



# NAVIGATING NOOSA

*By Annabel Mackie*

From the blue skies above, Noosa may look like a quaint seaside resort, but close up it has far more in common with the effortlessly-chic coastal spots of the Hamptons on Long Island and Ile de Re off the west coast of France.

Situated around 100 kilometres north of Brisbane airport on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, Noosa is where wealthy Sydneysiders and Melbournians own million-dollar glass-fronted holiday homes, strung along the banks of the inland waterways. To cater for these well-heeled homeowners, and affluent weekenders from Brisbane, you'll find an array of upscale restaurants (it's world-renowned for its annual Noosa Food and Wine Festival held in May). But don't worry there's plenty on offer for surfer dudes, eco tourists and families on a limited budget.

In general terms, Noosa is the collective term for several interconnected areas – Noosa Junction (popular with surfers and backpackers), Noosa Ville on the sheltered banks of the Noosa River which is a favourite with families, and Noosa Heads, with Hastings Street, the main thoroughfare, as its beating heart.

The Noosa River, along with its many tributaries, lakes, and creeks, is the natural artery that snakes its way through the region before entering the Pacific Ocean.

The river's northern region is part of the Great Sandy National Park and alongside the Noosa Everglades, an ancient series of waterways, lakes, and mangrove swamps, both provide endless water-based activities, eco adventures, camping and hiking expeditions.

## **Lay your Head**

If you don't have the cash to splash out on one of the prime waterfront rental houses (one went last Christmas for A\$20,000 for a week!), then a wonderful alternative is to stay at the plush Outrigger Resort & Spa. Offering 198 suites and apartments, the Outrigger sits high on a hillside and offers commanding views over the resort and the ocean beyond. Our spacious two-storey two-bedroomed apartment was perfect for us as a family of five and featured a lovely balcony (with obligatory Aussie barbie), well-equipped kitchen and a useful washing and drying machine. There was a pool to suit all the family: a lap pool for my husband, a tree-shaded one for the kids, and a hilltop one for me offering more panoramic views. There's only one all-day restaurant on site but with Hastings Street just a just stroll down the hill there's no end of dining options.



### Pampering Bliss

The Outrigger is fortunate to have an outpost of one Stephanie's award-winning spas and it's certainly not one of those spas squirreled away in a basement. The Ocean Spa offers 11 treatment rooms, including a couples' bath suite, vinotherapy suite, and a mineral floatation therapy pool where I spent a relaxing time in the dense salt and mineral solution that allows you to float weightlessly. Afterwards I enjoyed an indulgent Exotic Sole Ritual where my weary feet were exfoliated, massaged, and enveloped in a paraffin mask leaving them baby skin-soft as a result.

### Daytime munchies

Take a pew at Aromas, a Parisian-styled pavement café, as it's the prime people-watching spot on Hastings Street. A hearty breakfast of eggs benedict and a power smoothie will set you up for the day.

You can't go wrong with a lunch of fish and chips at Noosa Heads Surf Club, a low-key surfer canteen with an extensive balcony offering fab views across Noosa Main Beach. It's also a great spot for sunset cocktails and watching the surfers do their stuff.

The Boathouse Bistro & Bar in Noosa Ville is the perfect place for a leisurely lunch, or sunset cocktails and there's an attached take away if you're in a hurry. The owner, Phil Bradford, told us that the restaurant's floating platform was built for the Sydney Olympics and afterwards was shipped up to its current mooring on the Noosa River. As we tucked into our barramundi and warm chocolate pudding we loved watching the different vessels ply up and down the river and the pelicans swooping down for their lunch.

Venture over to the other side of the forest-clad Noosa Heads peninsula to enjoy the white stretch of sand that is Sunshine Beach. Afterwards we had lunch at the nearby Fratellini, an authentic Italian serving up delicious antipasto and pasta dishes.

### Dinnertime

If you're looking for exotic cocktails – Passionfruit Mojito or a Lemongrass Martini in a cool setting then the beachfront Bistro C is the place for you. It has a buzzy atmosphere and we loved John, our fun bandana-wearing waiter from Birmingham, who helped us select dishes from the innovative modern Australian menu.



Back in Noosa Ville we dined at the Thomas Street Eatery, a relaxed contemporary-styled dining room with large windows overlooking the leafy riverside promenade where we watched cyclists and roller bladers scoot past. My daughters' top dining pick was Gaston, a lively bistro on Noosa Drive. They loved the steak frites and the images of the Eiffel Tower and surfers projected on the restaurant wall.

For those looking for a refined gourmet dining experience, Berardo's Restaurant (Hastings Street) and Ricky's River Bar & Restaurant in Noosa Sound came highly recommended.

### Shop Till You Drop

You'll find one-off boutiques and international labels along Hastings Street – the main road that runs parallel to the ocean. My kids loved the neon-coloured jewellery and handbags in Uncle George, whilst I was a fan of the floaty kaftans and summer dresses in Tangerine Beach and the stylish homeware in Signature and Walker & Beck. Noosa Ville also has a clutch of lovely lifestyle stores such as Saffron and Coco & Bliss.

If you want to pick up some foodie delights for a picnic or your self-catering apartment make sure you visit Belmondos Market. This deli, café and gourmet food store all rolled into one is a little tricky to find, located in an industrial estate behind Noosa Ville, but it's definitely worth the effort.

Eumundi Market is no ordinary market selling the usual tourist tat and bric-a-brac. It's a local institution, around 12kms from Noosa, with over 600 stalls, including some

more permanent stores, held every Wednesday and Saturday morning. Aside from the artwork, hand made cards, Lush-style soaps and good quality clothing there are areas devoted to henna tattoos, massages and fortune telling. My husband spent a happy few hours browsing the myriad of food stalls and a great bookstore on Eumundi main street. This goes down as my all-time favourite market and we visited twice in five days!

### Activities galore

Noosa Main Beach is obviously the main draw with its wide expanse of white-sand beach, with red and yellow-costumed lifeguards, lined with low-rise apartments and restaurants. On the beach I overheard voices from all around the world – Italy, France, India, Japan and loads from the UK. When talking to the lovely Susan, who works for Noosa Tourism, she told me that Brits are the biggest visitor group after Australians and New Zealanders.

The best way, in my opinion, to view the million-dollar riverfront homes is on a paddleboard. We signed up with Noosa Stand Up Paddle (look out for their van parked just on edge of Lions Park in Noosa Heads). The calm sheltered inland waterways make it an easy place to learn how to paddleboard, and all our family (including our eight-year-old daughter) enjoyed a guide-led tour for two hours. There's also a yoga option for the more flexible!

Take a walk through the Noosa National Park, the forested rocky headland just beyond the main beach that is criss-crossed with hiking trails. Look out for native wildlife such as

black bush turkeys, kookaburras, koalas, and goannas as well as over 1,000 species of native plants like Bunya pines and giant native figs.

### Eco Warriors

There are only a few Everglades in the world and Noosa has one of them. We decided to explore these scenic wetlands onboard a Discovery Everglades Cruise. The tour (there are overnight camping options, too) starts from their riverside office on Gympie Terrace in Noosa Ville. We joined around 15 other people for our trip that initially made its way along the Noosa River passing by houseboats, colonial-style houses, and Sir Richard Branson's private Makepeace Island. After crossing the Lake Cootharaba, the largest seawater lake in Queensland, we made our first island stop for coffee and the option of kayaking. Afterwards we continued our journey along a network of tranquil dark tannin waterways, renowned for their mirrored reflections. Our lunch stop was at Harry's Hut, a logger's camp left over from the timber logging days. Whilst our guide cooked steak, barramundi and sausages on a BBQ my daughters swam in the river. What they hadn't realised until they threw the leftover bread into the river was that there were catfish, eels and turtles just where they'd been swimming!

Another good way to learn about Noosa's UNESCO-listed Biosphere Reserve is onboard one of the twice-weekly eco-tours around the inland waterways, offered by the Noosa Ferry Cruise Company.

Our knowledgeable guide pointed out some of the 300 bird

species – white-breasted eagle, osprey, brahminy kite and egrets – that can be spotted here during our trip around Noosa Sound, as well as some of the local flora and fauna when we made a brief walking stop in a national park.

### Next time!

It seems, from what we were told, that a trip to the World Heritage-listed Fraser Island, the world's largest sand island, is a rite of passage for any backpacker passing through Noosa. Our friendly backpackers told us they like to take the 4x4 vehicle trip to the island and then spend the night there.

If you visit between June and November you have a chance of spotting pods of frolicking humpback whales as they make their way up the Queensland coast on their return trip to the Antarctic.

### How to get there?

Emirates, Qantas and Singapore Airlines fly direct from Singapore to Brisbane and it takes about seven hours.

A standard one-bed apartment, including breakfast for two people, at the Outrigger Little Hastings Street Resort & Spa Noosa costs A\$259 per night.

A two-bed deluxe family apartment costs A\$589 per night (min. five night stay) and a two-bed tree top villa costs A\$489 per night (room only). Prices subject to availability and valid until March 31, 2015. Visit Outrigger Little Hastings Street Resort & Spa: [www.outriggeraustralia.com](http://www.outriggeraustralia.com) or email: [noosa.resmgr@outrigger.com.au](mailto:noosa.resmgr@outrigger.com.au)

### Useful Websites

Noosa Tourist Board: [www.visitnoosa.com.au](http://www.visitnoosa.com.au)

Stephanie's Ocean Spa: [www.stephanies.com.au](http://www.stephanies.com.au)

Noosa Stand Up Paddle, Lion's Park: [www.noosastanduppaddle.com.au](http://www.noosastanduppaddle.com.au)

Everglades Cruise, Noosa Ville: [www.thediscoverygroup.com.au](http://www.thediscoverygroup.com.au)

Biosphere Cruise, Sheraton Hotel jetty: [www.noosabiosphere.com.au](http://www.noosabiosphere.com.au), [www.noosaferry.com](http://www.noosaferry.com)

