

A LUXE ESCAPE

WHETHER YOU WANT A RELAXED EXPERIENCE OR SOMETHING MORE ADVENTUROUS THE FASHIONABLE RESORT TOWN OF NOOSA ALWAYS DELIVERS...

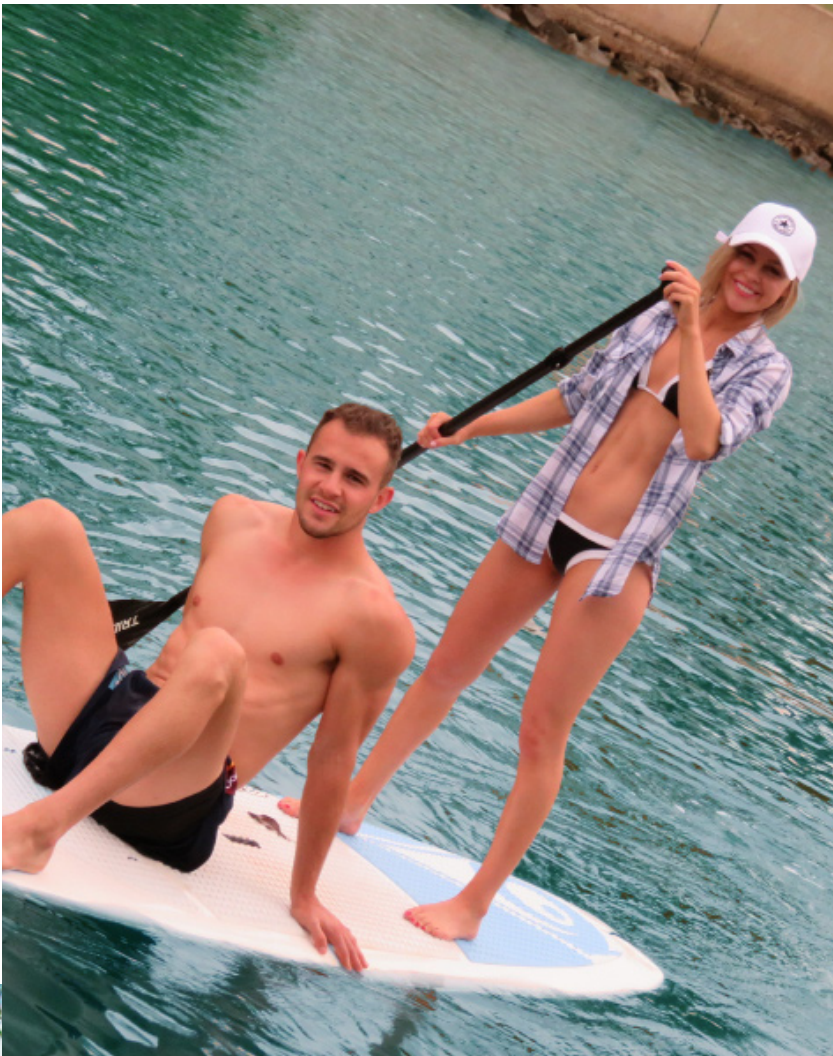
WORDS: Karen Bleakley

“H

ave either of you tried stand-up paddle boarding before?” asks Nick, our instructor. My friend and I look at one another and shake our heads, laughing. It’s a hot afternoon, and we are prepared to fall in.

Nick helps us balance on our boards. Getting on seems easy, until I try to turn by back paddling and end up almost toppling. When the three of us are standing up, and facing in the right direction, we start to paddle around the canal system that is known as Noosa Sound. As we gently glide along, Nick gives us pointers to bend our knees in-between regaling >>

Main image: Turquoise bays in Noosa National Park



us with stories about the stunning riverside properties we are passing.

“There’s a funny story about that house there; the owner wasn’t keen on having neighbours, so he bought the house next door and flattened it. Now they just have a set of table and chairs on the plot!” We look in awe at the prime waterside plot, empty apart from its patio furniture.

We learn that Nick is a pro stand up paddle boarder who travels the world attending Junior World Championships. Being a stand-up paddleboarding instructor is his perfect job; after school he heads down

Clockwise from far left: Stand-up paddleboarding with Boardwalk Boats; Hastings Street nightlife; Noosa Heads Surf Club; pedestrian-friendly Hastings Street

“Noosa is one of Australia’s most fashionable resorts, with Hastings Street as its beating heart”

to Boardwalk Boats to do a couple of hours of paddle board lessons. We decline Nick’s kind offer to do another lap of the canals (feeling that one hour on the boards is enough to allow us to walk around the shops without feeling too stiff).

CHIC AND STYLISH

Noosa is one of Australia’s most fashionable resorts, with the beautifully landscaped, fairy-light-draped Hastings Street as its beating heart.

Located on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast, it is laid-back, low-rise and leafy; almost the polar opposite of the bright lights and high rises of the Gold Coast.

Noosa’s incredible range of shops includes everything from designer luxury brands to souvenir gift shops, along with a scattering of pavement cafés and restaurants that are perfect for people watching and alfresco dining.

A few hours later, we head back to our apartment at Ocean Breeze Resort to drop off our huge collection of shopping bags. With our load lightened, we stroll across the road to watch the sun set over Main Beach.

The view from the beach is unlike anything I’ve seen before: an orange haze blurs across the horizon with a deeper pink stretching into the sky before it melts into a gentle blue. The white sand is bathed in pink, and the deep green palms that fringe the boardwalk sway in the breeze as locals amble along for their evening stroll, almost oblivious to the beauty of the changing landscape. We walk to the water’s edge, watching a solo yacht sail by.

Our moment of solitude is broken; suddenly there are kids everywhere. The surf club Nippers (kids who attend the surf club to learn beach safety and lifesaving skills) are running past us into the ocean in their pink neon club tops having a race involving rubber ducks.

We learn from the spectators that it is a fundraising event for Queensland Surf Life Saving Clubs. We watch as the kids run back up the beach and are wrapped in towels by their parents. They all flock into the Noosa Heads Surf Club for a delicious-smelling sausage sizzle to celebrate the end of the night’s special activities.

We follow them into the club and enjoy dinner on the balcony listening to the crashing waves and the excited chatter from the surrounding families.

>>

AD PAGE



Next morning, we slip easily into Noosa-life as we plan another shopping session from our outdoor breakfast table at Providore on Hastings. We let the time drift as we sip long blacks, nibble pain au chocolates and flick through glossy fashion magazines.

CRUISING THE EVERGLADES

Around lunchtime, with our bank accounts groaning, we are ready to leave the shops behind for an afternoon's Everglades Tour with The Discovery Group. The Noosa Everglades is one of only two everglade systems on Earth. This 60 kilometre 'river of mirrors' is bursting with flora and fauna and is one of Noosa's hidden gems.

We board the boat and meet our guide, Trevor. The cruise takes us past Makepeace Island, the Australian home of Richard Branson. The entire island can be booked for your exclusive use. The island's unique aircraft carrier barge is moored up ready to take guests on a sunset river cruise. Trevor explains that the island provides a safe home for koalas in the region to help with rehabilitation and breeding.

We drift through the glistening Lake Cooroibah and pass through a leafy network of channels before reaching Lake Cootharaba. Trevor expertly manoeuvres the boat through the shallow water and sails us into the Everglades at Kinaba.

The shimmering, calm water flanked with dense greenery looks like a tranquil place for a gentle paddle

Clockwise from above: Gourmet delights at Providore on Hastings; the Noosa Everglades; dinner is served at Betty's Burgers

in a kayak. Trevor keeps us alert by pointing out Brahminy Kites and Whistling Kites as they soar overhead. We float past a Banksia tree filled with cormorants lazily perched on the lower branches.

The Everglades is a wilderness; this silent ribbon of waterways is a place to reconnect with nature and rest your mind and soul.

Ready to stretch our legs, the boat moors at Harry's Hut – a wooden shack in the picturesque bushland setting. The hut previously belonged to a local character named Harry Spring and is now the home of a campground. Taking a glass of sparkling wine and some olives from the delicious platter of refreshments that Trevor lays out, my friend and I go for a bush walk to do some wildlife spotting. We watch a goanna lazing in the sun as we sip our bubbles.

On our cruise home, Trevor points out where Eliza Fraser was rescued after being taken by the Aborigines following her shipwreck on Fraser Island with her husband, James Fraser.

After an afternoon of fresh air, we are hungry for dinner at Noosa's iconic burger joint: Betty's Burgers. Their famous 'concrete' (frozen custard) swirled with salted caramel and Maltesers is nothing short of divine and is the perfect finish to a beautiful day.

BEACH RIDE

We awake next morning still feeling full from the mouth-watering burgers, so we are more than ready for >>



Left: Fresh fruit platters and to-die-for views at Noosa Boathouse



Above: Cyclists enjoy a scenic rest-stop at the beach

some exercise. We meet Darren, the owner of Ecotekk who is leading us on his Beach Bash electric bike tour. Darren explains how the gears and speed settings work and we walk our bikes onto the North Shore Ferry which takes a few minutes to cross.

On the other side, we wait for the traffic to drive off so we have the road to ourselves as we gain confidence. After a short ride along the road to the beach, we

“ We mount the bikes on the water’s edge. It feels like we are gliding as we peddle...”

mount the bikes on the water’s edge where the sand is firm. It feels like we are gliding as we peddle – the fat tyres and the peddle-assisted motor make it feel so easy.

As we ride, Darren talks about his efforts in the local area to promote eco-tourism and protect the pristine natural environment that Noosa is famous for.

I am surprised at how easy and fun it is, and it is just what we need after eating so much delicious Noosa food. With our energy burned off, it is time to refuel with yet more food.

This time it is the turn of Noosa Boathouse which had been recommended to us by so many people I’d lost count. Perched on stilts over the Noosa River, we sip cocktails and dine on local produce like Gympie

wagu steak and Hervey Bay oysters decorated with sea urchin butter while watching pelicans swimming by.

FAIRY POOLS
After a rest, it is time to get ready for a hike. No visit to Noosa would be complete without a walk along the coastal track in Noosa National Park.

The aim of our afternoon is to find the Fairy Pools; a local’s secret that is now public knowledge thanks to Instagram.

The 4,000-hectare National Park can be accessed by walking just a few minutes from Hastings Street. It offers spectacular coastal scenery, along with an abundance of wildlife.

It is a warm afternoon, but we are ready for it. We set off armed with bottles of water and wearing hats, closed shoes and heaps of sunscreen. The 39-minute walk from our resort (according to Google maps), actually takes far longer because we have to pause at every stunning little beach and cove we pass to take photos.

Just after Picnic Cove (you see a bench and the path turns a sharp corner), we look around for the route down to the Fairy Pools. We scramble down the steep slope then climb over the rocks at the bottom to get to the little pool of crystal clear water.

We strip down to our swimmers and float around watching the waves ebb and flow over the rocks to enter the Fairy Pools. A swim to the other side of one pool and a climb over more rocks leads to a second >>

Opposite page: Noosa’s expansive beaches and lush green forests



FURTHER INFORMATION

Get a taste of Noosa with these top experiences...

- Take a stand-up paddle lesson with Boardwalk Boats. A lesson costs A\$50 (£28) for 90 minutes or hire a board from A\$28 (£16).
www.boardwalkboathire.com.au
 - Join a half-day Everglades Tour with The Discovery Group. Costs are A\$79 (£45) per adult, A\$65 (£37) per child and A\$265 (£153) per family (two adults, two children).
www.thediscoverygroup.com.au
 - Take Ecotekk's unique Beach Experience bike tour on their fat-wheeled electric bikes for A\$109 (£63) per person.
www.ecotekk.com.au
 - Ocean Breeze Resort offers one, two and three bedroom self-catering apartments on Hastings Street. Prices start from A\$185 (£107) per night for a three-night break.
www.oceanbreezeresort.com.au
- Find out more about Noosa by visiting www.visitnoosa.com.au

larger, deeper pool. (It's worth remembering to bring reef shoes to protect your feet when you're in the pools and around the rocks).

Walking back, our weekend's activities (and over eating of rich food) start to catch up with us and we slow to a stroll, taking in the bird life and the occasional wild koala in the trees above.

During our final meal of the trip, we sip sparkling wine and eat fine food at Boardwalk Bistro on Main Beach while overlooking a beautiful castle sculptured entirely out of sand directly outside our restaurant window. The castle is even decked with flickering candles. It is the perfect spot to people-watch as families

Above: The Fairy Pools; and *(right)* mouth-watering food at Boardwalk Bistro



“We slow to a stroll, taking in the bird life and the occasional wild koala in the trees above”

come to marvel at the work of art.

Next morning, there is enough time to jump in the ocean for some body boarding (because no trip to Noosa is complete without getting wet!) before driving along the coastal road to explore the stunning Sunshine Beach and Peregian Beach.

Noosa surprised us. We had expected the incredible shopping and the mouth-watering food (and we definitely weren't disappointed), but blending fine dining, shopping and breath-taking beaches with the epic outdoor activities and pristine scenery made the trip even more memorable.

Four days of Noosa's fresh air left us feeling as rejuvenated as if we'd been on a spa retreat. 🇦🇺

Right: Picturesque Sunshine Beach

