

THE LUXURY TRAVEL CLUB FROM TRAVEL WEEKLY

# aspire

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## ON THE HORIZON

*Its rich wildlife, beautiful coastline and relaxing atmosphere make Noosa a dream destination*

**SAINT LUCIA**  
Paradise isn't  
just for couples

**IDRIS ELBA**  
British actor recalls  
his top set locations



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travelweekly

# REEF ENCOUNTERS

WITH WILDLIFE-RICH WATERS, NATURE TREKS AND PRISTINE BEACHES, IT'S NOT HARD TO SEE WHY THE LIKES OF RICHARD BRANSON FELL FOR AUSTRALIA'S SUNSHINE COAST, AS LAURA HOLT DISCOVERS AROUND NOOSA

David Low was certainly on to something. The local boy turned state parliamentarian was the first to see the tourism potential of the Sunshine Coast, establishing a scenic coastal highway in 1929, known as the David Low Way, which knitted together a string of enviable beachside enclaves, reaching a pinnacle at Noosa.

It paved the way for the boomtown status of tourism Noosa enjoys today. But it's no surprise, really, because Noosa essentially represents the best of Queensland in a microcosm: a mix of marine-rich waters, subtropical rainforest and spectacular

coastal scenery, interlarded by bohemian beachside towns.

On the town's main thoroughfare, Hastings Street, high-end fashion boutiques, such as Walker & Beck and Bowers & Co., line up beside artisan bakeries and coffee shops. Smart restaurants lie close by, including beachside Bitter-C, where I scotch-whiskey breaching offshore, and fine-dining venue Ricky's, where locals celebrate special occasions.

Indeed, it says something of Noosa's tourist fondle allure that Mother's Australia runner-up Matt Sinclair settled on it for his maiden restaurant: a hip, neon-lit joint,

called Sun Yang Gipsy, which serves up handcrafted cocktails and Asian-accented street-food dishes to a fashionable crowd.

## NATURAL BEAUTY

But aside from the smart shops and splashy dimensions, left-leaning Noosa is really about getting back to nature. On the doorstep is Noosa National Park, a 10,000-acre expanse of subtropical rainforest that nudges the southern shoulder of town and wraps itself around the Pacific. There are five waymarked trails here, from the two-mile Noosa Hill Walk to the seven-mile Coastal Walk, where —>





ABOVE: Noosa Everglades  
RIGHT: Noosa National Park



JACQUELINE  
FREAQUES  
VISIT NOOSA

## NOOSA KNOW-HOW

### WHAT KIND OF TRAVELLER HEADS TO NOOSA?

Noosa has something to offer every kind of traveller. It's the perfect getaway for anyone looking for a relaxed, luxury break in a sophisticated yet typically Aussie holiday location. Play, taste, relax, explore - everyone will find something they enjoy here, from dining in some of Australia's best restaurants that use gourmet local produce, to treatments in a day spa, water sports, perfect surf waves and exploring the Noosa National Park or the Noosa Everglades.

### WHICH ACCOMMODATION WOULD YOU RECOMMEND TO HIGH-END VISITORS?

- My top three recommendations would be:
- 1 Sofitel Noosa Pacific Resort - right in the heart of Hastings Street.
  - 2 Peppers Noosa Resort & Villas - in Noosa National Park, a short walk from the beach.
  - 3 Wakepace Island - Richard Branson's luxury private-isle island in Noosa River.

### ARE ANY EDUCATIONAL TOOLS AVAILABLE TO EDUCATE AGENTS ON NOOSA?

Agents should check out our website, [noosavac.com.au](http://noosavac.com.au). Plus, we have our really handy global travel planner, which is full of suggestions for itineraries, accommodation, activities and events. It's available online at [noosa.com/visitnoosa/foocus/\\_globalplanner](http://noosa.com/visitnoosa/foocus/_globalplanner).

### WHAT THREE NOOSA-BASED EXPERIENCES ARE NOT TO BE MISSED?

- 1 The Noosa Everglades
- 2 4WD from Noosa to Rainbow Beach
- 3 Noosa National Park coastal trail walk

kiaua shelter around Tea Tree Bay.

Of course, you can go it alone, but I join ranger Steve Gahnger, who runs Tropical Trekks, for an expert-led excursion. Seasoned at navigating the forest, he guides us past tangled fern vines, towering hoop pines and fan-like staghorns, as blue-winged butterflies and brown herons fill through the canopy.

After the excursion, I energy-lumpy. But luckily, a feast awaits from the Getaway Ferry. This very Noosa, because-loving company sources food from resident producers to provide meals in amazing locations. In this instance, it's a picnic lunch on a white-linen tablecloth overlooking the beach, complete with bahamian fish chabichou. A banquet of kale, feta and squash salads, Vietnamese rice rolls and fresh strawberries arrives,

“  
We kayak past eucalyptus  
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mark our passage  
”

much of it gluten and dairy-free, in keeping with Noosa's high-end hippy ethos.

Daily refuelled, I head off in search of another natural attraction: the Noosa Everglades. This 40-mile network of waterways is one of only two everglade systems on Earth bar, unlike its Florida counterpart, it's relatively unknown.

With Australian kayaking champion Willemie Gidding, of Kona Kapers, by my side, I ply the glassy water, jumping off from Devils Point to paddle across Lake Coorubalga. Entering narrow Kin Kin Creek, we cruise past eucalyptus and palm trees, as patrolling pelicans, whistling kites and banking cormorants mark our passage.

### ISLAND ESCAPE

At this stage, clients might feel the call of Cairns or the pull of Port Douglas. But in

Noosa, there's really no need to go north. A short charter flight from Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Redcliffe or Coolangubra leads straight to Lady Elliot Island, the most remote island of the Great Barrier Reef that's regularly accessed. The flight alone is worth the journey - as our pilot swoops over Rainbow Beach, he enthusiastically points out pods of humpback whales and dolphins.

Touching down, I'm greeted with another natural spectacle, bird season, which prevails here from October to April, when 30 species of terns, gulls, boobies, shearwaters and gulls bow in to breed. Triganbirds - nicknamed 'pinks of the skin' - dive overhead; noddys and gliders glower patrol the sky.

Different seasons bring different visitors to Lady Elliot. Between May and November, humpback whales drag past, while green and loggerhead turtles nest from November to March, with hatchlings from February to April. A third non-nesting variety, hawksbills, can also be spotted in the house reef - so after grabbing a wet suit and snorkelling gear, I head out to explore, witnessing a menagerie of black reef sharks, parrot fish and giant squid that live at some of the 1,200 species that call this reef home. For more expert explorers, there are also scuba diving excursions and full moons; there can be few better places in the world in which to take the open-water blue cruise. —



**NOOSA** - it's the Relaxation Capital of Australia! Think sun-drenched beaches, walks through national parks with incredible coastal and forest views, beachfront dining on the freshest local flavours, evening cocktails and chic boutique shopping. Explore further to experience the majestic Noosa Everglades, World Heritage-listed Fraser Island, Rainbow Beach and Lady Elliot Island. With so much surrounding natural beauty, Noosa is a must-do on any Australian journey.

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For destination and product enquiries:  
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NOOSA, QUEENSLAND



ABOVE: Lady Elliot Island Lighthouse

**LIFE DOWN UNDER**

In the afternoon, I head out on the island's glass-bottom boat for a snorkelling tour with guide Jess and muller-sporting skipper Simms, who's been on the island since it opened as a resort in 1985. Kaleidoscopic coral-reef life beneath us, as Jess points out turtles and sea cucumbers.

We're excited and hoisted, we jump in to witness a scene straight out of *Blue Planet*: a school of manta rays feeding on a trail of plankton, gliding like an armada of silent giants beside me. Though the heaviest beach-style calms on Lady Elliot are simple, it's experiences like this that make a stay here worthwhile. Rounding off a hecker hot day, I settle beneath the island's lighthouse, birds circling overhead, to watch the sky turn molten red, the ultimate sunset-viewer.

For the rest of Queensland's quintessential landscapes, I head to Fraser: the world's largest sand island. Dominated by a World Heritage listed

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national park, development is kept to a minimum.

To get a sense of how large the largest sand island on Earth is, it's worth noting that wild horses were only recently discovered on Fraser, more than 20 years after all non-native wildlife was thought to have been removed... as part of its UNESCO listing in 1993. The dingy, cousin of the Atlantic wolf, was the only exception: having lived here so long, it was deemed to be beneficial to the ecosystem.

Joining Kingfisher's 'Beauty spots' tour, I head out in a truck-size 4x4, traversing unimproved sandy roads with guide Kevin, who delights in watching the grip on our car belts tighten.

From July to November, there's a whole whale watching from Fraser. As a tip, let clients know it's best only in the season, when inquisitive adolescents come close to the boat. But travelling outside that period, tick off land-based attractions, including Lake McKenzie, with its



ABOVE: Accommodation on Richard Branson's Malapuepe Island  
LEFT: The Mahara shipwreck off Fraser Island

health-enhancing, silica-lined waters; the Mahara shipwreck, stranded since a 1933 voyage from New Zealand; and Eli Creek, a local meeting point, where Aussies gather for weekend barbecues. Capping it all off, it hop aboard an additional Air Traser flight, waiting at the 75-Mile Beach, which takes me over fens of mangroves and the island's lake-based rainforest.

Another perfect view can be found at Malapuepe Island, a 19-acre plot of seemingly perfect, heart-shaped land, surrounded by the Noosa River.

It was named in honor of the original, somewhat colorful owner, Finnish "Shogun" Malapuepe, who fired her weapon into the sky each day to summon locals when she needed something.

Those who make it to Malapuepe do so by boat, via a short journey from the town's marina. This is how Richard Branson first glimpsed eyes on Malapuepe. He acquired a golf club in the island in 2001 and went on to turn it into a private family hideaway.

Malapuepe has since been transformed into a luxury island retreat. Today, almost everything on the island has been shipped in from Bali, including the flower-studded Balinese statues and the ornately carved wooden doors that open onto the main-wastilan (Balinese-style) pavilion.

I'm here because, since 2001, Branson has extended the invite beyond his immediate circle to other would-be outcasts willing to pay a premium to rent

the island, for up to 20 people, exclusively. It delivers ultimate privacy, a short ride from the cosmopolitan delights of Noosa. You get free rein over waterports, an attentive team of staff and an endless supply of food, created by head chef Lisa Wilbur and served up in several night-worthy settings. It's the final frontier for those with lodges left to spare.

Noosa's beauty and the foresight of men such as Law and Branson helped shape the destination's fortunes. The town itself really is the queen of Queensland. >

FIND OUT MORE  
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