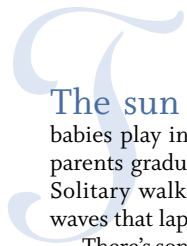


# TASTE OF THE TROPICS

Slow down, switch off and enjoy the leisurely pace of Noosa and its surrounds

PHOTOGRAPHY NICKY RYAN WORDS BELINDA JACKSON

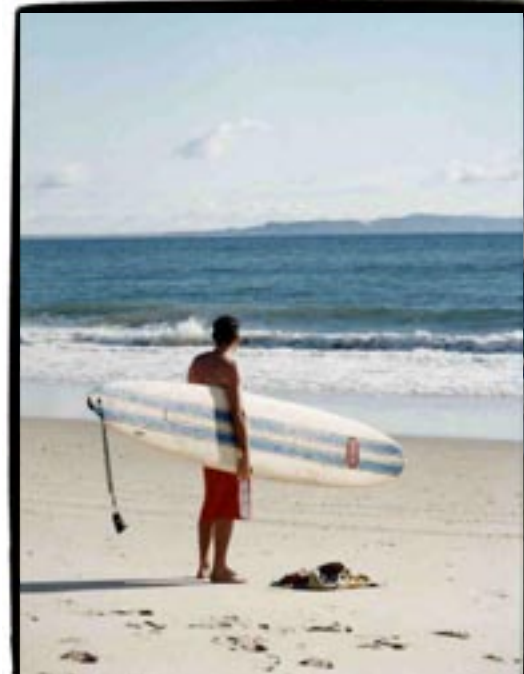




The sun is warm and tanned babies play in the shallow waters while parents gradually let each muscle relax. Solitary walkers follow the line of the waves that lap at the soft, golden sand.

There's something about the Sunshine Coast that just lets you slip back into your own skin and re-learn the art of simply being. Despite the fact that it's only an easy hour and a half drive north of Brisbane, Noosa's low-key sophistication allows you to forget the glitz of the southern cities, or the rustic tea and scones of the far west.

Take Hastings Street, Noosa's low-rise main strip. The road follows the curve of the area's most popular beach, Main Beach, and is flanked by pockets of dense tropical forests, with strategically positioned boardwalks, at each end. >



Main Beach's boardwalk is just perfect for a leisurely promenade after lunch.



< Hastings Street has made Noosa famous as a low-key R&R destination – without sacrificing any of the big-city luxuries. Favourite restaurants include Berardo's, which is headed by Noosa's first Michelin-starred chef Italian Bruno Loubet, and Ricky's River Bar + Restaurant, which re-opened in July to show off its new interior.

In fact, food is carefully considered in this town, and is an experience in itself. Carol's Organic Leaves – organically grown salad leaves – feature on all of the best menus. Spanner crab comes to the table already hand-picked from the shell, so there's no wrestling with heavy machinery over dinner. A favourite ingredient is the locally grown tomato, the Noosa Red, which has a far superior taste to the readily available supermarket variety.

Some of the best food destinations are away from the honey pot of Noosa Heads. Noosaville is at the top of the list, led by the cool, upbeat River House Restaurant, then Humid's chic lounge bar, and the many river-facing eateries along Gympie Terrace. These, such as laid-back Gusto, are made for leisurely lunches.

Beyond the heart of Noosa, the hinterland yields more culinary delights. At Garnisha, the fragrant curries are handmade from lemon grass, turmeric and limes, grown in its tropical gardens. The café at Kabi Organic Golf Course & Orchard a few kilometres up the road is a peaceful escape. Or retreat to the broad, shady verandas of the Apollonian Hotel, just three stops on Noosa's Food and Wine Trail tour.

Wednesdays and Saturdays are market days. The Eumundi Market sells everything from emu oil to Birkenstocks. Its sweet-scented food corner and fresh-produce section churn out Malaysian soups, Japanese >

## dining out

**BUDGET-FRIENDLY** **Squid Ink, Sunshine Beach** "Oh, that's the place where they'll serve seafood caught only that day," I was told three times before we ate there. If it's on the menu, don't go past the hand-picked spanner crab and asparagus risotto, which, at \$19.50, is one of the most expensive dishes on the menu. This friendly restaurant is BYO, and you can grab a bottle of wine in the shop downstairs. Call (07) 5447 4604.

**MID-RANGE** **River House Restaurant, Noosaville** Sleek and low-key, the windows open up to the warm summer breezes as staff dish up local seafood and char-grilled beef in what was voted the best new

restaurant on the Sunshine Coast in 2005. Entrees are all \$15, while all mains, save specials, cost \$26. Call (07) 5449 7441 or visit [www.riverhouserestaurant.com.au](http://www.riverhouserestaurant.com.au).

**BLOW THE BUDGET** **Berardo's Restaurant and Bar, Hastings Street** (pictured) Very French and very white, Berardo's is the undisputed must-visit restaurant in Noosa, where Michelin-starred chef Bruno Loubet dishes up sensational Hervey Bay scallops, local fish, super-rich quail and a brilliant selection of cheese with a sure hand. The seven-course Degustation menu costs \$95. Call (07) 5447 5666 or visit [www.berardos.com.au](http://www.berardos.com.au).





The scenic waterways surrounding Noosa have plenty to offer in the way of activities.

< dumplings or organic lamb burgers, and there's a crush at the Gympie Goat Cheese stand to try the cheesemakers' sensational, lemony day-old goat's curd.

Noosa's beaches are lauded just as much. Main Beach is great for people-watching and its calm waters are loved by kids. But mention Sunshine Beach to those in the know, and you'll get an approving nod. One of the coast's best surf beaches, Sunshine is less than 10 minutes from Hastings Street, but with a vibe that's refreshingly laid-back. Its shops, fringed by yuccas and casuarinas, feature a healthy dose of yet more sleek places to eat, including Squid Ink for incredibly fresh seafood, Wasabi for a Japanese hit, and a funky new lounge bar, Marble Bar Bistro. And, naturally it has its own café, Costa Noosa Espresso, which roasts and grinds its own coffee blends from all corners of the globe, including a delicious Yemeni brew.

Sunshine Beach is fringed by a series of low sand cliffs, and boasts some of the Sunshine Coast's best addresses – massive, tropical-style houses with broad verandas boast panoramic views of the coastline and each morning's sunrise. With such a superb way to start the day, it's no wonder the locals are up early and in bed shortly after sundown. Customers wandering into restaurants at 8.30pm looking for a meal are invariably greeted with the query, "Sydney or Melbourne?"

"We want to get out onto the beach when the sun rises, so there's no sitting up late in the evening," one local explains. Try it one morning: stroll across the beach as the sun rises, the waves break over the sand and a string of surfers wait for the perfect wave, and you'll understand. ■

## hot hotels

**BUDGET-FRIENDLY Australis Noosa Lakes Resort, Noosaville** Chill out near the marina in your own apartment, with a balcony overlooking pools and lagoons. Services include babysitting and golf courses. From \$124/night, (minimum two nights), Creative Holidays, 1300 747 400, [www.creativeholidays.com](http://www.creativeholidays.com). Or, call Australis Noosa Lakes Resort, 1800 010 777.

**MID-RANGE Sheraton Noosa Resort & Spa, Hastings Street** You can't get much closer to the action and the beach is just over the road. There are 211 rooms, but if you want to lash out, book into a new Lifestyle Spa Studio with a double spa on

the balcony and another in the gorgeous mosaic-tiled bathroom, champagne flutes and an espresso machine. Studio, from \$455/night, standard, from \$300/night, (07) 5449 4888, [www.sheraton.com/noosa](http://www.sheraton.com/noosa).

**BLOW THE BUDGET 18 Arakoon Crescent, Sunshine Beach** This four-bedroom house is perched on a cliff overlooking the beach, where surfers, dolphins and whales frolic. It's fully kitted out with an entertainer's kitchen, wireless broadband and an infinity lap pool, which disappears over the cliff. Sensational. From \$750/night or \$5000/week, Richardson & Wrench, 1800 066 672, [www.rwnoosa.com.au](http://www.rwnoosa.com.au).

## don't miss out on

**BEST INDULGENCE** A foot massage under the thatched pavilions of Ikatan Spa, set among lush tropical gardens. The spa is adding a café and pool, so it's the ideal place to spend a few hours in a state of suspended serenity. Ikatan Spa, Doonan, (07) 5471 1199, [www.ikatanspa.com.au](http://www.ikatanspa.com.au).

**GREAT GETAWAY** Visit nearby Fraser Island to swim in the freshwater lakes and watch the whales. Stay at one of the villas at Kingfisher Bay Resort. Packages from \$309/per person, twin share. Call 1800 072 555, or visit [www.kingfisherbay.com](http://www.kingfisherbay.com).

**TRAVEL FACTS** Tourism Noosa, 1300 066 672, [www.tourismnoosa.com.au](http://www.tourismnoosa.com.au).