

# port douglas

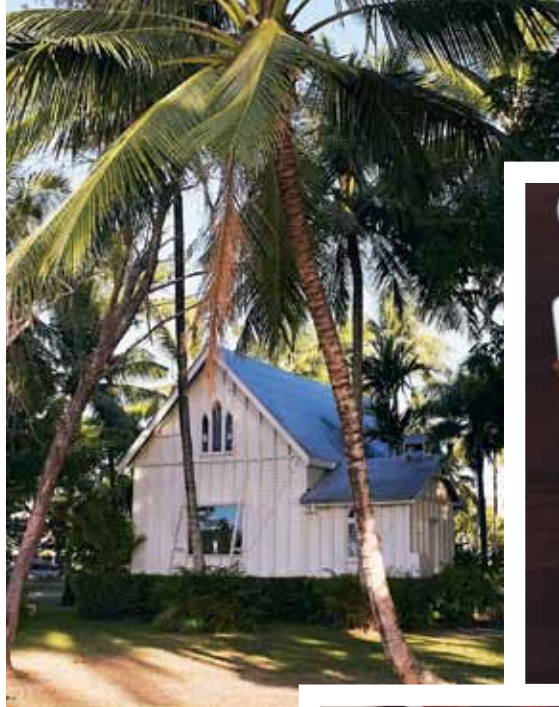
This Far North Queensland beauty offers chic dining, cafes and cocktail lounges plus year-round sunshine, making it the perfect winter escape.

WORDS ALISON PICKEL PHOTOGRAPHY JARED FOWLER





Clockwise: the bar at Sassi Cucina; historic church St. Mary's by the Sea at Anzac Park; Sassi's unforgettable tiramisu; Di and Tony Sassi. Previous page: Anzac Park offers sunset views over Sugar Wharf.



Just one-hour's drive north of Cairns, flanked by the Atherton Tablelands on one side and pristine coastline on the other, Port Douglas is a picture-perfect tropical paradise. From June to October is the best time to visit, with an idyllic 25°C average and no stingers in the water. You can still swim year-round, however, thanks to the stinger net at Four Mile Beach.

A gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, Port Douglas is also a great base to explore some of Far North Queensland's other gems. Undisturbed Cooya Beach, the quaint town of Mossman and the nearby Mossman Gorge that is part of the heritage-listed Daintree Rainforest are all easily accessible along roads lined with sugar cane fields.

## where to eat: restaurants

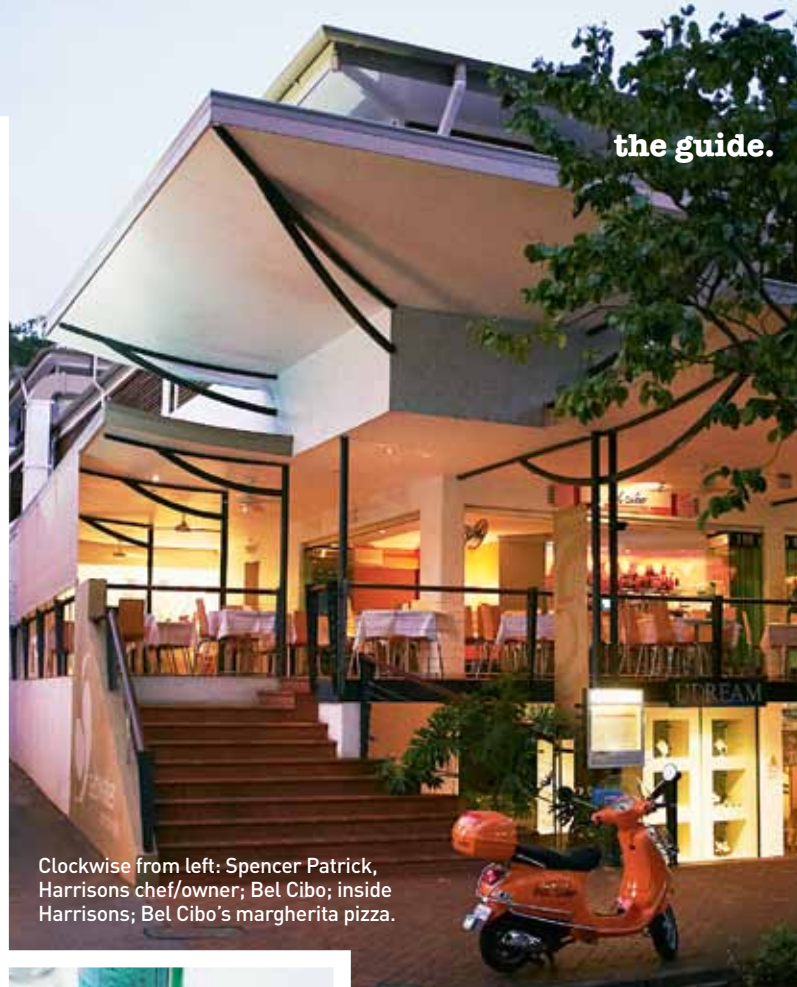
### HARRISONS

Spencer Patrick earned a Michelin star at London's Cafe Royal Grill Room and has worked with Raymond Blanc and Marco Pierre White, but these days he prefers warmer climes. His French-inspired menu incorporates local flavour and hints of Britain. The sweet crabmeat 'cannelloni' wrapped in carrot and served with coconut veloute elicits murmurs of delight, while a Moreton Bay bug special with caramelised witlof and celeriac puree is sublime when matched with a glass of Alsace Gentil Hugel 2009. Charming service and a refined wine list chosen by Spencer's wife, Reina, complete the experience. **22 Wharf St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 4011.**

### SASSI CUCINA

Tony and Di Sassi have been culinary trendsetters in Port Douglas for more than 20 years, having made a name for themselves at La Cucina and Sassi at Balé. Though Sassi Cucina represents a more laidback approach, Abruzzo-born Tony still turns out considered plates while Di's crisp, yet warm, front-of-house service makes for memorable dining. The linguini is brimming with seafood, and the flash-fried prawns are perhaps the best in town. For dessert, the tiramisu doesn't wimp out on espresso flavour and comes with wonderfully dark chocolate ice cream. And if you're very lucky, Tony might pop out of the kitchen to give an impromptu operatic performance. **9 Grant St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 6744.**





Clockwise from left: Spencer Patrick, Harrisons chef/owner; Bel Cibo; inside Harrisons; Bel Cibo's margherita pizza.

## ZINC

Book a booth or spend a balmy evening out on the terrace of this slick restaurant. The mod-Oz menu covers more than just the seafood-focused Asian-fusion flavours so popular here, with dishes such as pork tenderloin on a bed of cabbage and speck, followed by a fabulous ricotta and cherry strudel. Don't miss the tropical aquarium in the bathrooms. **Cnr Macrossan and Davidson sts, (07) 4099 6260.**

At the other end of the block, Zinc's sister, **Finz** (cnr Macrossan and Owen sts, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5433), is a good dine-in or takeaway option for seafood.



## BEL CIBO

New Zealand chef Andy Gray worked with Matt Moran at Sydney's Aria before moving north to open this Italian number. His pan-seared scallops are balanced with crisp pancetta and silky cauliflower puree, while pastas come in classic combinations such as chicken, lemon and rosemary. You can also enjoy thin-crust pizza and people-watching from the balcony. **26-30 Macrossan St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 6330.**

## BUCCI RISTORANTE

Bucci may be the more casual venture from Harrisons' Spencer Patrick, but you can still expect quality dining. Head chef Shaun Malone serves up local Vanella burrata drizzled with honey or an open lasagne of wagyu ragu with truffled mascarpone. To finish, enjoy their version of The River Cafe's renowned 'Chocolate Nemesis Cake'. **41 Macrossan St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 6364.**



For a special night out, **Nautilus** (17 Murphy St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5330) is an old favourite. Walk up the tree-canopied path to dine on lobster bisque or twice-cooked duck ravioli with cinnamon cream reduction.





Clockwise: the sunset views at 3.Nineteen; Billy's By the Sea; 3.Nineteen's chermoula prawns.



and housemade meals to take home. Enjoy rustic dinners Wednesdays to Fridays, such as Moroccan duck or barramundi with a turmeric potato crust. **1/366 Port Douglas Rd, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 3373.**

#### BILLY'S BY THE SEA

A Greek restaurant through the week, Billy's is also a great place to refuel on Sunday mornings before heading across the road to the markets (see 'Where to Shop'). Tuck into fluffy pancakes with berry compote, or try Billy Diacos's version of a breakfast bruschetta – toasted flatbread topped with avocado, rocket, tomato, bacon and a poached egg. **Cnr Wharf and Warner sts, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5558.**

#### FRESQ CAFE

Another popular spot from 3.Nineteen owners Mark and Hoaf Burnett, and it's easy to see why. The 'Blazing Saddles' – potato cake, homemade baked beans, roast tomato, ciabatta toast and fried egg lashed with barbecue sauce – can feed the hungriest cowboy. **Cnr Macrossan and Grant sts, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 6111.**

A few doors down, **Mocka's Pies** (9 Grant St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5295) has earned its place as an institution thanks to perfect flaky pastry and closely guarded recipes. Be sure to try the famous crocodile pie – for those too scared to commit, it comes in a taster size for only \$2.50.



### where to eat: cafes

#### 3.NINETEEN

Chef Damion Jones turns out delectable sharing plates such as chermoula prawns and 20-hour baked pork belly with pomegranate molasses in this outdoor cafe near Sugar Wharf. Come dusk, enjoy a mojito as the sun sets over the mountains. **4 Dixie St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 6319.**

#### OTZ FOOD

Tucked in a small cluster of shops well away from the main street, Otz Food is Port Douglas' worst-kept secret. Sisters Karen and Liz Fines offer simple food done well. Start the day with moist banana bread, or come later for house-baked quiche or supplies, from fresh produce to pâtés, oils





Clockwise: Salsa Bar & Grill; Watergate Lounge; a selection of Watergate's evening cocktails.



## where to drink

### BISTRO 3

The bar at this seafood diner offers water glimpses, smooth tunes and lush cocktails. The wine list includes some stellar Aussie drops – maybe a Lenton Brae Chardonnay from the Margaret River or a Barossa St Hallett Granache Shiraz Rosé – plus a few well selected Old World numbers. Like what you try? Buy a takeaway bottle at the wholesale price. **Cnr Macrossan and Wharf sts, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 6100.**

### SALSA BAR & GRILL

Salsa Bar is popular with locals for dinner, but is also great for late-afternoon cocktails accompanied by small bites such as nori rolls or moreish Thai chicken spring rolls with banana mayo. It's not on the list, but ask for a Pear Shaped – pear vodka with Chambord, lime, mint and sugar. **26 Wharf St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 4922.**

### WATERGATE LOUNGE

Owner Ricardo Cooney has worked in London and New York, so it's only natural he blends a little urban cool with a relaxed tropical vibe at his cocktail lounge. The sexy candlelit space shares its walls with the occasional gecko, as the large windows are flung open to let in the cool evening air. Shaken specialties include caipiroskas and margaritas, and their own creations such as the Plush – vodka, peach schnapps,



pineapple, lime, mint, cranberry juice and palm sugar. **5/31 Macrossan St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5544.**

Other options include the historic **Court House Hotel** (cnr Macrossan and Wharf sts, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5181) for beers and live music, or head to **On the Inlet** (3 Inlet St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5255) for George the 250kg groper's 5pm feed. The Combined Services Club, aka **The Tin Shed** (7 Ashford Ave, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5553), has top views of the marina, or take a punt on the cane-toad races at **The Iron Bar** (5 Macrossan St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 4776). For a little romance, **Derani Zealand of Horses in Port** (tel: 0412 772 182) will take you on a champagne sunset tour in a horse-drawn carriage.

## where to shop

### PORT DOUGLAS MARKETS

On Sunday mornings, Anzac Park is buzzing with Far North Queensland producers. Among the chai-scented soaps and wind chimes there are some great foodie gifts. Visit Coffee Works for lime and cracked-pepper chocolates, Pickled in Port for roasted beetroot chutney, or Cairns potter Ken Ison for a beautiful blue tagine. **Anzac Park, Wharf St, Port Douglas, Sunday, 8am–1.30pm.**

### ORIGIN ESPRESSO

Since opening a year ago, Mark Finch and Glen Thorp have been the main suppliers for the local java fans. They specialise in single-origin beans sourced from South America, Papua New Guinea and East Timor. They then roast, grind and package on site to ensure peak freshness. You can also sit at one of the pavement tables and enjoy an espresso with cake, and they blend a mean Karma Chai, too. **11/7 Grant St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 4586.**





Clockwise: The lobby at Peppers Beach Club; Shannonvale Tropical Fruit Winery; indigenous artwork at Mossman Gorge; Blood Orange manager Rebecca Nelson.



### BLOOD ORANGE

This tiny provedore offers a colourful array of produce, a good range of Asian groceries and local goods such as cane sugar, cheese and coffee, though the highlights are chef Pip Coombe's vinaigrettes, sauces, relishes, chutneys and reheat-and-eat meals. **9 Warner St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 4979.**

Next door at **Seafood House** (11 Warner St, Port Douglas, (07) 4099 5368) you can order mud crabs fresh or cooked or, for a taste of the region, buy some sugar-cane-cured trout or smoked crocodile.



## where to stay

### PEPPERS BEACH CLUB

Peppers has something for everyone. The spa suites are ideal for two, while the one- and two-bedroom suites are more family friendly. During school holidays, young ones can hang out at the kids' club, while parents can relax with a cocktail around the huge pool complete with man-made beach. **20-22 Davidson St, Port Douglas, (07) 4087 1000, peppers.com.au, from \$308 per double including breakfast.**

### SHANTARA RESORT & SPA

Just a short walk to Macrossan Street, Shantara Resort & Spa offers an all-adult sanctuary. Each of the bright, airy rooms comes with kitchens or kitchenettes and

generously sized bathrooms, with many also including a spa bath. **27-31 Davidson St, Port Douglas, (07) 4084 1400, shantara.com.au, from \$205 per double.**

### SIX BEACHFRONT MIRAGE

If you're looking to stay for at least a few nights, Hans and Wendy van der Wolf have lots of unique properties for groups of all sizes. Number six is a two-minute walk to Four Mile Beach and caters for up to eight people. It comes with a fully equipped kitchen, games room and a private pool. Welcoming touches include L'Occitane toiletries and a Nespresso coffee maker. **6 Beachfront Mirage, Port Douglas, (07) 4098 1418, executiveretreats.com.au, from \$950 per night.**

## further north

### SILKY OAKS LODGE

Since taking over two years ago, Barbara and Paul Vin Min have turned Silky Oaks into the ultimate couple's hideout. There are no TVs in the bungalows, but all come with spas, iPod docks and hammocks on the balconies – some overlooking the Mossman River. The Treehouse Restaurant offers smart Australian cuisine in the heart of the rainforest. They can even arrange romantic riverside dinners for two. **Finlayvale Rd, Mossman, (07) 4098 1666, silkyoakslodge.com.au, from \$327 per double including breakfast.**





the guide.

Clockwise: Treehouse Restaurant at Silky Oaks Lodge; learn about Cooya Beach wildlife with Linc and Brandon Walker; Mojos' salt-and-pepper squid; Shantara Resort & Spa.

## KUKU YALANJI CULTURAL HABITAT TOURS

Spend a few hours spearfishing on the mud flats and mangroves surrounding Cooya Beach with brothers Linc and Brandon Walker of the Kubirri Warra people. Between teaching you to throw a woomera and demonstrating their unfailing knowledge of the native wildlife, they'll happily answer questions about their heritage and the area. Catch mangrove mussels, crabs, scallops or, for the more adventurous, green ants right off the tree, then venture back to base to cook up your day's catch. **Tel: (07) 4098 3437, from \$75 per person.**

## SHANNONVALE TROPICAL FRUIT WINERY

Like the sign says out front, these wines are not sticky and sweet. In fact, many of Trudie and Tony Woodall's fruit versions can be matched with food like traditional drops. The passionfruit has lovely smoky

characters to suit creamy sauces, while jaboticaba – their chilled red – solves the dilemma of what to drink with Indian. There are also six fortifieds, including a dreamy chocolate port. **417 Shannonvale Rd, Mossman, (07) 4098 4000.**

## MOJOS BAR & GRILL

A town favourite, Mojos comes highly recommended for a casual meal. The menu is familiar with burgers, wraps, pastas and salads, but it's the spicy, yet yielding salt-and-pepper squid with peanut mojo, nam jim and lime mayonnaise that really draws the crowd. **41 Front St, Mossman, (07) 4098 1202.**

## THE JUNCTION

Cute vintage teapots, family photos and a blackboard menu give this cafe a quirky feel. Come for perfectly cooked eggs, bacon and Toby's Estate coffee. My Gaelic

dining companion vouched for the authenticity of the full Irish breakfast, right down to the little pork sausages. **1/5 Front St, Mossman, (07) 4098 3398.**

## MOSSMAN BUTCHERING COMPANY

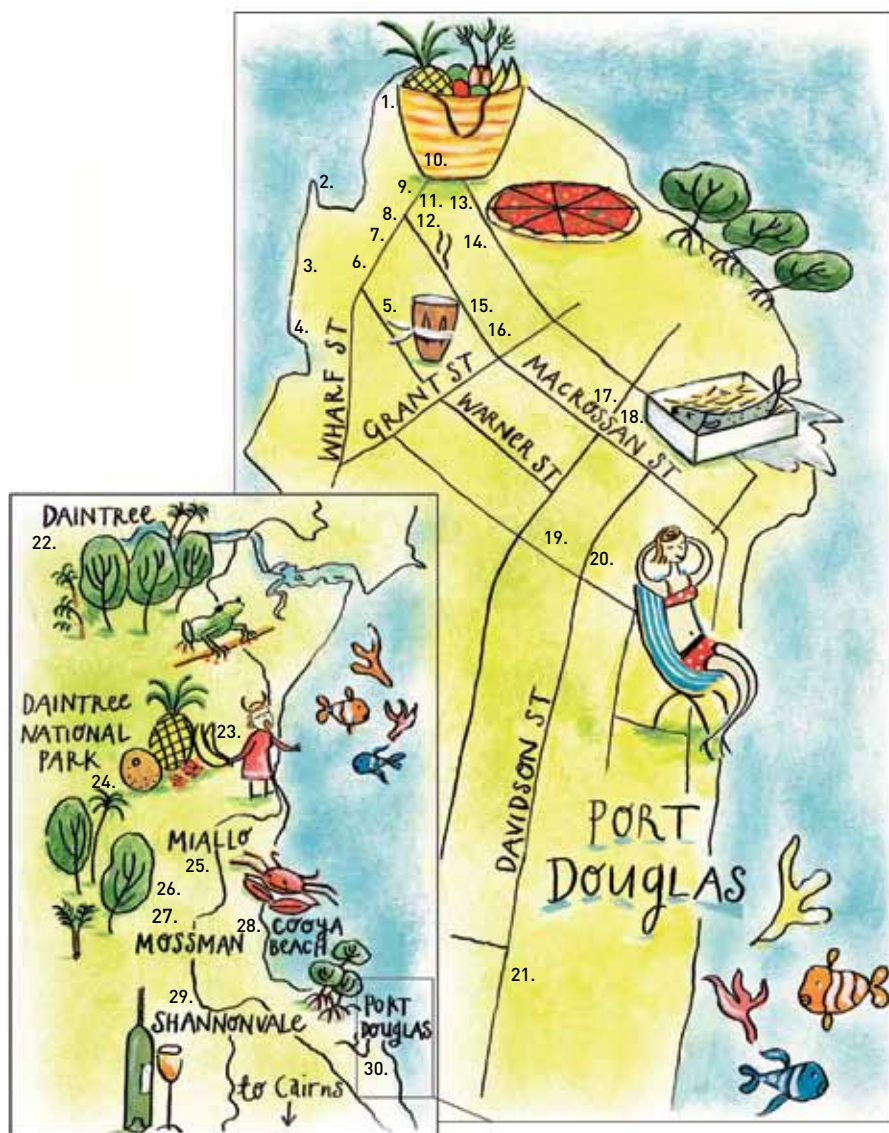
Aaron Valentine's fantastic butchery is worth a visit if you're planning a barbecue. His award-winning gourmet snags come in varieties such as lamb and feta, pork, sweet chilli and mango, and even a chilli kransky. Hams are smoked on site, the chooks are bio-dynamic, and beef and pork come from the Atherton Tablelands. **3 Junction Rd, Mossman, (07) 4098 2244.**

## SCOMAZZON'S ROADSIDE STALL

Straight-talking Deirdre Scomazzon is one of the great characters of the area. In this large tin shed off the highway, she sells tropical fruits from her and husband Bruno's farm. There are also old-fashioned lollies at the counter or enjoy a frozen sugar cane juice. **Scomazzon Rd, Mossman.**



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### HIGH FALLS FARM

A treasure hidden by canefields, High Falls Farm is a great lunch stop. Although it's only open during the dry season, this is the time to reap the benefits of the farm's crop. Enjoy snapper with bush spices and grilled Pacific plantain, or chicken salad with a mango and ginger sauce, washed down with a chocolatey black sapote smoothie. After your meal, take a self-guided tour of the orchard to see more than 60 exotic fruit trees, including lychees, water cherries and the intriguing miracle fruit – just don't forget the mozzie repellent. **Old Forestry Rd, Miallo, (07) 4098 8480.**

### KARNAK PLAYHOUSE

This is no ordinary dinner-and-a-show joint. Diane Cilento gained fame on the stage and screen, and as Sean Connery's ex-wife, before returning to her native Queensland to open Karnak. The open-air theatre has hosted the likes of Opera Australia and David Helfgott, against a stunning backdrop of a lit-up lake, where frogs and crickets chime into the performance. Chef Dwayne Drew prepares courses matched to the show – perhaps 'Figaro' fig and date pudding for Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. **Upper Whyanbeel Rd, Whyanbeel Valley, (07) 4098 8111.**

### DAINTREE ECO LODGE & SPA

To really get away from it all, stay in one of 15 stilt bungalows set in the rainforest. The menu at the Julaymba Restaurant is based on indigenous ingredients, while many components in the Daintree Essentials toiletries are found on the property. Indulge in a spa treatment or get closer to nature with a relaxing massage by the waterfall. **20 Daintree Rd, Daintree, (07) 4098 6100, daintree-ecolodge.com.au, from \$350 per double including breakfast. d.**

*Thanks to Tourism Queensland for assistance with this feature. For more information, visit: tropicalholidays.com.au.*