



A coast ripe for adventures

Sally Macmillan finds too much to do in too little time on Queensland's Discovery Coast.

"If you wipe out, don't get your knickers in a knot," says "Water-boy" Luke as our gaggle of nervous nellys, bobbing here on the briny, eye the booming rollers with trepidation.

"It'll only be yea up to here," the bronzed Adonis says, hitting his yea impressive six pack.

"You just hop back on and paddle back out. Easy-peasy. Ready?"

No! But we DO go and ... have such a buzz of a ride that Luke — an hour later — is hard pressed to haul us off the rollers to head back home.

We're surf kayaking out in the ocean off the quaint town of 1770 on Queensland's Discovery Coast, mid-way between Bundaberg and Gladstone.

Across the way and around Monument Point, is 1770's sister hamlet and surfing mecca of Agnes Water.

These are absolute gems of hideaways, only just waking up, as small boutique luxury resort developments move in and seachangers discover the lures of the lifestyle and surrounds of the erstwhile sleepy fishing villages.

Long-time locals, of course, had hoped to keep the jewels hidden a good while longer. Sorry folks, but your natural assets are just too seductive.

It's aptly named, this coast.

First historical: here on May 24, 1770 (hence the township) Lieutenant James Cook (before he earned his captain stripes) discovered the hideaways, anchoring the Endeavour at what became to be known as 1770 in Bustard Bay (Cook's party shot and ate a humongous bustard here).

And in the modern day: surfers, backpackers, adventure seekers and lifestyleers are discovering the awesome array of rugged wilderness, national parks, sand dunes, beach sweeps, tropical rainforest, coastal mangroves and surfing 30 nautical miles out to sea on the Great Barrier Reef.

Luke Wuiske is a seachanger himself, albeit a young one. The

oyster diver, surfer, fisherman and kayaker swapped Pambula on the NSW South Coast for Queensland's north a few years back and keeps discovering new adventures and lures every day.

"I paddle around a headland or take a bushwalk and there's something stunning and new every time," he grins as he corrals our motley group of backpackers and adventure seekers to the kayaks at the start of our 3¹/₂ hour ocean exploration.

"Our here there's manta rays, turtles, dolphins, whales, ospreys, sea eagles ..."

On this paddle there are no marine biggie sightings but, as we weave around headlands and head out into the ocean swells, we spot a wheeling sea eagle and scores of other bird life.

After an hour paddling around headlands, then through churl and chop and a brief stretch of leg on a deserted beach, it's off to kayak the surf.

All bar yours truly are in tandem craft, Luke demonstrating the rudder rudiments of the back paddler and the lie-back tactics needed of the front paddler once "aboard" the wave.

The initial "lift-off" is scary and there are a couple of wipe-outs but the ensuing ride is so exhilarating that everyone immediately heads back out again ... and again and again.

Finally Luke calls it a day. Our new backpacker mates from around the world return to their hammocks at the Cool Bananas lodge. We whiz up the road, swing left past Agnes Water proper and enter our ritzy but utterly relaxed stay in a gated community of just a handful of homes. One is owner-occupied while the others are for holiday rentals.

This IS the life: Coral View, an architect-designed luxury retreat hangs above treed slopes, overlooking our private Honeymoon Bay beach, 30m swimming pool, tennis court, cabana, barbecue and dine deck and manicure-mown picnic

table nooks beachside.

Inside, the four bedrooms all have ensuites and lead to outdoor space; the kitchen's a gourmet's delight, there's a huge laundry and games room and vast open-plan living and dining.

The master suite not only boasts a separate spa bath and shower, super king-sized bed and robes but eat-your-heart-out floor to ceiling slideaway glass door views.

The deck, with 180 degree vistas out to the Coral Sea and flanking headlands, runs the full width of the house, taking in the master bedroom, dining and living and the second bedroom. The third has its own private balcony and the fourth (set up bunk style for kids) opens to a side patio with barbecue. At the back is another bonus: a Tuscan patio area with water feature and native gardens.

We can't view the raved-about sunset here so it's back to 1770 to board one of Neil Mergard's big pink-as LARCS, his 1770 Environmental Tours' Lighter Amphibious Resupply Cargo vessels.

Originally built for military use, these fascinating critters are equally at home on sea and land.

With a score of young camper families and other couples on board, Neil swings our Sir Joseph Banks pinkie down the ramp over the water and up the sand flats running up near Round Hill Creek in Bustard Bay.

This is the one-hour Sunset Cruise that takes in the flanking Eurimbula National Park wildlife, the marine and bird life in and around the bay and, this evening, a scudding, dappled pink and red sky sunset.

We don't have time for the day LARC's Paradise Tour that takes in Bustard Head Lightstation, picnic lunch and sand-boarding down the towering dunes of Middle Island.

Nor can we fit in a fishing or scuba diving or surfing (30-plus nautical miles out to sea, surfing on the continental shelf's rollercoaster mindblower waves)



aboard Neil's other beloved beauty, the MV James Cook custom-built steel charter vessel.

Those will have to await our next foray.

Instead we opt for a drop in to The Tree, the eclectic 1770 pub with a spackled-facade, a self-

cook barbecue meat tray left by our Coral View caretaker and a dreamy night's sleep.

Morning brings birdcall, a magic Honeymoon Bay dawn swim and a chow down at the jumping Agnes Tavern.

Our only down? Two days is far

too short to explore all that the Discovery Coast offers.

Note to self: book another sojourn immediately.

■ The writer was a guest of Tourism Queensland.



Messing about: Kayakers harness a small wave off 1770



Sea chances: Clockwise from above kayaker Luke Wuiske; a Coral View vista; trekkers on Bustard Hill; 1770 township and Bustard Bay



Discovery Coast, Queensland

Getting there: Qantas to Brisbane and on to Gladstone; hire car companies at airport. Drive time to 1770-Agnes Water is about 90 minutes.

Stay: From 1770 beach camping to backpacker, budget and luxury available in both townships. Luxury stay: Coral View - 1770 Beach Accommodation. Other 1770 and Agnes Water properties available (some sleeping 12). Details www.1770beachaccommodation.com.au or call Corey Karras 0407 071 770. A week from \$1000 for entire house and facilities.

To do: Liquid Adventures two-hour sunset tours from \$30; other kayak, 4WD and national park tours. 0428 956 630, www.1770liquidadventures.com.au

1770 LARC Tours (below): aaa.1770larctours.com.au
MV James Cook adventures www.1770jamescook.com.au or (07) 4974 9422.

Upcoming event: May 24, annual festival re-enactment of Cook's landing. www.1770festival.com

More: www.townof1770-agneswater.com, www.gladstoneregion.info

