to simply as "the floating restaurant". In 2005 it was relocated via barge from Sydney's Darling Harbour, where it was used as a communications centre during the 2000 Olympics. The uppermost of the three storeys boasts a "sunset bar", which is the perfect spot to, er, watch the sunset - an event we have to run up the stairs to catch, having forgotten that the Sunshine Coast doesn't observe daylight savings.

Sunset ticked off the list, we head across the road to Thomas Corner Eatery (thomascorner.com.au), opened by chef-owner David Rayner in 2010. (As an aside, those not fond of flying furry animals should beware Noosaville at dusk, as bats swoop through the streets - luckily, we find them rather charming.) Rayner has been a champion of local produce for many years and his dishes all feature

local heroes. Highlights include Darling Downs wagyu fillet with red eschallot butter, brussels sprout leaves and speck, and Jason's smoked trout with celeriac remoulade, sorrel and popcorn-like fried capers - the latter dish is named for the local fishmonger. The restaurant is open for brunch and lunch as well as dinner, and during daylight hours you can watch the happenings on the river from the dining room or deck.

Hastings St is the glittering epicentre of Noosa Heads - quite literally now that fairy lights have been permanently installed in the trees, lending it a celebratory air year-round - and separates the river from the beach. Busy enough during the afternoon, by night the street heaves with gorgeous young things.

But tempting as it is to linger and people-watch, we're here for the food. Newcomer Locale (localenoosa.com.au) provides a departure from the beach-cool vibe of the rest of the street - it serves modern Italian dishes in a dark and moody dining room that backs on to the forest. We start with Coffin Bay oysters and continue through to dishes including squid ink risotto with king prawns, cuttlefish, lemon and chilli, and lemon panna cotta with blood orange foam and pine nut praline. It's an evening of fantastic flavours and wines to match.



ISTOCKPHOTO/PLEIO

Wasabi



Clockwise from above left: meals come with great views of Noosa Main Beach at Season; sashimi at Wasabi; a tropical-themed cocktail at Miss Money Penny; the pathway in Noosa National Park; the dining room at Thomas Corner; a dish at Ricky's; the atmospheric bar area at Italian restaurant Locale





FESTIVAL TIME

Now in its 12th year, the Noosa International Food & Wine Festival (14-17 May) is an institution, as is local restaurateur Jim Berardo who founded the festival with Greg O'Brien. The festival has come a long way since its inception, evinced both by the recent addition of "international" to the title, and also by the turnout: the first year had 150 attendees; this year 45,000 people are expected. "We want to keep it small," laughs Jim.

The festival is characterised by a constantly refreshed programme - this year's highlight, for Jim at least, will be the 1970s-themed beach parties, complete with clam bakes and bell-bottoms. The festival has always been renowned for its food trails and this year new additions include a visit to the Mooloolaba Wharves to learn about local seafood and sustainability (and culminating with a long seafood-focused lunch).

The number of renowned chefs and food personalities who host events and masterclasses at the festival is astounding - this year attendees include Australians Matt Moran (Aria, Chiswick), Frank Camorra (MoVida), Andrew McConnell (Cumulus et al) and Mark Best (Marque), to name but a few. New Zealand is also represented, with both Josh Emmett (Rata, Ostro) and Ben Batterbury (True South at The Rees). For a programme and to book, go to noosafoodandwine.com.au

Hastings St has been *the* place to eat on the Sunshine Coast for years now, and one of its elder statesmen is Berardo's Restaurant and Bar (berardos.com.au). Owned by local hero Jim Berardo (see box at left), it's one of the area's top fine-diners, with a chic all-white dining room and sophisticated dishes such as barramundi with octopus, rice crackers, buttermilk and kale. Berardo also owns the more casual Berardo's Bistro on the Beach.

Alongside the established players of Hastings St, there's also plenty of new blood. Next to Berardo's is Betty's Burgers & Concrete Co (bettysburgers.com.au), which serves killer burgers and "concretes" (frozen custard-based desserts) and is a popular hangout for all ages. At the other end of Hastings St is Miss Moneypenny's (missmoneypennys.com) - a stylish all-day eatery that really comes into its own in the evenings, with an excellent selection of bar snacks and cocktails.

The aforementioned lack of

Tanglewood sourdough bakery and Eumundi Meats, making it a great spot to stock up for a picnic, but if it's coffee you're after, you'll want to head to the Clandestino Roasters cafe (clandestino.com.au). Each cup of excellent coffee comes with a little card detailing the origin of the beans it's made with, including the name of the farmer who grew them. Decoration is by way of stylish three-storey Yama cold drip towers on the tables, and there's also a great kids' area under the stairs complete with junior leather armchairs.

ON THE ROAD

Noosa Heads is a mere hour and a half drive from Brisbane Airport. You could easily spend weeks eating out here and not get bored, but if you've made the effort to hire a car to get there, it's well worth setting the sat nav to explore some of the other small towns in the region.

On Wednesday and Saturday mornings, make sure to visit the

The sun peaks through the curtains at 5am and locals like to head outdoors early

daylight savings means the sun peaks through the curtains at 5am and locals like to head outdoors early, to take advantage of the cooler temperatures. Noosa National Park is a mere 1.4km from Hastings St, and a walk around to Alexandria Bay is a picturesque way to work off some of the gastronomical benefits of a holiday here. You'll be in good company, as it's a favourite spot for local joggers and walkers.

After a morning constitutional you'll need a good breakfast and it's hard to beat the views at Season (seasonrestaurant.com.au) on Noosa Main Beach. Ease into the day with buttermilk and banana pancakes.

When I asked David Rayner where the best place in the area for coffee was, he directed me to Belmondos Organic Marketplace (belmondos.com), set in the back streets of Noosaville and a mecca of everything good and local. Tenants include

Eumundi Markets (eumundimarkets.com.au), a 30-minute drive inland. Now Australia's largest art and craft market, there's a quirky mix of kitsch and genuine local artworks for sale. For those wanting food souvenirs, there are stalls selling independently roasted coffee beans, while a magnificent array of cronuts is displayed in an old Kombi van.

If you head due east from Eumundi, back to the coast, you'll hit Peregian Beach - a small town with an impressive amount of good food. Pitchfork owners Craig and Kim Galea (pitchforkrestaurant.com.au) say one of the great things about small towns is that no one does the same kind of food. Pitchfork serves smart all-day dishes (perhaps fish with eggplant croquette, pistachio puree and tarragon aioli, or snacks of Merguez sausage-stuffed olives) and good drinks - a pale ale from Montana went down a treat on a blisteringly hot



Clockwise from left: joggers in Noosa National Park; the Glasshouse Mountains; Clandestino Roasters cafe at Belmondos Organic Marketplace; cronuts at the Eumundi Markets; Little May Espresso's tea cake topped with rose petals; Pitchfork's bar area



HINTERLAND LANDSCAPE: JIRI BEZAC / ALAMY; LITTLE MAY: EUMUNDI MARKETS & CLANDESTINO; AMY STEWART



afternoon. Across the way, Love Shack (Peregian Town Square) offers Chinese dumplings and delicious gelato flavours (try the chia seed), and there's also Le Bon Delice French patisserie (lebondelice.com.au) and organic grocers The Bent Banana, which sells lovely juices and honey on tap (facebook.com/BentBanana).

Further south and just off the Bruce Highway is Yandina, a small town with an unexpected Thai flavour, thanks both to its ginger plantation and the legendary Spirit House (spirithouse.com.au). The restaurant opened in 1992, with the cooking school following in 1995, and we're lucky enough to have been signed up to take a class. Head chef Annette Field directs our group, delivering her encyclopaedic knowledge in a casual manner that's both inspiring and slightly intimidating. She challenges our knife skills by asking us to cut kaffir lime leaves into slices the width of a hair, and I try my best to make myself invisible. "That's what we call a fail," she deadpans upon seeing some excessively long juliennes of carrot, and only about 10 per cent of our lime leaves are deemed acceptable. That said, it's all in good humour, and once we're sitting at a table in the sun,

tucking into a multi-course feast including pork braised in soy with star anise, and coconut poached prawns with beans and basil, it's clear that all the quality control was worth it.

South of Yandina, a steep climb into the Blackall range further inland delivers you to the town of Montville, a charming muddle of Bavarian and faux-Irish buildings. Make sure to call into Little May Espresso (facebook.com/LittleMayEspresso), recently opened by Rich and Hannah Hayes. We are forgiven for thinking the Hayes have been in the area much longer than they have, as Hannah's familiarity with all of her customers makes them feel like family. She includes us in this approach - seeing my notebook poking out of my bag, she casts me a scolding look and advises, "don't work too hard - just relax!"

Happily, it's hard not to - the food here is casual but excellent, as in pork belly sandwiches with green pineapple salsa. Rich also takes the "local" brief to new heights with fantastic desserts - apple tarts made with bunya nuts and tea cake topped with rose petals from the garden.

Continue out of Montville (if you have time, take a brief detour to the right to stop at Flame Hill Winery,

flamehill.com.au - the views from the terrace are spectacular) and on the right you'll soon come across the first of the Spicers resorts in the hinterland, Spicers Clovelly Estate (spicersretreats.com). We arrive as the sun goes down, just in time to admire the magnolia grove surrounding the main guesthouse. We've been looking forward to dinner at the on-site restaurant The Long Apron - awarded two hats in the 2015 *Queensland Good Food Guide*, its menu is full of contemporary temptations, and chef Cameron Matthews tells us he likes to "have a bit of fun". We sign up for the eight-course tasting menu, which is wholly delicious, yet refreshingly informal; a starter of pork rillettes with silky tarragon bread must be eaten with the hands, making it a great icebreaker.

Further down the Blackall range in Maleny is the Clovelly hotel's sibling, Spicers Tamarind (spicersretreats.com), which is an Asian-inspired retreat with wonderful views over the Glasshouse Mountains. These are a fascinating collection of volcanic plugs (the formations that hard magma core leaves behind when the rest of a volcano turns to dust - an example in New Zealand is



Piha's Lion Rock). It's the perfect place to relax, thanks to the lovely Spa Anise, but you can also opt to explore the rainforest, take a Thai cooking class or head out mountain biking.

Maleny is also home to some of the best producers in the region. Maleny Cheese (malenycheese.com.au) produces a host of interesting products including the surprisingly good camel curd and an excellently creamy mango yoghurt. You'll also find Maleny Dairies (malenydairies.com), a family-owned farm with a milk-processing facility. Guernsey cows supply the goods, and there are daily tours (cow-spotting included). And pay a visit to Colin James Fine Foods (colinjamesfinefoods.com.au) for coffee, gelato and cheese.

Back in Noosa Heads before we have to leave, we squeeze in an afternoon at Noosa Main Beach. It's one of Australia's few north-facing beaches, meaning it's more sheltered than most. Reclining on the sand while enjoying burgers from Betty's and watching surfers coast along the waves is a very relaxing way to spend a few hours. And that's the Sunshine Coast's charm - it can be as action-packed or laid-back as you like, but great food will always be in the background. ☘

Clockwise from below: meeting the Guernsey cows is a highlight of a visit to Maleny Dairies; The Long Apron head chef Cameron Matthews gathers produce; The Long Apron's fish & beetroot dish; cooking classes are interactive at Spirit House; one of the villas at Spicers Tamarind Retreat, set amid native bush



WHERE TO STAY
SHERATON NOOSA RESORT Having shed its rose-hued exterior in a major revamp, the Sheraton Noosa is now the stylish heart of Noosa Heads. Make sure to visit the on-site Noosa Beach House restaurant, with chef Peter Kuruvita at the helm - try the Sri Lankan snapper curry. sheratonnoosaresort.com
SPICERS CLOVELLY ESTATE Relax and unwind at this collection of European-influenced cottages, set in gorgeous sprawling grounds. spicersretreats.com/spicers-clovelly-estate
SPICERS TAMARIND RETREAT Each airy rainforest villa at Tamarind feels like it's on its own private island, and a visit to the on-site Spa Anise is pure luxury. spicersretreats.com/spicers-tamarind-retreat

Weyba Creek and Noosa Heads, looking across to Noosa Main Beach

