



Whitsundays Kitchens Rules!

MKR stars join Airlie Beach duo to put Whitsundays food scene on the map

They might have come to Airlie Beach for the Joshua's Whitsunday wedding, but Newcastle couple Carly Saunders and Tresne Middleton have also been putting the destination on the food map.

Former contestants on Channel 7's MKR, Carly and Tresne spent a day of their Whitsunday holiday on a food tour of seven of the region's restaurant hotspots.

Their hosts for the day were Tourism Whitsundays, Fish D'Vine co-owner Rebecca Clark and her right-hand-man Mark Wyatt, from the Rum Bar, Airlie Beach.

Perhaps better known as the 'Food Junkie' and 'Dr Rum', Airlie's most celebrated food and cocktail couple devised an itinerary to highlight the Whitsundays' foodie diversity to its visiting celebrity chefs.

For both, this was less about promoting their individual businesses and more a chance to collaborate with other restaurateurs to showcase the wider Whitsunday food scene.

Used to sampling dish after dish on MKR ("although you were always hungry," Carly revealed), the duo set off with their hosts, ready to share their experiences with their 26,000 Facebook friends and 53,600 followers on Instagram.

At the Fat Frog Beach Café there were boomerang photos of perfect panacotta wobbles posted to Instagram.

At Sorrento Restaurant & Bar co-owner Petrit Istogu was asked for the secret to his pizza base recipe, which Carly described as the best she'd eaten by far.



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Anchor Bar enjoyed the tick of approval for its convivial atmosphere and views high on the hilltop above Airlie Beach, complete with share platters celebrating the sociability of food.

Northerlies Beach Bar & Grill proved “next level”, with its spectacular beachfront location and outlook on Airlie Beach, complimented by a chilled seafood platter destined to impress.

The food at Hemingway’s in Abell Point Marina had the group scrambling for their cameras with every dish.

“They say you eat with your eyes and at Hemingway’s the food presentation and balance of flavours were fantastic,” Tresne said.

Walter’s Lounge at the Port of Airlie was a particular highlight of the tour.

From the bottle of French Mirabeau Rose sabred on arrival to the story behind the ‘Beverley’ dessert, the Walter’s experience left Carly to surmise: “this is going to be one of those restaurants in Australia people travel to go to”.

The tour concluded at the Rum Bar and Fish D’Vine where the group welcomed Whitsunday wedding giveaway winners Joshua Breakwell and Joshua Starr for a slap-up seafood dinner including mud crab served three ways.

From blueberry mojitos to flaming ‘Squeaky Tiki’s’ Dr Rum’s prowess behind the bar and his extensive knowledge of rum had everyone enthralled long after the last plate was cleared.

“The Rum Bar is not for the feint hearted,” Carly concluded.

“But Dr Rum has so many tips about rum and its history we learned a lot – and I wasn’t expecting that.

“As for the fish – I was going to say ‘divine’ – and you know what, I ‘m going to run with that.”



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“Overall I have to say you have so many amazing restaurants for what is a relatively small spot.”

As co-owner of Airlie’s longest established independent restaurant alongside her business partner Kevin Collins, Rebecca said the tour had exceeded not just Carly and Tresne’s but also her expectations.

“When we arrived in the Whitsundays there was one Bi-Lo supermarket and now look at us,” she said.

“We have everything I used to chase through travel – it’s all in our backyard.”

Tourism Whitsundays General Manager Tash Wheeler said over the next 12 months the organisation wanted to highlight the region’s food scene.

“We have so much diversity in our offering and the food and dining scene around the region is really something to be proud of,” she said.

“This food tour was a fantastic opportunity to put the Whitsundays on a national platform and promote the food experiences we offer.

“We are so lucky, and proud to have so many fantastic members we’re able to work with on showcasing the destination as a world-class place to visit.”

As for Dr Rum, the motto of the story was: “I should probably have a few less nights in front of the television and a few more exploring our local food scene, which in comparison to a lot of holiday destinations worldwide is kicking some major goals”.

For the full story and photos of the tour head to the Food Junkie’s blog at <http://thefoodjunkie.com.au/blog/mkr-tour>

About the restaurants:



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Fat Frog Beach Café
Coral Esplanade, Cannonvale Beach

Developing a café had been on Naomi McKinnon's bucket list for more than 20 years.

In 2013 she secured the perfect space directly opposite one of the Whitsundays' most popular family beaches with views to the Whitsunday islands and Coral Sea.

Naomi and her team invested in vintage styling including antique knick-knacks, good old-fashioned kids toys and a dress-up box crammed with groovy stuff.

"The café had to be comfortable, homey, warm and a bit eclectic and quirky," she said.

"It had to feel like a bit of city funk had come to town.

"And it had to be very, very family friendly.

"The food had to be wholesome and healthy and to achieve that everything would be made in-house and using the best ingredients available to us.

"Equally as important, the coffee had to be amazing – consistently amazing – much research led me to Campos, one of the best decisions made.

"I'm in love with my Fat Frog and couldn't be prouder that we have bought a bit of city to our gorgeous country village."

Sorrento Restaurant & Bar
Abell Point Marina, North Village

Petrit and Julie Istogu have been running Sorrento for eight years.

From the very beginning they had clear aims in mind.



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“We wanted a friendly, informal atmosphere where people could sit back in comfort and enjoy themselves, have fun and take in the magnificent views of the Whitsundays,” Petrit said.

“But most importantly we wanted a place that offers great service, exceptional quality and value for money.

“We think you will find that Sorrento lives up to those aims.

“Our menu offers a range of meals highlighted by fresh, local seafood, delicious salads, pasta and risotto, and our famous pizzas.

With live music often on the menu as well, Sorrento is a social place to soak up the Whitsunday atmosphere and enjoy good times.

Anchor Bar
Golden Orchid Drive, Airlie Beach

Started by Josh Knutson and Leah McMillan in 2014, Anchor Bar is known for its friendly service, chilled out vibe and sociable food.

Elevated above the main street of the resort town of Airlie Beach, Anchor Bar boasts spectacular views.

Sundays are one of the most popular days of the week when the bar is filled with locals and holidaymakers enjoying live music by resident and touring acts.

For Josh the bar is about beautiful views, tasty, value-for-money meals and sociability.

“It’s a place where everyone hangs out and shares food,” he said.

“It’s all about enjoying meals and tasting platters together.”



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Northerlies Beach Bar & Grill **Freedom Shores Resort**

One of the Whitsundays' newest food offerings, Northerlies Beach Bar & Grill is located on the water of Pioneer Bay looking back towards Airlie Beach.

To General Manager Ken Meighan the menu is a reflection on the Whitsunday lifestyle.

"We aim to create relaxed dining giving our customers an island experience on the mainland," he said.

"Northerlies focuses on our farm to table grilled steak options and chilled seafood or fresh grilled fish dishes to suit our absolute beach front dining.

"We also offer many other local specialty dishes that complement the unique and amazing view across the water to Airlie Beach township."

Hemingway's **Abell Point Marina, South Village**

Hemingway's is a contemporary venue on the waterfront at the award winning Abell Point Marina.

With its unrivalled ocean views, stylish coastal chic design and imaginative menu, Hemingway's is a vibrant addition to the Whitsunday food scene.

The food could be described as modern Australian cuisine, fused with influences from across the globe.

Fresh, locally sourced produce forms the basis for a menu incorporating exciting and innovative flavours and devised by first-class chefs.



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Dining at Hemingway's is an authentic gastronomic experience, offering guests the perfect combination of superb food, stunning surroundings and great service.

In 2018 the restaurant was awarded a Chef Hat by the Australian Good Food Guide, acknowledging the quality of the food.

***Walter's Lounge
Port of Airlie***

Walter's Lounge is a place to enjoy delicious, freshly prepared food, outstanding cocktails and hand picked boutique wines.

An Australian Good Food Guide Chef Hat restaurant the menu is a mix of taste, art and science.

For owner Heath Bentley and his team the restaurant's ride to success has been a labour of love.

"We don't necessarily think of ourselves as fine dining but we know what we like when we go out and we like to have a crack at that and we just enjoy what we do," he said.

"I think we're all in it for the area and to move the Whitsundays forward – and we want everyone to find their niche."

***Fish D'Vine & The Rum Bar
Airlie Beach***

Fish D'Vine and the Rum Bar are Whitsunday institutions.

The seafood is literally divine and Australia's original rum bar is renowned for serving the best mojitos outside of Cuba.



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Co-owned by Kevin Collins and Rebecca Clark, with Mark Wyatt (aka Dr Rum) at the helm of the Rum Bar, Fish D'Vine is one of the longest established restaurants in Airlie Beach.

"But we're not just a restaurant in a town, we're a business in a community," Rebecca said.

"We've never worked on the business, we've worked in it, and we've created a family.

"The dishwasher is as important as anyone else and when we open those shutters for the day, we say, 'let the show begin'."

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