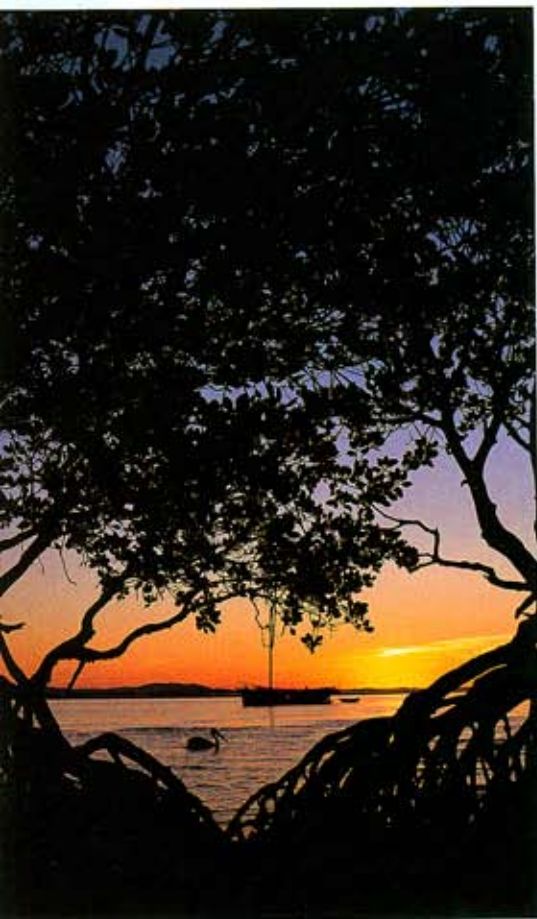




QUEENSLAND'S NUMERICALLY NAMED SEASIDE IDYLL IS BEING HAILED AS NOOSA'S FAST-GROWING LITTLE COUSIN. **CHRISTINA PFEIFFER** CHARTS THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESORT STEEPED IN HISTORY AS IT'S USHERED (LIKE IT OR NOT) INTO THE FUTURE.

SEVENTEEN

70



**THOUGH HUGE CHANGES
ARE OCCURRING AT
1770, ONE COMMON
DENOMINATOR
WILL UNDOUBTEDLY
LINGER: THE STRESS-
FREE LIFESTYLE.**

Gazette from August 19, 1768. In those days, the discovery of Australia had set all of London abuzz. The headlines read: "Secret Voyage. Lieutenant Cook awaits fair winds. Search for unknown continent south of the equator." Indeed, at Round Hill Head, there's the obligatory monument to mark the spot where the intrepid explorer came ashore. Flicking to the back page, I almost miss the five lines announcing James Watt's and his revolutionary steam engine, an innovation that would change the world.

A lone runner dressed only in togs jogs up the hill through rugged bushland. Behind me, in the next suburb of Agnes Water, waves crash along an expanse of sandy beach, perhaps the best in the area. When I make my way down the sea is already dotted with surfers. A group of school kids exercise on the sand. Young couples lie lazily between the caravan park and the ocean, lapping up the laidback Queensland atmosphere. The caravan park is being replaced by Sansara, an exotically named luxury development with 114 villas (at a cool \$1-5m each), fine dining restaurants, cinemas and a conference hall. Most of the 18 spots in its retail precinct have been snapped up and there are plans for a scuba pool, crèche and luxury Day Spa.

The first upmarket 1770 resort opened last October: the \$62 million Mantra Pavillions Mirage, a 78-apartment outfit with three pools

and landscaped gardens. Developed by Olympian Grant Kenny and Flight Centre founding director Jim Goldberg, this is surely only the start of things to come. Other accommodation options range from backpacker digs right up to \$3000-a-week ocean-view mansions.

The milk bar-style cafés have caught on to the changes and are extending their menus from hamburgers and crumbed fish to frozen oysters and filet mignon. Then there's the Saltwater Café, which, although it shares the same building as the local pub, is run by a chef whose experience extends to cooking in Nice, San Francisco and Sydney.

To explore the surrounding countryside, most people hire a 4WD or join a wilderness day tour on bright pink LARCs, converted amphibious '60s US Army vehicles. These wonderful craft travel across vast expanses of sand and ocean, through hectares of bushland, and to the remote Eurimbula National Park and Joseph Banks Conservation Park. There's also a bumpy ride up a rocky cliff face to Bustard Head light station, as well as a fun afternoon sliding down the caramel coloured sand dunes of Middle Island.

If you're interested in visiting Queensland's first coastal lighthouse, then the LARC is your only choice of transport. Here, you can stay in the former lighthouse keepers' residence, now comfortably renovated by the former

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT // Peering through the mangroves at Round Hill Beach; a couple dive off Fitzroy Reef at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef.

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PREVIOUS SPREAD // Aerial view of Round Hill Head.
LEFT // Make the pilgrimage to Bustard Head lighthouse.

Two hundred and thirty seven years after Lieutenant James Cook stepped ashore at the Queensland town of 1770, the once sleepy seaside village is in the throes of becoming the Sunshine State's next holiday hotspot.

Renamed from Round Hill in 1936, holiday villas and luxury beach houses at 1770 are rapidly replacing motels and backpackers'. For Sale signs line the beachfront and although the town is still somewhat isolated, sophisticated holidaymakers from Sydney, Melbourne, London and Germany are gradually replacing the camping and caravan fraternity.

Wedged between Gladstone and Bundaberg, 1770's quickest means of access is to fly to either of these hubs, then hire a car and drive the hour and a half to the seaside spot. The tiny town's remote nature is about to change, however, as plans are afoot to build a commercial airport. If approved, access will become that much easier and will encourage a lot more visitors to this idyllic locale. That means, to avoid the rush, the time to visit is now.

This small peninsular, with only 126 house lots surrounded on three sides by the Coral Sea and Bustard Bay, was first discovered by Cook when he stepped ashore near Round Hill Head. On only his second foray onto the Australian mainland, and his first onto Queensland soil, Cook saw acres of wild bushland, green ants nesting in the mangrove trees, wild bush turkeys (bustards), and hastily snuffed out fires of Aboriginal campsites. In an excerpt from Cook's diary dated that Thursday May 24, he notes that "all, or most of the same sort, of Land and Water fowl as we saw at Botany Bay we saw here, besides these we saw some Bustards, such as we have in England, one of which we killed that weighed 17 1/2 pounds, which occasioned my giving this place the Name of Bustard Bay." Today, sections of the coastline remain much the same, while other parts show unmistakable signs that the developers are here to stay.

Perched on a rocky outcrop on top of Round Hill Head, I soak in the rugged ocean view as I flick through a copy of the *London*

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ABOVE // A local fisherman is watched avidly by interested pelicans at Round Hill Inlet.

lighthouse keeper, author and authority on the area, Stewart Buchanan. It's a holiday that guarantees solitude, a quiet time for reflection and breathtaking ocean views; although the isolation mightn't be everyone's cup of tea.

Behind the lighthouse is a cemetery where the early pioneers of the region are buried. In those pioneering days, life was tough; Buchanan recounts a tale of two sisters, one blind, who ran a farm until they were so old they were unable to survive on their own. Then there was the lighthouse keeper's wife who drowned mysteriously, and the fishermen that vanished in Pancake Creek under baffling circumstances.

Activities are hugely weather dependent and there are a number of companies that offer chartered fishing trips. A day-cruise to Lady Musgrave Island, a 14ha tropical paradise small enough to amble around in 45min, is also a great option. Situated near Fitzroy Reef at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef, you can pull on your snorkelling gear and step off the beach into a protected coral lagoon where you'll find yourself staring at a colourful array of fish and coral.

Though huge changes are occurring at 1770 and Agnes Water, one common denominator will undoubtedly linger: the stress-free lifestyle. Visitors will continue to go fishing, perhaps from luxury yachts instead of aluminium tinnies. Many believe this sleepy town may one day

become the next Noosa – but with one proviso. David Culpan of PRD Nationwide Agnes Water, who "sea-changed" from a comfortable investment banking job in Sydney three years ago, is cautious about labelling 1770. "I don't think it's the next Noosa because of the limited availability of land," he says. "Actually, I hope it will become much *more* exclusive . . . Queensland's answer to Italy's Portofino." ■

CONTACTS // 1770

- ☑ PRD NATIONWIDE manages a range of holiday homes for rent // PHONE // (07) 4974 9470
- ☑ MANTRA PAVILLIONS MIRAGE ON 1770 // Beaches Village Circuit, Agnes Water // PHONE // 07 4902 1000 WEBSITE // www.pavillionsresort.com.au
- ☑ SEABREEZE is an eco-friendly luxury villa // PHONE // (08) 8354 2723 // WEBSITE // www.seabreeze1770.com
- ☑ THE 1770 REEF HOUSE // 8 Endeavour St, 1770 // PHONE // (07) 4974 9463 // WEBSITE // www.1770beachshacks.com
- ☑ SOVEREIGN LODGE // Elliott St, 1770 // PHONE // (07) 4974 9257 // WEBSITE // www.1770sovereignlodge.com
- ☑ SALTWATER CAFÉ // Lot 5 Captain Cook Dve, 1770 // PHONE // (07) 4974 9599
- ☑ 1770 HOLIDAYS LARC Tours & Fitzroy Reef cruises // PHONE // (07) 4974 9422 // WEBSITE // www.1770holidays.com
- ☑ LADY MUSGRAVE CRUISES // PHONE // (07) 4974 7002 // WEBSITE // www.lmcruises.com.au