

Hello Sunshine

Behind Lake Cootharaba, the impressive 439-metre Mount Cooroora offers sweeping views of the hinterland. **opposite** A typical roadside stall with fresh local farm produce.



The Sunshine Coast is famed for its beaches, but those who wander beyond into the hinterland will be amazed by its many wonders.

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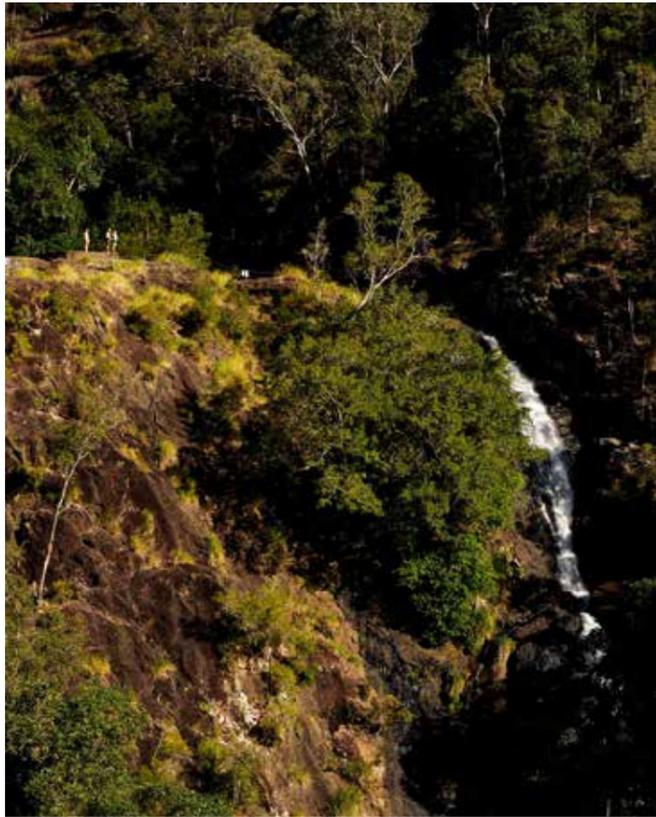


top An after-school treat from Kin Kin's favourite. **bottom** Soaking up the lightshow from Mayan Farm, inland from Kin Kin. **opposite** Hanging out at Kondaililla Falls rock pool.

● The Sunshine Coast hinterland is a diverse environment of waterfalls, lush rainforest, undulating back country hills amongst ancient volcanic peaks and the world's largest crocodile-free everglades. Escape the busy beach communities and wander along mountain paths, reflecting how this land provided so much in both cultural significance plus an abundance of food to the Kabi Kabi people for tens of thousands of years.

Within a generation of arriving, the European settlers had dramatically altered the landscape in their quest for timber. Their legacy is a region of rich farmland and many old timber towns scattered throughout the valleys and ridges. Staying at Mayan Farm, a rammed-earth villa on a 100-acre working farm inland from Kin Kin, we were treated to ochre sunsets above emerald rolling hills. Dawns were misty in the valleys below with the May sun soon burning off the low fog.

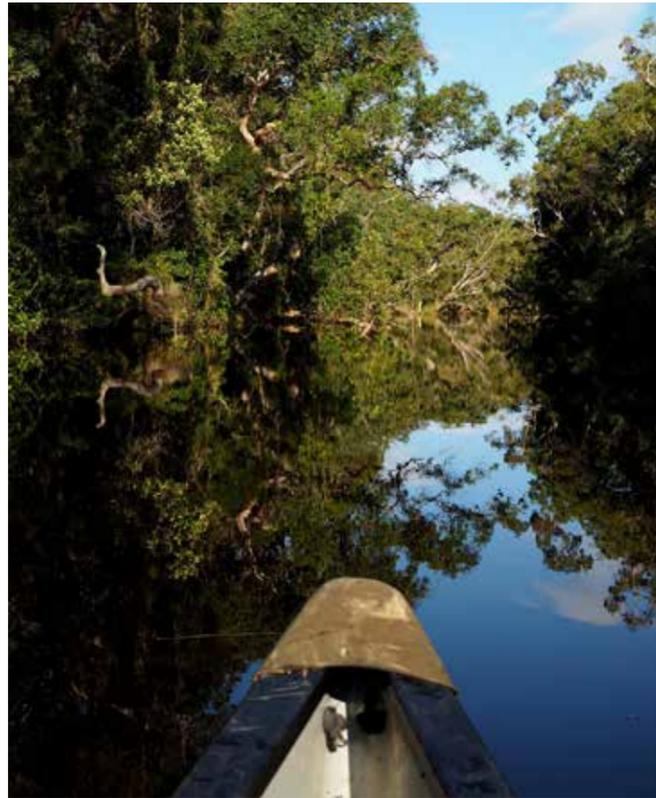
The property owners, Jodie and Brett also operate Kin Kin General Store and Black Ant Gourmet and the farm's free-range stock is key to their paddock-to-plate philosophy. Not only will you find a feast at the store for your day's picnic, but Jodie has a wealth of knowledge on the best trails and lookouts to visit. On an early-morning stroll towards Sheppersons Hill, we crossed a burbling stream in the valley with whipbirds calling and the sun filtering through the canopy. At the peak, sweeping views to the east are over the protected Noosa Biosphere surrounding Lake Cootharaba and onto the distant headlands and sparkling ocean. In this area, the Noosa Trail Network has routes of various lengths snaking across the ranges, rich farmland, hilltop lookouts and lakes of the hinterland. >



Heading south from Kin Kin, there are regular markets to visit in the regional towns – check local guides for open times. Roadside stalls are commonplace on the back lanes and fresh produce including avocados, papayas, limes and ginseng are available. Inland, there are many waterfalls plunging down densely-forested ravines and gullies. The Mapleton Falls are easily viewed from a vertiginous lookout. From here, a relatively easy walk loops through lush rainforest with giant kauri pines being engulfed by strangling figs. Further south, the iconic Kondalilla Falls rock pools provide welcome rejuvenation after a short hike through a humid understorey.

A whole day can be spent exploring the diverse ecosystem of the Noosa Everglades (did I mention crocodile-free?), a large tropical wetland extending through the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park. Heading by canoe beyond Fig Tree Point on Lake Cootharaba and then north on the upper reaches of Noosa River, the dark, tannin-stained water is mirror-like – creating surreal imagery of the reflected tree-lined bank. The serene scene is only disturbed by the birds repeatedly diving from overhanging branches as we sliced through the glassy waters. This region has over 40 per cent of Australia’s bird species and on a late-afternoon paddle through The Narrows we observed whistling kite, kingfishers flashing by and olive-backed oriole diving into the water, returning to preen on a limb directly overhead. >

top left Skene Creek plummets 90 metres at Kondalilla Falls. **right** A busy morning at Eumundi Markets. **bottom** A farm in the Kin Kin hinterland in the late-afternoon light. **opposite** Pushing off from Fig Tree Point for a paddle through The Noosa Everglades.



top left Heading through The Narrows on the upper Noosa River with the dark water acting like a mirror. **right** The sub-tropical rainforest on the Wompoo Circuit near Mapleton Falls. **bottom** The Wilderness tents nestled in the bush of the everglades ecocamp at habitatnoosa.

Some five kilometres upstream is Harry's Hut, an ideal camping spot amongst the low-lying paperbark and scribbly gum woodland. For the more adventurous, there are several campsites further upstream for another 15 kilometres. Plus, there's a variety of walks including crossing to the ocean on the Teewah Beach Walk or a 12-kilometre hike to the striking Cooloola Sandpatch. For those who really want to immerse themselves in the Everglades, there is the multi-day hike on the Cooloola Wilderness Trail.

And of course, there are the seductive beaches and headlands of Noosa National Park to explore by foot. A good approach to avoid the battle of Hastings Street is to start at Sunshine Beach and walk north over the headland to the pristine Alexandria Bay. After a splash in the surf, there are many tracks to choose from in the subtropical rainforest, open woodlands and wallum scrub of the national park and then you can loop back via the iconic headlands and stunning Tea Tree and Granite bays.

This region offers a remarkable amount of varied activities amongst a diverse and spectacular setting. There is so much to investigate away from the beach in this rich landscape. Load up your backpack with a hamper of fresh produce and disappear for the day deep in the forest, up a creek or on a track to a remote waterfall.

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