

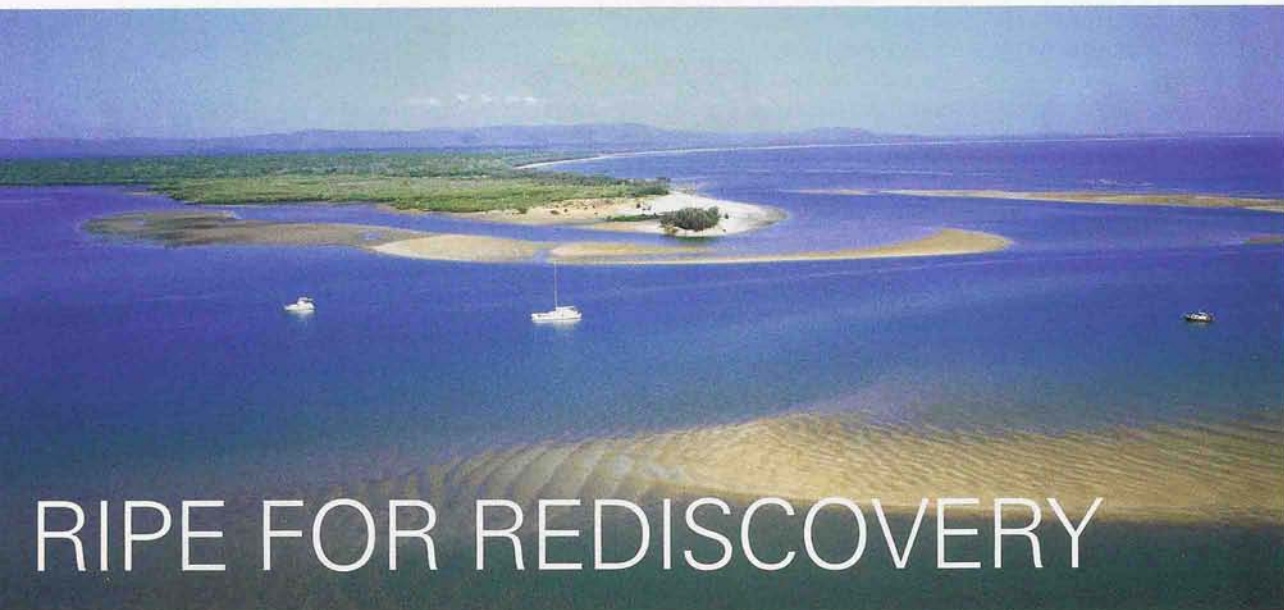
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AUSTRALIA

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RIPE FOR REDISCOVERY

Although it's been hailed as the 'new Noosa', few people have heard of the north Queensland coastal town of 1770 – yet

By **CHRISTINA PFEIFFER**

In 1770, when James Cook encountered the area now known as The Town of 1770 in Queensland, he saw acres of wild bushland, green ants nesting in mangrove trees, Bustard birds, and the traces of hastily snuffed-out fires from Aboriginal campsites. More than 200 years later, there is still plenty of bush and wildlife, and a new kind of local – Melbourne and Sydney property investors who have rediscovered the area.

A four-hour drive north of Noosa, 1770 is on a small peninsula surrounded on three sides by water – the Coral Sea and Bustard Bay. This clifftop town is very small, and life here is delightfully simple. There are only 126 house lots (many have simple beach houses with small 'For Sale' or 'For Rent' signs in the front), a jetty, a licensed club, a pub, a couple of cafés (including the luscious Saltwater Café on the main road on the peninsula by the ocean) and a newsagency. All rather like Noosa a couple of decades ago.

Shopping means travelling 8km south to Agnes Water where – driven by easier and better beach access – property development is rife and plans are afoot for a local airport and luxury villa development. A 5km-long sandy white beach, often compared to the Sunshine Coast's beach, stretches from Agnes Waters along to the tip of the peninsula where 1770 is perched. The best property at Agnes Waters is beachfront; at 1770, it's clifftop.

I STAYED in Agnes Water at The Edge on Beaches Resort, managed by John and May Wilson since they quit Adelaide two years ago. Their story is typical – until recently, they say, their clientele was mainly Queensland holiday-makers keen to experience the Great Barrier Reef at Fitzroy Reef and Lady Musgrave Island, both a 90-minute boat ride from 1770. Now, most of their bookings are from people from Melbourne and Sydney.

On my first night I drove to 1770 in search of

a gourmet meal – a quest which proved a little challenging as the only options were no-frills, milk bar-style cafés serving traditional Aussie fare. Some have smartened their menus by adding frozen oysters and \$19 fillet mignons, but the town's only fresh seafood is at the Saltwater Café.

Sharing the same building as the local pub, Saltwater is run by chef Ed Fallon, whose experience has included cooking in Nice, San Francisco and Sydney. "1770 is going through a transition where a sophisticated crowd from Sydney, Melbourne, London and Germany are slowly replacing the local caravan mob," he says. "Setting the menu choices and prices to suit all budgets is my biggest challenge."

The next day I joined an eco-adventure tour on a Light Amphibious Resupply Cargo vessel to visit Queensland's first coastal lighthouse, the Bustard Head Light-station. The tour took us onto long stretches of pristine beach and across tidal creeks beside the windswept bushland of



The unspoilt position of Queensland's Town of 1770 is attracting city investors.

Eurimbula National Park, a popular camping spot. On our way back, we stopped at Middle Island and took turns sliding down the sand dunes that rise dramatically from the beach. Later, from the rugged cliff top at Round Hill Head, we watched the sun set while dolphins and turtles swam in the clear blue sea below, surrounded by tussock grasslands, pandanus, acacias, banksias and eucalypts – all part of the Joseph Banks Environmental Park.

BY MY SECOND day, as happens to most visitors, I found it impossible not to ask about local property prices. I learned that while 1770 and Agnes Waters prices have risen steeply over the past three years, they remain modest by Noosa standards. Sales above \$1.5 million still sets tongues wagging. “Noosa buyers are interested in 1770 because of its seclusion and pristine unspoilt position,” says Olivier Miller from Laguna Noosa Real Estate.

David Culpan from PRD Nationwide agrees. Two years ago, this 40-year old Sydney investment banker – sick of “working long hours, always being on call and with a corporate credit card you’re expected to use for entertaining 24/7” – moved to 1770. Originally headed for

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Noosa, but redirected to 1770 by a friend, Culpan rejects the cliché that 1770 will become the next Noosa. Certainly, 1770 has already attracted some high-profile investors, including Michael Baevski from Melbourne’s Myer family. He’s constructing a luxury ecologically-sustainable villa development, Sunrise at 1770, on

the beach near the Deep Water National Park. Its club-houses, massage pavilions and bars are almost complete and, as the property is designed to support local plant and wildlife, buyers are required to share a commitment to preserving the area’s natural ecology. Members of the Smorgon family are among those who bought into the development.

As monied city folk buy into the area, many long-term residents are being forced out by spiralling council rates which, although on many of the house lots there is no sewerage or water in 1770, can reach as high as \$6000 a year.

For now at least, the one word that encapsulates the mood at 1770 is ‘relaxed’. 1770’s residents continue to lounge on the beach and go fishing, still in their aluminium tinnies, until the luxury yachts start to arrive. ■

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