

Travel Insider.

Cruising Goodwin
Terrace in beachside
Burleigh Heads,
Queensland

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Southern belle

Discover the laid-back Aussie charm of
Queensland's Southern Gold Coast.





**THE
COAST
IS
CLEAR**

If Surfers isn't your idea of paradise, hit the highway and head south. As Emily McAuliffe reports, fewer tourists, fine dining, fun bars and low-key markets give the Southern Gold Coast region a mellow appeal.

Currumbin Creek is the ideal spot to stand up on, or fall off, a paddleboard





EAT & DRINK

IF YOU'RE not paying attention you'll miss it. The entrance to one of the newest additions to Palm Beach's rapidly expanding culinary portfolio, Lester & Earl (07 5598 2889), is nothing more than a door. No sign, no flashing lights – just a door. But once your eyes adjust to the dim lighting and make out “smoked barbecue, cold beers” graffitied on the wall inside, you'll know you're in the right place. Perch yourself on the balcony to watch the waves roll in while tucking into slow-smoked Texas ribs chased with a whisky sour or one of 12 tap beers that change weekly.

If you're after coffee – Lester & Earl only serves the hard stuff – go to Barefoot Barista around the corner (see page 74) or head further south to Kirramisu (kirramisu.com.au) at Kirra. The beans start roasting at Kirramisu from 5.30am – perfect if you want to catch an early set at Snapper Rocks 10 minutes down the road, where surfing greats such as Kelly Slater and Stephanie Gilmore stare down the barrels during the Quiksilver Pro and Roxy Pro tournaments.

The Southern Gold Coast isn't all sandy feet and salty hair. Deftly servicing the epicurean market are fine-dining restaurants such as Burleigh Heads' The Fish House (thefishhouse.com.au), which, as the name suggests, serves beautiful seafood, and Allure on Currumbin (allureoncurrumbin.com.au), which focuses on classic

(Clockwise from top left) Lester & Earl; the restaurant's slow-smoked Texas ribs; surfers at Snapper Rocks, one of the region's best surf beaches





Goodwin Terrace in Burleigh Heads is a favourite local hangout (left); The Fish House's oven-baked ocean trout with herbs and macadamia nuts; Hidden restaurant and bar in Tugun

French cuisine with an Australian twist (such as confit pork belly with scallops fresh off the trawler).

"We're the locals' secret," says Allure co-owner and head chef Brad Hooper of his chandeliered establishment, which is extraordinarily popular despite being away from the foot traffic of the coastal strip. "As if you'd want to go up north," he scoffs, before adding with a grin, "but I guess I'm not supposed to say that, am I?"

Another little-known eatery, aptly named Hidden (hiddengroove.com), can be found in the quiet coastal suburb of Tugun. Owner James Park saw a demand for classic acoustic entertainment in the Gold Coast's south so he expanded his hole-in-the-wall café, Groove, to include a live-music venue at the end of an arcade. Here, tasselled '70s-style lamps emit a warm glow over a small rostrum where Park, who moonlights as an Italian opera singer when he's not fulfilling his barista duties, shares the stage with local talent.

EXPLORE

STAND-UP paddleboarding (SUP) has well and truly entered the mainstream but, although it seems every man and his water-loving dog is taking up the Hawaiian water sport, it's harder than it looks. The Southern Gold Coast is home to one of the first SUP schools in Australia –





Walk or wade through the rock pools at Snapper Rocks (above); Johnei&jo sells locally crafted homeware and giftware

JM Stand Up Paddle Company (jmsup.com), which was well ahead of the game when it started out 10 years ago and continues to offer Academy of Surfing Instructors-accredited lessons in the calm waters of Currumbin Creek.

Besides being the best spot for a paddle, the turquoise creek is also a breadcrumb trail to a local hide-out, the Currumbin Valley Rock Pool (Currumbin Creek Road). As you drive 15 minutes west from the coast towards Currumbin Valley, you'll quickly forget you're on Australia's pre-eminent beach strip as golden sand is replaced by a towering forest of trees. The residents roll in for a splash in the rock pool and a picnic around lunchtime so it's best to bag a car park in the early morning or late afternoon.

To escape the midday heat you can peruse the boutique shops of the south, such as Johnei&jo (0407 423 293), which sells clothing, homeware and giftware created by local artisans and fair-trade international suppliers. For owner Colleen Graham, leaving Sydney to set up shop in Palm Beach was a positive move. "Here, everyone is relaxed and friendly so I think it rubs off," she says of her new location. "Every day feels like a holiday."

To lap up that relaxed vibe, grab a coconut to sip while browsing the merchandise of emerging designers at The Village Markets in Burleigh Heads on the first and third Sunday of each month. Here, among 90-plus stalls,

Hit the deck for dining at the Palm Beach Surf Life Saving Club



The Southern Gold Coast's best...



FLIGHT PATH

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Qantas flies to the Gold Coast from Sydney and Melbourne, with connections from other Australian capital cities. qantas.com

Postcard view

When you climb the Eiffel Tower for a panoramic view of Paris, a crucial landmark is hidden from view – the Eiffel Tower. Similarly, when you climb Q1 in Surfers Paradise, you can't appreciate the spire of one of the Southern Hemisphere's tallest residential buildings. Hence, the Gold Coast's picture-perfect view is from the wide promenade linking Kirra and Coolangatta (Marine Parade), where waves roll out beneath you and skyscrapers to the north, including Q1, emerge out of a soft sea mist in the distance.

Sunday session

Heading to a Gold Coast surf lifesaving club might sound clichéd but the clubs remain firm local favourites. For the best position on the Southern Gold Coast it's a toss-up between the Currumbin and Palm Beach

clubs (currumbinlsc.com.au; palmbeachsurfclub.com.au), depending on whether you want to be perched over the ocean or nestled amid the sand dunes while you sip a sundowner.

Free entertainment

Late every Sunday afternoon, the Southern Gold Coast community gathers in Justins Park in Burleigh Heads (The Esplanade) to watch local performers. Bongo drummers provide a soundtrack for fire twirlers, tightrope walkers, hula hoopers and anyone up for a dance. Grab a gourmet pizza from the always packed Justin Lane across the road and stretch out on a blanket to watch the festivities unfold.

Coffee experience

No, we're not talking about sipping a latte by the beach

while scanning the day's news (though you can do that, too); this is about getting hands-on. Keen to share their coffee obsession with the world, the crew at Barefoot Barista in Palm Beach (barefootbarista.com.au) offers free 30-minute barista classes every Saturday at 1pm.

Natural wonder

Inland from the Gold Coast's southern beaches is Springbrook National Park (nprsr.qld.gov.au), which forms part of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Gondwana Rainforests. Here you can choose from a variety of hiking trails, including a 1.5-kilometre circuit to Natural Bridge, where you can admire a waterfall cascading over an arched rock formation by day and the glitter of thousands of glow worms in an adjoining cave by night.

you'll find the wares of crystal jeweller Katrina Evans (iinadesigns.com.au) and Alex Coleborn (gloriadulcie.com), who designs fine crochet and silk garments. Finished shopping? Sit on the grass with an espresso and enjoy the live music.

If you still have a few coins in your pocket, a mere two dollars will buy a beachside yoga class in leafy Justins Park (asmy.org.au) in Burleigh Heads. Shaded by pine trees, you'll be guided through simple hatha yoga asanas. Yes, we're still on the Gold Coast. Really.

STAY

THE name Nirvana by the Sea (nirvanabythesea.com.au) seems fitting when you're afforded a front-row view of the Pacific from your bathtub. This Kirra hotel's architect nailed the design with floor-to-ceiling windows that offer stunning sea views from almost all 69 rooms. If you really feel like splashing out here, however, opt for the two-bedroom penthouse with its exclusive rooftop pool.

Speaking of pools, if you need a kid-friendly option, check out Golden Riviera in Tugun (goldenriviera.com.au). Owners Lorraine and Dennis Roughton not only offer a family-friendly resort but also treat guests like family with "How'd you enjoy dinner last night, Kate?" and "Nice to see you again, John" greetings all part of the service. Oh, and the location's not bad, either – let's just say the "Beach" sign with arrow on the lawn isn't necessary given the big blue is practically lapping at the gate. ●



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For our City Guide to the Gold Coast, visit travelinsider.qantas.com.au.