

Aesthetic LINES

ARTISTIC ESCAPE

For a fresh perspective on Southern Queensland – a lush region that defies categorisation – join Carla Grossetti as she connects the dots along the Sunshine Coast Art Gallery Trail

It's late Saturday afternoon in Eumundi and the sky is honey coloured. As the autumn sunshine streams over the distant hills, floppy-hatted buskers start sawing away on their violins. Nearby, a pavement artist applies the finishing touches to his chalk rendition of a Rossetti masterpiece as a pair of pony-tailed teens nod in appreciation. Meanwhile, a tutu-clad blonde is having a loud, politically charged conversation with a French tourist.

It's market day and I feel as if I've stepped into a tourist brochure full of images that perfectly capture the bustle and buzz of Eumundi. It's a little cultural oasis and these idiosyncratic characters form part of a snapshot designed to sum up the town's identity.

After mooching about the weekly markets all morning, I've bagged a stool at Joe's Waterhole to catch my breath. Uncle Bob's Jug Band is about to play and the bar is crowded with locals and tourists, drinking and chatting and being extravagantly friendly to one another.

Eumundi is one of many bustling hinterland towns on the map of must-see places along the Sunshine Coast Art Gallery Trail, which came into being a decade or so ago. There's plenty of lush scenery along the trail, which is about 100km

long, extends from Caloundra to Gympie and takes about three days to complete. A shorter section – which takes in Eumundi, Kenilworth, Maleny and Montville – can be covered by car in a day.

Peter Homan, Eumundi Markets' general manager, agrees that a stroll around the stalls is a great way to glean a sense of the region's character. Peter is no shrinking violet – the 52-year-old wears a jaunty red hat that's meant to help marketeers find him in the maze-like market. He broke free of the shackles of conformity two decades ago when he tossed in his job at a petrochemical company after falling in love with Noosa and the surrounding region.

At Peter's urging, I slice through the crowds. Soon, I come across more of the market's larger-than-life characters, such as the "Eumundi Medicine Man" – famous for mixing potent herbal brews – a procession of saffron-robed Hare Krishnas, a red-tressed woman doing a tarot reading, and a young man inking temporary tattoos onto women enjoying a hen-party outing.

Eumundi Markets thrives on what is essentially an undercurrent of chaos, which Peter has helped orchestrate for the past decade. "The experience of visiting Eumundi Markets is as valid as going to a gallery in terms of

WHAT TO SEE

- **Caloundra Regional Gallery**, 22 Omrah Ave, tel: (0)7 5420 8299, www.caloundraregionalgallery.org.au
- **Art on Cairncross**, Cairncross Cnr, Maleny, tel: (0)7 5429 6404, www.artoncairncross.com.au
- **Maroochy Regional Bushland Botanic Gardens**, Tanawha, tel: (0)7 5445 3375, www.friendsofmaroochybotanicgardens.org.au
- **Lasting Impressions Gallery**, 6 Elizabeth St, Kenilworth, tel: (0)7 5446 0422, www.lastingimpressionsgallery.net
- **Red Desert Gallery**, Memorial Dr, Eumundi, tel: (0)7 5442 7172, www.reddesertgallery.com.au
- **Noosa Regional Gallery**, Riverside, Pelican St, Tewantin, tel: (0)7 5449 5340



WHAT TO DO

- **Bulcock Street Markets**, Caloundra, tel: (0)7 5492 5977, www.caloundrabuzz.com
- **Belmondos Fresh Food Market**, 59 Rene St, Noosaville, tel: (0)7 5474 4404, www.belmondos.com
- **Noosa Farmers Market**, AFL Grounds, Weyba Rd, Noosaville, www.noosafarmersmarket.com.au
- **Kawana Waters Farmers Market**, Stern Dr, Sportsman's Parade, Kawana Waters, www.kawanawatersfarmersmarket.com.au
- **Eumundi Markets**, Memorial Dr, Eumundi, tel: (0)7 5442 7106, www.eumundimarkets.com.au

enriching the region's cultural heritage," says Peter, who also organises the town's annual Body Art Carnivale. "This is an arty area. It attracts a creative class of people. The market has a core value – that the bulk of products for sale must be handcrafted. The carnivale, too, is all about originality."

Indeed, one stallholder creates shoals of fish from stainless steel, which he sells as wall hangings. Another makes whales from copper. An up-and-coming designer refashions men's shirts into dresses.

While the trail appears to be an ode to both art and the artists who make it, the drive along it is like a beautiful work of art in its own right. It makes for a worthy day or two away from the coast.

Art trail co-founder Tony Gill is one of many eloquent local residents who offer places to linger along the trail, in his case it's Art on Cairncross in the hinterland township of Maleny. Tony has lived on the Sunshine Coast for three decades. During that time, the area has evolved from isolated farm community at the turn of the 20th century to hippie stronghold during the '60s to creative hub starting in the '70s.

"The artistic community has helped shape this area and is integral to its energy, without compromising on the fact that it's still a peaceful place to come and enjoy a break from city life," he says.

Often described as the Nimbin of the north, Maleny retains that bohemian imprint

– it's a place where you can expect to see farmers in trucks rolling past cafés full of cheesecloth-wearing locals sipping chai lattes.

The beauty of the trail is that journeys along its length can be tailor-made to suit the individual. My husband and I kicked off a "day trip for dilettantes" in the coastal township of Noosa, where, along with ample time to admire the Indigenous art at the Desert Rain Gallery, we factored in a few days of surf, sand and sun before heading for the hills.

One minute we were in the centre of a coastal town full of salon-tanned beautiful people and grizzled surfers, the next we were cruising at a snail's pace in the countryside near Cooroy. Tony says the trail is aimed at visitors looking for a fresh perspective on the lush Queensland region.

"We've had a vibrant counterculture here ever since the '60s, as many of those original hippies – artists, performers and musicians – have stayed on, which just adds to the region's colour and character," he says.

The branches of the trail that criss-cross this region lead visitors to galleries and studios that showcase top local, national and international artists and craftspeople – from painters to potters, sculptors, jewellers and ceramic artists. ◊

PHOTOGRAPHY MARK LOBO



WHERE TO EAT

- **Poets Café**, Elements of Montville, 38 Kondaililla Falls Rd, Montville, tel: (0)7 5478 6212
- **The Tamarind**, 88 Obi Ln S, Maleny, tel: (0)7 5429 6922
- **Wasabi Restaurant & Bar**, 2 Quamby Pl, Noosa Sound, tel: (0)7 5449 2443, www.wasabisb.com
- **Reserve**, 840 Landsborough-Maleny Rd, Bald Knob, tel: (0)7 5435 2288, www.reserverestaurant.com.au

Peter Hudson is one of a number of full-time artists who call the region home. The 60-year-old painter, who won the Sunshine Coast Art Prize in 2009, lives in Maleny with his wife Susan. Although the artist's paint-splattered studio is not open to the public, his contemporary portraits and landscapes are exhibited at the Lasting Impressions Gallery in Kenilworth.

"Many artists are drawn to this region because of its sheer beauty," says Peter, who was a finalist for the 2007 Archibald Prize and whose work is on permanent display at the National Portrait Gallery. "Artists love beautiful things. If you're a landscape painter or your art is based on the landscape, then it's very much a visual world you live in. For an artist, this is a conducive environment."

Many of Australia's best-known artists have used the majestic Glass House

Mountains as a backdrop and inspiration for their art.

"I've based a lot of my work on the mountains because of their visual power," Peter says. "Yes, you've got the coast, which is absolutely beautiful. But the hinterland is also incredible. You have these dramatic volcanic mountains and beautiful, lush rolling hills and it's so green and picturesque and just a stunning place to be."

It's the sleepy, old-fashioned feel to so many of the towns in the Sunshine Coast hinterland that draws people here – to settle down permanently or just to escape the city for an hour or two. Of course, while channelling one's inner culture vulture, it's all but compulsory to connect the dots linking the region's best vineyards, museums, markets and restaurants.

Jenny McKay of the Sunshine Coast Council says the trail helps visitors piece together an image of the disparate cultures and attractions that make the Sunshine Coast such an inviting place to visit.

Besides wandering around the area's many galleries and museums – where it's possible to buy anything from a holiday memento to a major work of art – it's also worth circling a few dates on the

calendar, which is full of extravaganzas of just about every kind.

Among the most hotly anticipated events on this year's Sunshine Coast arts and cultural calendar are the 2011 Body Art Carnivale in Eumundi (13–15 May), which celebrates body art in its many, varied forms, and the Noosa Food and Wine Festival (13–15 May), where top experts and serious foodies gather to "taste, talk, debate, dine and indulge". There's also the 10-day Floating Land Festival at Boreen Point (27 May–5 June), which attracts artists from across the Asia Pacific, and the Noosa Long Weekend (17–26 June), a festival of arts, literature, food and fun.

Jenny says many of the artists who create works or performances are inspired by an eco imperative. "The Floating Land Festival is a great example of why communities rely on artists to help promote conversations about creativity, the environment and culture," she says. ▸

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In all, there are about 22 galleries on the art trail, including the Butter Factory in Cooroy, the Caloundra Regional Gallery and Noosa's Putipula Gallery.

Add to that the visual pleasures afforded by the picturesque landscapes along the way, and it's clear that the trail is as much about the natural environment as it is about art. The fact that local artists are blurring the boundaries between the two can only be considered a good thing.

Copies of the Sunshine Coast Art Gallery Trail Map are available from the Sunshine Coast Visitor Information Centre. To obtain a map or to ask for more information, call 1800 644 969 (within Australia) or visit www.scap.org.au/art-trail.

WHERE TO STAY

- **Spicers Clovelly Estate**, 68 Balmoral Rd, Montville, tel: 1300 252 380, www.spicersgroup.com
- **Secrets on the Lake**, 207 Narrows Rd, www.secretsonthelake.com.au
- **The Narrows Escape**, 78 Narrows Rd, tel: (0)7 5478 5000, www.narrowsescape.com.au

t Tiger Airways has multiple flights weekly to the Sunshine Coast from Sydney and Melbourne. Book your flights at www.tigerairways.com

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