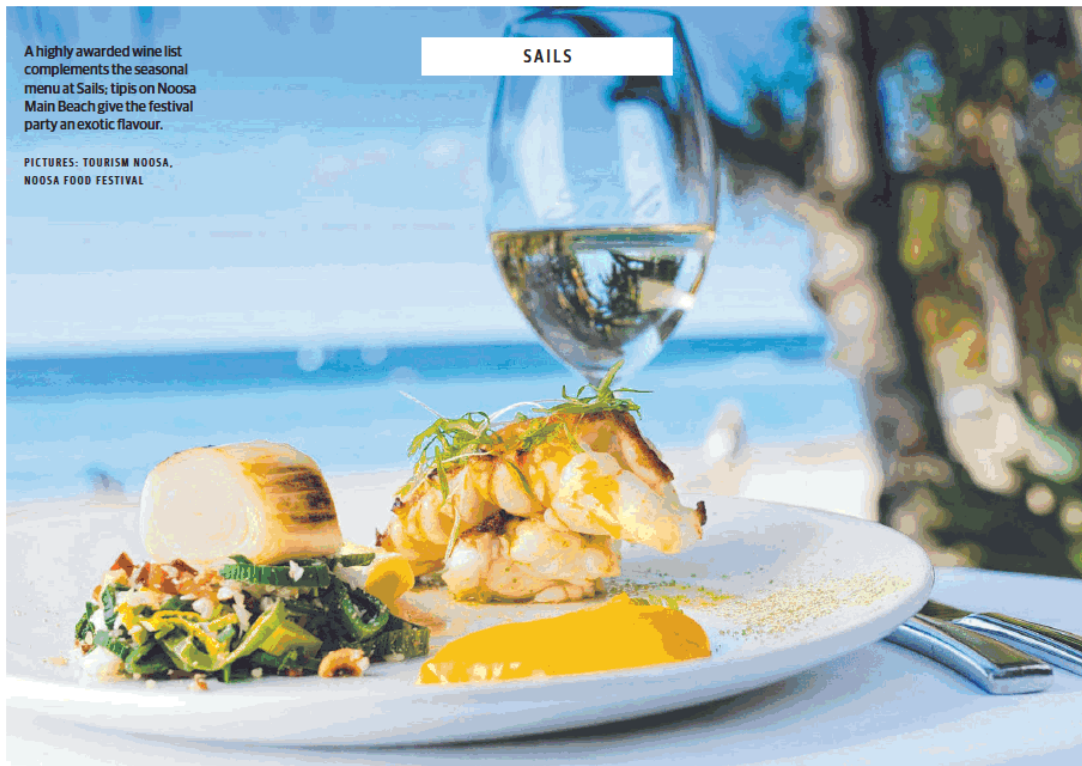


DESTINATION ♦ QUEENSLAND



SAILS

A highly awarded wine list complements the seasonal menu at Sails; tips on Noosa Main Beach give the festival party an exotic flavour.

PICTURES: TOURISM NOOSA, NOOSA FOOD FESTIVAL

ESCAPE ROUTE

NOOSA

GETTING THERE

Qantas, Jetstar and Virgin Australia fly to Sunshine Coast Airport in Maroochydore from Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Rent A Car Noosa can deliver wheels for the 35-minute drive north to Noosa. sunshinecoastairport.com.au rentacarnoosa.com.au

STAYING THERE

Five-minutes' walk from the Junction and 10 minutes to Hastings St, Crest Noosa offers sweeping views from its one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments and penthouses, many tastefully refurbished. noosacrest.com.au

DOING THERE

The 2019 Noosa Food and Wine Festival is on from May 16-20 with a line-up of 103 events. As well as special events like Sails' dinner with Yarra Yering wines and a Hinterland Farm Trail, Festival Village revellers can book a range of mini masterclasses in the new Drinks Lab and collab sessions like the Four Pillars Red Snapper Brunch in the new River Lounge. noosafoodandwine.com.au

NOSH ON, NOOSA

Its food and wine festival draws a crowd, but any time is a good time to eat in Noosa

CELESTE MITCHELL

When it comes to local produce, the Sunshine Coast is a bit of a show-off. Facing the Pacific Ocean and backed by a verdant hinterland that fosters everything from fellos to pasture-raised pork, its gourmet pedigree is ripe. But until today, I'd never heard of tastebud teasers like myoga, mukago, shishito or mitsuba – all thriving in the foothills of Mount Cooroora in the Noosa hinterland.

I've been granted a rare visit to Honeysuckle Hill farm, where renowned Wasabi (wasabisb.com) restaurateur Danielle Gjestland grows more than 50 varieties of fruits, vegetables, herbs and edible flowers – including the aforementioned rare Japanese plants that dictate their delicate degustation menu.

"We started the farm out of necessity really," Danielle says, as she hands me a crunchy shishito pepper to taste. "The restaurant got to a point where we couldn't do what we wanted to do without access to certain ingredients."

Occupying a small slope on Danielle's parents' property in Pomona, 30 minutes drive from

Wasabi's perch over Noosa River, the farm is a family affair. Danielle and her mum harvest twice weekly, loading up Danielle's Mini Cooper to shuttle supplies direct to the kitchen.

Although Honeysuckle Hill is less than a decade old, Danielle has always been an advocate for championing Noosa's food bowl. Even if it confused diners when Wasabi first opened in 2003 and, shock horror, didn't serve salmon.

"One thing that we really try to achieve is yes, you're going to eat Japanese food, but you're also going to come away having experienced the produce from our region and the things that live here and grow here," explains Danielle.

MEET THE FARMERS

While Honeysuckle Hill isn't open to the public, Noosa visitors can gauge the strength of its local produce every Sunday at Noosa Farmers Market (noosafarmersmarket.com.au), where I meet chef Matt Golinski the next morning.

Coffees in hand from Auswana (auswanacoffee.com.au), whose beans are grown on nearby D'Agulliar Range, we chat with Shauna from

Cedar Creek Farm Bush Foods, who peels a cooked bunya nut for me to taste. The native nut grows in abundance on their property in Belli Park, halfway between Eumundi and Kenilworth, its roots harking back thousands of years, when Aboriginal clans would make annual pilgrimages to feast on the carb-rich food source.

We stop for finger limes grown in Woombye from Sunshine Coast Farm Foods, where Matt stocks up on Gympie Farm matured goats cheese. Two more steps and we buy bags stuffed with Pimentos de Padron, grown by Richard Mohan of Midyim Eco Produce (midyimeco.com.au) who shunned life as a lawyer about 15 years ago in order to grow the Spanish peppers and now supplies restaurants in Sydney and Melbourne with 70 per cent of his crop.

"This is where I bring everybody, because it's a snapshot of what's grown here," Matt says. "It's part of the shopping culture of Noosa."

PADDOCK TO PLATE AND PALETTE

Strong relationships with local farmers like these is what translates to such pleasurable dining in Noosa, including lunch overlooking Noosa River at Thomas Corner Eatery (thomascorner.com.au) or so close to the waves at Main Beach you can feel the spray, at Sails (sailsnoosa.com.au).

Thomas Corner staffers will rise to the challenge set down by visiting chef Christine Manfield for a collaboration dinner during the Noosa Food and Wine Festival this year, but head chef Michael Trask says it's their Sunday lunch during the event that will really showcase what the restaurant is about. "All of the produce will come from no further south than Caloundra and no further north than Gympie," he says.

At Sails, certified free-range pork from Rhodavale Pork in Gympie, tuna from the waters off Mooloolaba, and vine-ripened Noosa Reds tomatoes all play a starring role in the seasonal menu, complemented by a highly awarded wine list and affable staff.

While it's easy to experience art on a plate, those with broader aesthetic interests will be treated to a cultural coup during the festival when artist Peter Phillips unveils his new gallery.

Birmingham-born Peter, who is credited with being one of Pop art's pioneers, chose the Noosa hinterland town of Tinbeerwah to retreat to in 2017 with daughter Zoe and her family. In celebration of his 80th birthday, two events are being held at the gallery during the festival with acclaimed chef Josh Lopez directing a menu matched to six decades of Phillips' work and Noosa's Land & Sea brewery's new distillery, Fortune, responsible for the cocktails. The gallery will be open by appointment once the festival wraps.

NEW FOOD 'HOODS

While Hastings St continues to be the epicentre of any Noosa holiday, come nightfall, most of the action is "over the hill" in Noosa Junction as restaurateur Pascal Turschwell tells me during dinner at Bombetta (bombetta.com.au). Pascal opened the slick, split-level Italian eatery in late 2017, after selling well-known

Gaston cafe and bar, and quickly won over locals with the everyday aperitivo deals.

Between mouthfuls of crispy skin slow-roasted porchetta and braised beef short rib with goats cheese polenta, Pascal reveals his party plans for the Saturday night of the festival.

"People don't usually come over the hill but this is where the bars are," he says. Indeed, the Junction has come of age with new cafes (try Larder & Baked and VanillaFood), bars and boutiques luring visitors.

That's not to say Hastings St is old hat. Newcomer O-Ren (orenbrewhouses.com.au) opened in January, providing a taproom for Cooroy's Copperhead Brewery ales – like miso and rice beer, or dragonfruit sour – paired with a slick Asian menu. It's here you'll likely find after-hours action at festival time, too.

But if you ask me, any night of the week would be ideal to pull up a seat at the bar, order a plate of chicken dumplings, and toast Noosa's indelible flavour-profile.

THE WRITER TRAVELLED AS A GUEST OF TOURISM NOOSA AND NOOSA CREST



BEACH FEAST

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