



**COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Morning coffee at Commune Espresso, an arty, community experience, at Burleigh Heads. Opposite: Broadbeach.

# GO *for* GOLD

Queensland's most famous beach playground is as glamorous as ever, but a new sophistication and serious food cred are emerging on the Gold Coast, *Fiona Donnelly* reports.

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN LAURIE





**A** “A table for two? There’s an hour’s wait on that.” It’s 7pm on a Friday and we join the queue behind a roped-off entrance to an arcade. Tables of raucous diners line the walkway beyond us, colonising shopfronts and the mezzanine gallery.

It has the buzz of a laneway bar in inner-city Melbourne, but this is Burleigh Heads, at the southern end of the Gold Coast, and its shift from motley suburb to hip dining destination is a transformation repeated along the coast.

More than just Surfers Paradise, the Gold Coast is a string of suburbs that have developed like villages along a glorious coastline. While boldness has always been the GC’s strong suit, reinvention is its flipside.

Melbourne-born restaurateur Simon Gloftis owns two of the region’s best-regarded restaurants: Hellenika at Nobby Beach and The Fish House in Burleigh Heads, the latter a finalist for Regional Restaurant of the Year in the most recent *Gourmet Traveller* Restaurant Awards. His family moved to the coast when Gloftis was a teenager; he says he and the GC

have “grown up” together. In 2010, for example, when he opened Hellenika, he recalls it was impossible to persuade diners to eat after 7.30pm. Now his customers regularly book the second sitting. “And that’s happened in just three years,” he says.

One of the keys to the Gold Coast’s makeover is a refocusing of efforts to serve locals, not just tourists. Andrew Whiting, owner of Elk Espresso at Broadbeach, is an example of the region’s new breed of entrepreneur. He established his first café, the low-key Vintage Espresso at Mermaid Beach (now with different owners), because he, his wife Jodie and their friends wanted somewhere great to eat. “I was sick of people moving to Melbourne and Sydney to experience the culture there – I thought why not create it here?”

A firm advocate of the Gold Coast lifestyle, he urges travellers to visit Australia’s sixth largest city without preconceptions. “It’s changing and evolving. Every month there are new establishments opening, and as each opens everyone else is picking up their game.”

And besides, where else in Australia can you experience an average of 300 days of sunshine a year along with a raft of glamorous, idiosyncratic places to stay and play.

## GRAND DESIGNS

Top left: poolside at Palazzo Versace, and (right) roast Burrawong chicken for two at the hotel’s restaurant Vie; Sheraton Mirage.

## STAY

### SHERATON MIRAGE

The lobby presents acres of marble and palm-fringed floor-to-ceiling views across a lagoon-style pool to the Pacific breakers beyond. The resort rises just three storeys, but there's a whiff of '80s larger-than-life glamour that chimes with the location after a \$26-million renovation this year; even the lifts have padded banquettes. Room sizes are generous, from 43 square metres to stately 185-square-metre "royal suites" with ocean views. It's also the only five-star Gold Coast hotel with direct beach access. *71 Seaworld Dr, Main Beach, (07) 5577 0000, sheratonmiragegoldcoast.com*

### PEPPERS BROADBEACH

Spread across two city blocks, Oracle's dual high-rise towers (one at 50 storeys, the other 40) loom like sculptured spinnakers above several top Broadbeach dining options (Social Eating House, No Name Lane, Ten Japanese Restaurant among them). Peppers Broadbeach occupies both towers with about 200 urban-styled apartments. All the usual five-star, 24-hour service features apply, but there are also welcome touches of quirkiness and character: a third-floor Zen garden, pillow menu, pantry deliveries, free in-house iPads and WiFi plus a mini cinema. Soul Surfers Paradise on The Esplanade is a sister property; its 77 levels ensure all apartments have sea views. *Peppers Broadbeach, 21 Elizabeth Ave, Broadbeach, (07) 3106 3737, peppers.com.au; Soul, 8 The Esplanade, Surfers Paradise, (07) 5582 0600, soul.com.au*

### PALAZZO VERSACE

There aren't too many five-star hotels at which you can moor a super-yacht. Palazzo Versace has 90 marina berths. Always ready to go the extra mile for guests, the hotel can also accommodate pampered canines – in a superior pet room, no less. The Palazzo Pooch Package includes a "canine couture futon", and Versace crystal food and water bowls. The human digs are similarly well appointed; select condominiums have plunge pools, while everyone else makes do with the "water salon" flanked by muslin-draped four-poster cabanas. For \$40, guests and non-guests can book a cabana and

watch a poolside movie that comes with a picnic hamper of popcorn, Smarties and more. *94 Seaworld Dr, Main Beach, (07) 5509 8000, palazzoversace.com.au*

### HILTON SURFERS PARADISE

Who wouldn't like a personal beach valet, someone to pinpoint the best spots and tote togs and beach towels to the ocean? Hilton's arrival in 2011 was a vote of confidence in Surfers, and this is the chain in holiday mode. Valets wear shorts and Converse sneakers but service remains sharp. Both the Hilton's towers house ritzy residences, a range of fully serviced one- to four-bedroom self-catering apartments. The sub-penthouse suites, which start at \$2,200 a night and include a personal valet, are located in Orchid Tower, as are Luke Mangan's Salt Grill, great cocktails at Fix bar and 13 levels of guest rooms and suites. Request a king relaxation suite and take in the views. *6 Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise, (07) 5680 8000, hiltonsurfersparadise.com.au*

### NIRVANA BY THE SEA

Keen to surf, rather than just hang at Surfers? Nirvana by the Sea sits oceanfront at Kirra Beach, legendary among longboarders, and its 15 luxe levels have expansive views. Three-bedroom "sky homes" are large enough to house several couples or a family in style; some two-bedroom apartments have private plunge pools. Luxe hotel-style facilities include an in-house cinema, 25-metre lap pool, kids' pool, sauna and steam room. *1 Douglas St, Coolangatta, (07) 5506 5555, nirvanabythesea.com.au*

## SPA

### HILTON SPA

Organic products, an invigorating Vichy shower with a light show, two couples' rooms and a separate menu of treatments designed for men are some of the highlights at Hilton's Eforea spa, located in a bright and airy space on the second floor. Smart traveller options include a jet-lag body remedy and an after-sun rescue treatment. *(07) 5680 8000, hiltonsurfersparadise.com.au*

## WINNING GOLD

Peppers Broadbeach (right and bottom left) has apartments with an urban edge. Below: Sheraton Mirage, Main Beach. Bottom right: Craig Wright of Palazzo Versace's Vie (bottom right).





One key to the Gold Coast's growing culinary sophistication is a *refocusing of efforts* to serve locals, not just tourists.



**NEW WAVE**

Clockwise, from top left: Social Eating House; Seaduction's lollipop petits fours; Social Eating House and its (from left) tuna sashimi, scampi with avocado mousse and jalapeño dressing, and yabbies, confit chicken wings and jamón; The Fish House; and Broadbeach.



## AURORA SPA

Managed by Melbourne's Aurora Spa Retreats, this basement space in Palazzo Versace remains true to the hotel's style, with flamboyant furnishings in the relaxation room and a Roman-style pool. The spa's signature Kitya Karnu treatment takes place in a personal steam room – hot and a little squeezey – but the results are worth sweating for. (07) 5509 8000, [palazzoversace.com.au/spa](http://palazzoversace.com.au/spa)

## GWINGANNA

A minimum two-night weekend retreat is required to access Gwinganna's spa facilities. Guests leave recharged and armed with ideas to sustain their new sense of wellbeing at home. Co-owner Hugh Jackman can occasionally be spied wandering around in boardies. Book ahead to try the new Australian Spirit of Sound treatment, featuring vibration and drumming with a massage performed by a therapist-percussionist. The resort is about 25 kilometres, or less than half an hour's drive, from Surfers Paradise. 192 Syndicate Rd, Tallebudgera Valley, (07) 5589 5000, [www.gwinganna.com](http://www.gwinganna.com)

## EAT

### THE FISH HOUSE

When owner Simon Gloftis told locals The Fish House wouldn't offer BYO, they told him he'd go broke. In its first year this simple brick restaurant with glorious views to Surfers scored a finalist nomination for *Gourmet Traveller's* regional restaurant for 2014. Whole King George whiting with lemon, oil and herbs is a signature but weigh up the rest of the catch arrayed in the kitchen's cool-room window. Choices come char-grilled, pan-roasted, steamed or baked with shared sides. There's old-fashioned generosity as well as meticulous attention to detail, plus a cracker wine list. Try Gloftis's Hellenika in Nobby Beach ([hellenika.com.au](http://hellenika.com.au)) for Greek taverna-style treats and a great-value \$55 banquet. 50 Goodwin Tce, Burleigh Heads, (07) 5535 7725, [thefishhouse.com.au](http://thefishhouse.com.au)

### SOCIAL EATING HOUSE

Can't face decision-making after a long day at the beach? How about something on toast – a crisp rectangle of hot-smoked trout mousse, say, dotted with Yarra Valley salmon pearls? Or a few jamón and manchego bombas with a punchy mojo picon?

There's a good by-the-glass list; Lois Grüner Veltliner, perhaps, or a lightly chilled Alsatian pinot blanc for starters. Take a seat at the handsome back-lit bar and graze or refuel with the likes of slow-roasted lamb shoulder. There's a mix of high benches and low tables, an open kitchen and an easy-going vibe. 5137, Oracle South, 3 Oracle Blvd, Broadbeach, (07) 5504 5210

### SEADUCTION

Chef Steve Szabo worked for a decade at Palazzo Versace before becoming executive chef at Soul Surfers Paradise. With the best beach views on the coast, Seaduction sits on the second of 77 storeys and its sweeping ocean outlook and plush décor – bronze and cream leather chairs, designer carpet underfoot – scream special occasion. Dishes are ornate, sometimes elaborate, but always nicely underpinned by Szabo's classical training and flair. If the private dining room isn't sufficiently exclusive, enlist some friends, hire a sub-penthouse and Szabo will come to you for a customised dégustation for up to 14 people – five-courses, say, for about \$200 per head. Now, that's in-room dining. 8 The Esplanade, Surfers Paradise, (07) 5635 5728, [soul.com.au](http://soul.com.au)

### JUSTIN LANE PIZZERIA & BAR

If Burleigh Heads is the epicentre of the Gold Coast's culinary revival, this crazy pizza joint is one of its engines. After 5pm it takes over most of a shopping arcade, with simple wooden tables and chairs filling the herringbone-tiled walkways and several shops. Pizze are good, with sourdough bases and toppings such as San Daniele prosciutto, buffalo mozzarella and rocket, or zucchini, confit garlic, cherry tomato and goat's cheese. Start with a few bites – pork and fennel meatballs, perhaps, or a bowl of chilli Mooloolaba king prawns. Since opening in 2011, the pizzeria's 110 seats have multiplied to 230, but diners can still wait an hour for a table. In September, co-owners Adam Haralampou and chef Robert Morwood opened the loungey Cavalier Bar & Supper next door, so you can twirl a swizzle stick rather than twiddling your fingers. 1708-1710 Gold Coast Hwy, Burleigh Heads, (07) 5576 8517, [justinlane.com.au](http://justinlane.com.au)

### VIE

The views from the neat alfresco deck at Vie are of mega-yachts at Broadwater, but dishes here are

down-to-earth with intense flavours. It's no surprise to learn that Vie's chef, Craig Wright, is a graduate of Sean's Panaroma at Bondi. Order a salad of heirloom baby vegetables, glossy with walnut vinaigrette and on a base of goat's cheese, or a perfectly char-grilled tuna steak flanked by nutty faro salad, toasted almonds and a lemon vinaigrette. At lunch, a \$49 three-course deal is a clincher. 94 Seaworld Dr, Main Beach, (07) 5509 8000, [palazzoversace.com.au](http://palazzoversace.com.au)

### FROM EARTH & WATER

Sitting in this airy, white-on-white room with its simple wooden floors and fresh flowers, it's hard to imagine the space was once occupied by a Chinese takeaway. It's an interesting example of the culinary changes on this part of the coast. Lunch could include a salad of local heirloom tomatoes with a sorrel avocado yoghurt purée, or ribollita and almond "feta". Chef-owner Nicki Fulton says the concept is straightforward: everything is vegetarian, house-made and about 60 per cent of the menu is raw. Desserts, too, are raw, organic and vegan, including a "raw Snickers">



## ENGINE ROOM

Below: Justin Lane Pizzeria & Bar in Burleigh Heads. Left: executive chef Steve Szabo of Seaduction in Surfers Paradise.





with layers of salted date caramel, raw chocolate and vanilla nougat.  
2 West St, Burleigh Heads,  
(07) 5520 7907

#### BLACK COFFEE LYRICS

The off-beat Surfers shopping centre location hits the right notes for hipsters, but might not appeal to those who prefer pleasures a little better upholstered. Affordable rents have allowed the three owners free rein and what BCL lacks in glamour it supplements with quirkiness (spot the toy soldier upside down on the ceiling and chat to manager Nathan Swindale about his tank-driving licence). Though open from breakfast, it pulls a cool, young crowd especially for cocktails and dinner. Dithering over what to drink? Try one of six “tasting trays” of rums, tequilas or whiskeys. Cheers! Shop 41, Centre Arcade, 3131 Surfers Paradise Blvd, Surfers Paradise, 0402 189 437, [blackcoffeelyrics.com.au](http://blackcoffeelyrics.com.au)

#### TEN JAPANESE RESTAURANT & DAICHI BY TEN

Ten's low-rise exterior is understated, but when those steel doors spring open it's a clue something singular is ahead. Place yourself in the hands of chef Daisuke Miyake by opting for the omakase or dégustation, with first-class service. The rigid seating

policy has changed, so faultless sashimi can now be enjoyed at the space-age glass and steel teppan installation, or dine kaiseki-style at the sushi bar. Try a delicate Japanese Grace wine from Katsunuma or, if you've got a thing for Grange, find vintages spanning 1996 to 2004. In August the team launched an adjacent ramen shop, Daichi by Ten, where you can slurp intensely flavoured tonkotsu, or pick up gyoza and sushi. 2669 Gold Coast Hwy, Broadbeach, (07) 5570 1010, [teppanten.com.au](http://teppanten.com.au)

#### ELK ESPRESSO

“Are you from Melbourne?” Elk's owner Andrew Whiting has lost count of the number of times he's been asked this question. He and wife Jodie are proud GC “purebreds” and established this cool, character-filled café with its simple but tasty snacks to cater for locals looking for an alternative to anodyne tourist-oriented eateries. It attracts a mix of patrons, from beachgoers in towels sipping peanut butter and chocolate thickshakes to suits enjoying sourdough toast heaped with smashed beans and ricotta, and zucchini topped with crisp prosciutto. Staff are as sunny as the



outlook across Broadbeach United's soccer field. Elk opens for dinner on Friday nights. 16 Chelsea Ave, Broadbeach, (07) 5592 2888

#### PABLO PABLO

It's colourful and done on a shoestring but this Latin pit stop with its chalkboard walls, funky light fittings and rustic wooden tables is good times central in Palm Beach. Order a Rosita craft beer and tabla de quesos with a selection of Valdeón, Manchego and Mahón, or choose a raft of share plates: a beetroot and almond salad, say, some patatas bravas and braised octopus with pickled carrot, or beef cheeks in a rich tomato reduction. Shop 6, Fifth Ave, Palm Beach, (07) 5534 7003, [pablopablo.com.au](http://pablopablo.com.au)

#### COMMUNE ESPRESSO

There are conga queues here on the weekends and the café spreads along the footpath – mismatched tables, stools and even armchairs pop up outside adjoining businesses. It's less of an eatery and more an arty, community experience, which is exactly how owners Mitch and Nerissa McCluskey like it – check out ping-pong Sundays. Commune lacks

sea views and is tucked away on the lower Gold Coast Highway but it's one of the busiest cafés on the coast. Try a bowl of cinnamon-dusted bircher topped with grated apple and yoghurt, or the slow-cooked pork on ciabatta with house-made barbecue sauce, coleslaw and a poached egg. All will become clear. 1844 Gold Coast Hwy, Burleigh Heads, (07) 5520 3377

#### THE LITTLE PLATE

This pocket-sized place run by an all-female team has a globetrotting menu – it could include shared plates of Portuguese-style fresh sardines from Iluka to beef carpaccio or soft blue-corn tortillas filled with pulled pork. There are just three wines by the glass and two house beers made by local micro-brewery the Aardvark and Arrow. Shop 11/3 Deodar Dr, Burleigh Heads, 0499 724 303

#### PIG AND PINTS

UK-born chef James Brady's resumé includes stints at Melbourne's Vue de Monde but a Gold Coast sea change inspired a different style of venue: a craft beer and burger joint called Pigs and Pints at Surfers Paradise, and its recent off-shoot, the region's first fancy food truck. The Pig Van serves a changing menu of burgers, bags of pork crackling and Brady's house-made smoked potato chips. He is preparing to open a second Pigs and Pints at Burleigh Heads. 54 Thomas Dr, Surfers Paradise, (07) 5504 6404, [pigsandpints.com.au](http://pigsandpints.com.au)

#### DRINK

##### THE CAMBUS WALLACE

There's not much to reveal the location of this stylish galley-shaped haunt named for a Scottish cargo ship that foundered off the Queensland coast in 1894. Handsome timber doors swing back to reveal a cleverly lit wooden bar dotted with nautical>



## SEA AND DO

Clockwise, from above:  
 Elk Espresso; Black  
 Coffee Lyrics; Commune  
 Espresso; Burleigh  
 Heads. Opposite,  
 clockwise from left:  
 Elk Espresso, inside  
 and out; Ten Japanese  
 Restaurant's black cod  
 "saikyo-yaki"; and  
 a share plate of  
 Pablo Pablo.



## CUT ABOVE

Clockwise, from below: Brendan Elcham, owner of Canteen, Burleigh Heads; assorted breads at Golosi, Burleigh Heads; Mods and Rockers Retro Barber Shop, Surfers Paradise. Opposite: Broadbeach.



memorabilia. As well as a slew of cocktails there's an apt focus on rum, including the likes of TMD rum from the Gold Coast hinterland, 12-year-old Nicaraguan Flor de Caña, Zacapa XO and more. *4/2237 Gold Coast Hwy, Nobby Beach, (07) 5575 3420, thecambuswallace.com.au*

### BIN 12

Owner Daniel Ridgeway made his name at Little Truffle in Mermaid Beach, but this wine bar sibling is a more casual affair. There's Sapporo on tap and snacks are on the money: popcorn shrimp with spicy mayo, say, or chicken parmy strips with jamón. Adam Lane, former head chef at Saké



in Sydney, is in the kitchen. *12 James St, Burleigh Heads, (07) 5535 3085*

### BURLEIGH BREWING

This craft brewery run by husband-and-wife team Brennan and Peta Fielding holds regular tours and opens its Brewhouse bar on Fridays from 5pm. Brews include My Wife's Bitter (a gift from Brennan to his wife), FigJam IPA, an India pale ale, and Hef, a German-style, unfiltered wheat beer. *17a Ern Harley Dr, Burleigh Heads, (07) 5593 6000, burleighbrewing.com.au*

### SPECIALTY COFFEE

There was a time when a "cuppa-cino" was the best you could hope for on the coast. Try these cafés for coffee to rival the best in the country. At Peter Gloftis's **No Name Lane** (S132, 3 Oracle Blvd, Broadbeach), choices include 3rd Crack beans (sourced from an Ashmore brokerage and roastery) and Black Sheep Coffee, a roastery owned by Mark Gloftis; the owners are cousins of Gold Coast restaurateur Simon Gloftis. **Canteen** (23 Park Ave, Burleigh Heads) brings minimalist laneway cool to Burleigh Heads and is the handiwork of Brendan Elcham, of the family that runs Deluxe Boutique Coffee Roasters. Visit his small **Canteen Kitchen** next door for excellent Middle Eastern-accented dishes. Palm Beach's **Barefoot Barista** opens at 5.30am – ideal after an early swim (shop 5, Palm Beach Ave, Palm Beach). Barefoot Barista and its Burleigh sibling, **Borough**, also serve co-owner Liz Ennis's house-baked treats. **ESPL** is a Surfers Paradise espresso bar run by 22-year-old Nick Pearce, still at university studying a business degree (4 The Esplanade, Surfers Paradise). He also owns **Blackboard Coffee** (shop 7/240 Varsity Parade) at Varsity Lakes.

### SHOP

#### MODS AND ROCKERS RETRO BARBER SHOP

Listen to The Doors cranked up (or staff singing "Bohemian Rhapsody" in unison) while reclining in proper leather barber's chairs beside a drinks trolley. A \$30 cut includes a beer, whisky, Port or sake, as well as a hot lemongrass-scented towel wrap and a splash of Truefitt & Hill cologne – perhaps Spanish Leather, sir? Fossick for vintage threads at The Velvet

Door, a side business run on the site by one of the stylists. *4/35 Orchid Ave, Surfers Paradise, (07) 5667 9880*

### FOUND AND LOST

Warning: browsing at either of these shops will result in expenditure, with the added incentives of services for shipping, upholstery and restoration. Fans of mid-century furniture head to **Found** at Tugun, which specialises in vintage Australiana and Euro classics. For more wide-ranging retro treasures try **Lost** at Palm Beach (weekends only). Both shops are owned by Matt Hatcher, a cabinet-maker, and partner Kelly Nuss. At Palm Beach, refuel at **Mable**, a joint-venture café with Twahn McMahon's **Small Stall** shop next door. *471 Golden Four Dr, Tugun, (07) 5534 7628, foundfurniture.com.au; 1059 Gold Coast Hwy, Palm Beach, lostpalmbeach.com.au*

### VILLAGE MARKETS

Handmade jewellery crafted from recycled silver, silk caftans, funky beads – you could leave these markets looking like a local. On the first and third Sunday of the month a cavalcade of designers, vintage dealers and artists set up on the school oval at Burleigh Heads State School, and on the fourth Sunday of the month at Paradise Point Park. *thevillagemarketsgc.com.au*

### PRODUCE

Self catering? You can fill the pantry at **Harbourside Market** at Biggera Waters (610 Oxley Dr) with fresh pasta, deli treats and dry-aged beef – there's even a cheese room. It's conveniently located adjacent to the discount shopping precinct of Harbour Town (147-189 Brisbane Rd). At Southport's **Ferry Road Market** (Brickworks Centre, 107 Ferry Rd), stop by the excellent Reef Seafood for freshly prepared sushi and line-caught fish; there's also an award-winning butcher, Merlo Torrefazione for coffee, the Tea Centre and others. A handy pit stop at the southern end of the coast is **Golosi**, a cute standalone provedore on James Street, Burleigh Heads. Still hungry? Farmers' markets are held on Saturdays at **Burleigh Markets** ([goldcoastfarmersmarkets.com.au](http://goldcoastfarmersmarkets.com.au)) on the state school oval. On Sundays browse the **Gold Coast Turf Club Farmers' Market** at Bundall Racecourse ([yourlocalmarkets.com.au](http://yourlocalmarkets.com.au)). 

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## THE FINE PRINT

### GETTING THERE

Qantas, Jetstar and Virgin Australia have direct flights to Gold Coast Airport from major Australian cities.

A light rail from Southport to Broadbeach Waters is due to open in mid-2014.