



COVER STORY

Gold stars

For those bored of boards, there's been little to wax lyrical about over the years when discussing Queensland's most coveted strip of sand, the Gold Coast.

Yet close to a century since pioneering Brisbane publican Jim Cavill opened the Surfers Paradise Hotel, you'll now find some real specks of unexpected gold here if you're prepared to dig a little deeper.

Suddenly the Gold Coast is a foodie's paradise, a design-lover's paradise, an architecture-lover's paradise. It's even a culture-lover's paradise (well near-enough to paradises). And Cavill would be shocked to learn that now you don't even need to get wet to enjoy it.

Take HOTA (Home of the Arts). God knows what Andy Warhol would make of the Gold Coast, even now, let alone Surfers Paradise, but several of his works are on display at the *Pop Masters: Art from the Mugaribi Collection, New York*, at HOTA.

In 2021 during the pandemic, HOTA moved into stunning new premises, complete with the hip rooftop bar, The Exhibitionist, overlooking the Gold Coast.

At the same time, this famed strip of

Forget the tacky bling of years gone by: this Queensland drawcard has reinvented itself. By Craig Tansley and Anthony Dennis

coastline was constructing its first genuine and architecturally-impressive five-star-plus beachside hotel and residences, the now open Langham at Broadbeach, injecting some big Asian hotel group panache to this part of Queensland.

Speaking of architecture, back down the coast, a cutting-edge apartment block, Norfolk, at Burleigh Heads has attracted international attention. Designed by the Australian firm Koichi Takada Architects, Norfolk features retractable slatted wooden screens and thin balconies that reference the form of a pine cone.

All the way along and off the at-times unlovely Gold Coast Highway, retro motels, such as the Mysa at Palm Beach, are finally getting the cool Miami-style makeover treatment.

The Gold Coast even boasts what is possibly Australia's sexiest supermarket, Tugun Market Co, complete with its own cafe, fromagerie and florist, built inside a converted fruit barn.

Still need convincing? Well, try our in-depth guide on how to extract the most, and perhaps least predictable, enjoyment from 72 hours (but why stop there?) on the suddenly more grown-up Gold Coast.

Pack your board for sure but be warned - you may not even get time to use it.

DAY ONE

Morning | After choosing one or two of our recommended lodgings (see panel opposite and MyQueensland.com.au) as your base, make your way to Miami, the eponymous Gold Coast suburb. Once a semi-industrial

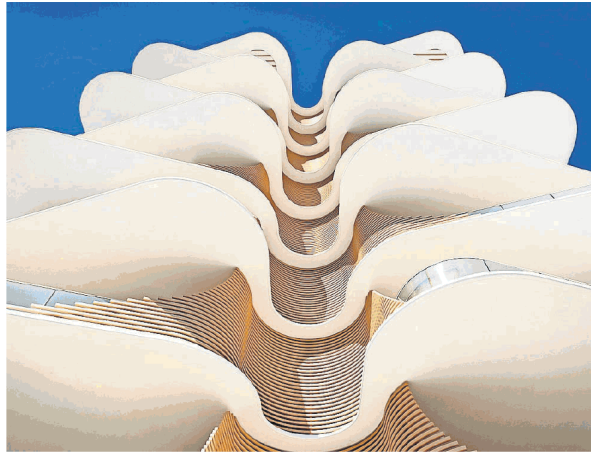
suburb, it's now one of the coolest cafe and art enclaves of any region in Queensland.

You won't believe the choice you'll have for breakfast here with the perennial favourite being treats from Paddock Bakery (paddockbakery.com). This is an Instagram staple in a weatherboard cottage, with coffee lattes served in a picket-fenced, tree-shaded courtyard.

Drive north to HOTA (Hota.com.au) the venue that's made the Gold Coast a genuine cultural destination. Visit the aforementioned Pop Masters exhibition (until early June), then head upstairs for lunch at The Exhibitionist (theexhibitionistbar.com.au) rooftop bar.

This is surely one of the hippest hangouts at any Australian art institution, with views across the luxury watercraft-dotted canals to Surfers Paradise and the gorgeous Gold Coast hinterland. Eat your heart out, NGV and AGNSW.

Afternoon | Broadwater is a calm-water estuary just north of Surfers Paradise, which runs to Brisbane's Moreton Bay. From HOTA, you can catch the Hopo Gold Coast Ferry (hopo.com.au).



Clockwise from main: Room with a view at Rick Shores; seafood at Rick Shores; the Norfolk building in Burleigh Heads; a dish at Siblings Kirra; HOTA (Home of the Arts); a cocktail at Paloma Wine Bar; and the lobby of the Dorsett Gold Coast.



FIVE PLACES TO STAY ON THE GOLD COAST

Langham Gold Coast, Surfers Paradise

The Gold Coast's first genuine five-star plus hotel, the Langham Gold Coast feels like it's in its own private beachside universe. Just 30 metres from the sand, every room looks out across the ocean or over the coast's mountainous hinterland. There's a 20-metre pool with lagoon-style sandy beaches and transplanted palm trees if you prefer to skip the waves. Add to that an upscale Cantonese restaurant, T'Ang Court; a ground-floor eatery, Akoya, which makes you feel like you're dining right in the dunes, and a cool, untypically hotel-like cafe, 26 & Sunny, metres from the beach. See langhamhotels.com

The Dorsett, Broadbeach

The latest hotel addition to the vast Star Gold Coast complex, this is the first branch of the Hong Kong-based Dorsett brand to open in Australia. This smartly-designed four-star, 313-room hotel is directly connected to the casino complex with its myriad attractions including the SkyPoint Observation Deck. The hotel's most impressive feature is its Isoletto Pool Club, billed as the "perfect oasis in the sky", with a 12-metre "viewing wall" overlooking Broadbeach. Here at the club guests can take a dip, sip a cocktail or snaffle a snack. See dorsetthotels.com

QT Gold Coast, Surfers Paradise

Set in the heart of the Gold Coast's glitzy Surfers Paradise, QT Gold Coast still manages to offer a quiet retreat into the region's colourful past. There may be 300 rooms, but it feels intimate and nostalgic with home-made lemonade served in bottles on arrival, a VW Kombi by the front door, wooden surfboards from the '50s and vintage bikes available. Rooms offer ocean, mountain or river views and there's a market-style restaurant, a Japanese restaurant, the chic Stingray Lounge and a swim-up bar at an outdoor pool. See qthotels.com

JW Marriott Resort & Spa, Surfers Paradise

JW Marriott Resort & Spa's first Australian property is a place you need never leave on your holiday, though you're only five minutes' walk from the beach near Surfers Paradise. The tropical lagoon with white sand beaches and waterfalls is its piece de resistance. But, thankfully, nothing evokes memories of Gold Coast bling. There's a silver Airstream serving lunch beside the beach; stylish slow-moving, enormous rattan fans in the lobby; a market garden outside, plus multiple dining options and activities such as jet skiing and paddleboarding on a canal behind the resort on offer. See marriott.com

Sheraton Grand Mirage Resort, Main Beach

You can't get closer to the sea than here. Sheraton Grand Mirage Resort is the Gold Coast's classic five-star absolute beach-front resort with the sand only 20 steps from the water from a beachfront room. Set in six hectares of lagoons and tropical gardens, you could spend your entire holiday within the resort enjoying your own beach, two bars, restaurant and outdoor pool. But being on The Spit – a thin section of terra firma between the sea and the Gold Coast Seaway, you're in walking distance of marinas with luxury bars and restaurants offering boat tours. See marriott.com

It will deliver you to four other destinations: the hustle and bustle of Surfers Paradise; Sea World (seaworld.com.au) and family-friendly Broadwater Parklands (goldcoast.qld.gov.au).

Here you'll find water parks and waterside restaurants and cafes while there's also Marina Mirage (marinamirage.com.au), an entertainment and dining hub for the aquatically-minded.

You can also drive to Marina Mirage and enjoy some boating. From June-October whale-watching tours take you past the Seaway and into the ocean with a good chance of coming face-to-face with migrating humpbacks.

Evening | On and around The Spit, a narrow strip of sand between the Pacific Ocean and the Broadwater are gathered some of the Gold Coast's ritziest restaurants, including fine diner Mare Restaurant (lalunabeachclub.com.au), part of Australia's only floating beach club, La Luna.

Dine right on the water, with superyachts all around. Or take an Uber (or your own wheels) 15 minutes south to the northern

Gold Coast's dining and night-time entertainment epicentre, Broadbeach.

Here you'll find restaurants for every taste, right beside each other on Oracle Boulevard. Our pick is Social Eating House (socialeatinghouse.com.au), set among exposed brick and blue velvet lounges. Its lamb dish is the stuff of legend.

DAY TWO

Morning | Take a beach walk along the Southport Spit and check out the fitness festival in action. Gold Coasters love to rise early to walk, run or surf.

Stroll to the Gold Coast Seaway and watch the trawlers come in from a night's work and surfers paddle across to South Stradbroke Island. Grab breakfast at the Seaway Kiosk (seawaykiosk.com)

Afternoon | You want cool? It's easy to drive from here to the Gold Coast Hinterland, where the temperature drops the higher you go.

To see all the hinterland would take days, but it's easy to access Mount Tamborine (visittamborinemountain.com.au) half an hour's drive west.

The Gold Coast hinterland is home to three world heritage listed national parks with some of the oldest rainforest on Earth, one of which is Tamborine National Park (parks.des.qld.gov.au), 1160 hectares of rainforest over 14 separate reserves.

Mount Tamborine's tiny village is home to many art galleries you can visit on the Gallery Walk.

Take an easy three-kilometre hike at Witches Falls Circuit then drop in at the region's wineries, Witches Falls Winery and Cedar Creek Estate.

A hinterland alternative to the more well-trammelled Tamborine is Springbrook National Park (parks.des.qld.gov.au), site of the imposing Natural Bridge formation formed by the force of a waterfall over a basalt cave.

Springbrook also offers magnificent lookout views of the Gold Coast and the Tweed Coast overlooking the NSW town of Murwillumbah. From here you can continue south on the wonderfully scenic loop drive, briefly entering NSW, before heading back across the border to the Gold Coast. ▶