

Striking a balance

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A COUPLE of years ago Agnes Water was being touted as the next Noosa – but it's better than that.

Now that's a big call, particularly from a longtime Noosaophile.

But the former Melbourne–Sydney social annexe on the Sunshine Coast has lost a bit of its sheen and some of the real money is going elsewhere.

Agnes is at the stage of development (though quite a few of the real locals wish it wasn't) when it's the place to visit before it becomes like its southern seaside counterparts.

There is still that slower country feel and enough untainted coastline to evoke memories of yesteryear, but enough development for all the creature comforts.

Good accommodation can be found, from basic to luxury, eateries from fish and chip shop to fine dining, uncrowded beaches, decent roads and a great climate. And on top of those five holiday essentials there is some shopping.

I first visited Agnes 30 years ago and it was basic – beautiful, but basic. The road in was a shocker, there was no pub, no shop, no nothing.

Down the dirt track, if your Kingswood could make it, was some semblance of civilisation at the Town of 1770, but Agnes was camping in the bush and bringing your own everything.

Fortunately I married a woman whose family members were longtime visitors to Agnes.

They owned and still own cattle properties west of Agnes around Rosedale, northwest of Bundaberg, and they would take their cattle in search of feed down the track to the water.

As is the way with many a farmer, they have a beach shack that has been in the family for generations.

Across beautiful Baffle Creek, teeming with wildlife, they would drive their cattle in search of winter feed.

Or in summer they would seek out crabs and fish and a cool breeze to provide relief from the hot and harsh bush.

So I revisited Agnes and continue to do so, and have fallen in love with the place.

With kiddies in tow we now have to think about school holidays for the five-year-old and we figured it might be a bit busy this time, but what the heck.

It was the middle of the June–July holiday break and there were vacancies everywhere and kilometres of uncrowded beaches.

The water wasn't exactly warm, but I soon discarded my full-length wetsuit for a vest and boardshorts in the middle of the day and the kids frolicked in the water as long as we would allow them.

There has been a shopping centre at Agnes for a while, strangely split in two by the road to the Town of 1770, and there are all your basics, though no flash joints like in Noosa.

Maybe that's why we like it.

We stayed at Sandcastles Motel and Resort right on the beachfront, walked to the water and into town, refuelled at the eateries, went to Kahunas for pizza and a beer at night and the Bean Cafe for breakfast and lunch, surfed, fished and had a relaxing holiday away from the fast pace of the city and the quickening pace of the Gold and Sunshine Coasts.

It is a bit of a drive from Brisbane, comfortably done in about six hours.

And there's surf, too, although not as consistent or probably as big as on the Coasts because much of the swell is blocked or deflected by the southern tip of the Great Barrier Reef. But it was OK and it does get good if you can pick it.

Agnes is a boaties' paradise with myriad inlets, bays and an estuary to explore and fish, and a safe passage to go reef fishing and to points further north.

Offshore reefs intermittently offer good waves for surfers.

The accommodation ranges from luxury beach houses or motel units at Sandcastles and a couple of resorts on the road around to 1770, to bed-and-breakfasts and plenty of holiday houses in Agnes itself.

As is often the way, the backpackers have discovered Agnes as a relatively cheap, Australian seaside experience.

There are other resorts coming, but there is no high-rise and no traffic lights or jams – yet.

The pace is slow, the people friendly and it feels untouched.