



Bounty for all seasons

Distance from the mainland has ensured Norfolk Islanders produce fine local food, writes **Erin O'Dwyer**

It's a long time since I've seen a cheeseball on an hors d'oeuvres platter. But here, on a warm summer's afternoon, on the verandah of Norfolk Island's Two Chimneys Winery, it is entirely apt.

Established by Noelene McAlpine and her husband, Rod, two years ago, the fledgling winery has eight varieties of grape surrounding the picturesque homestead. A tasting room with wood fire and wide, covered verandahs makes it a tourist hub for all seasons.

Last year, the family took out the island's champion tourism award, thanks to their young wines and exquisite local food platters.

The platters are down to Noelene's creativity. Her homemade cheeseball goes nicely with local marinated mushrooms, nasturtium flowers and fresh-picked banana, orange and paw paw. A glass of ruby red chambourcin rounds it all off.

"Just a few things I've thrown together," says Noelene, a descendant of a member of Fletcher Christian's mutiny on the Bounty crew.

"Nothing really." Food lovers will beg to differ.

Contrary to popular belief, Norfolk Island is gourmet heaven. True, some places still do a roaring trade in a chicken parmigiana or a hearty beef roast. But much as it was a century ago, the island's fresh fruit and vegetables are all locally sourced. Only root vegetables are imported, so fresh organic produce is an old story here. This means that for mainland gourmands obsessed with food miles and sustainability, there's nowhere like Norfolk to

sample local seasonal dishes.

Lately, chefs on the island have been getting more serious. The island's 35 eateries are developing seasonal signature dishes and a food and wine trail is in the planning stages. Next year, Governor's Lodge Resort will hold an *Iron Chef*-style cook-off, drawing on the talents of its Norfolk-born, city-trained chefs.

Sydney-trained Rachel Borg – another mutineer descendant – will no doubt be among them. She greets us at the first stop on our island food tour, the historic Bounty Restaurant, for a traditional Norfolk spread.

She begins by showing us three ways to cook with bananas: there are banana fritters – made by combining grated green bananas with bicarbonate of soda and served as a savoury accompaniment to meat or fish; next comes banana dumplings or mudda – made by boiling grated green banana in coconut milk; finally, banana philly – a moist slice using ripe fruit

combined with flour, then slow-baked in banana leaf. It's all delicious and served with generous dollops of Norfolk Island gravy – fresh cream in the local tongue.

Aside from bananas, Borg serves up Tahitian kingfish marinated in lemon and coconut milk, warm-baked coconut bread and a spicy fish curry. Borg is equally at home with five-star fine dining – she is the in-house chef at the island's only five-star resort, Forrester Court – but today, she is preparing food as her family always has, according to recipes inherited from

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her British mutineer forefathers and their Tahitian wives. It's the food of the South Pacific, with a uniquely English twist.

The same theme is interpreted in different ways across the island. At Hilli Restaurant and Wine Bar, just outside the Burnt Pine township, the family team serves up fresh-caught seafood with an island flavour.

We try Cajun calamari with citrus dressing, line-caught kingfish and local mushroom risotto and a salad of mixed leaves, mushrooms, macadamia nuts and roasted pumpkin. For

dessert, it's a passionfruit meringue with berry compote. How can we resist?

Up in the island's hilly interior is Dino's at Bumboras. It's an eclectic Norfolk pine homestead with a casual atmosphere that belies its five-star menu. Australian restaurateurs Helen Bartholomew and Dean Bosley bought the historic homestead in 1998 and opened their eatery in 2000. Their commitment is to fresh local produce with a contemporary twist.

Here, we try woodfired pizza with blue swimmer crab, king prawns and olive tapenade as well as the chicken breast filled with brie and mango wrapped in prosciutto served over spring vegetable risotto. But it's Helen's homemade sorbets that really take the cake.

The couple might be newcomers but like everything on Norfolk, their home is historic.

Bumboras was originally a 10-hectare land grant made to mutiny descendant William Adams in 1875. Adams later sold five hectares to a descendant of Pitcairn Island schoolteacher George Hunn Nobbs, who bequeathed the land to his daughter, Harriet Buffet, a descendant of English whaler John Buffet. (These surnames are common among residents of the island, along with Christian, Quintal and McCoy.)

A sepia photograph of Harriet's son, Thomas, and his wife, Nellie, still graces the hallway of the home. The couple moved into the home on the property in 1921, then added a kitchen and verandahs. Some say Thomas still haunts the bathroom, resplendent in a suit and tie.

Ghosts aside, the homestead shows off the Bartholomew's wonderfully modern taste. Polynesian etchings hang alongside modern oils and resin mobiles. A reservations book sits on the front verandah. Guests don't phone for a booking. They drop by instead.

Next day, I make a visit to Candida Langman's self-sufficient eco-farm. She plucks me a ripe nectarine that oozes flavour and we wander through the orchard, which is irrigated with harvested storm water and fertilised with mulch. "I looked down at my plate the other night and realised that everything on it was from my own garden," she says.

Langman began developing the farm three years ago and now has 99 different fruit trees. There are all manner of vegetables and plenty of fresh eggs that she sells at a roadside stall. Locals, as well as tourists, come to visit, amazed that even their bountiful island could possibly be so productive.

"We're even growing apples," Langman says. "No one on the island believes [it]."

> TRIP NOTES

- **Getting there** Norfolk Air flies twice weekly (three times a week from February 28) from Sydney to Norfolk Island, 1600 kilometres east of Coffs Harbour. See norfolkair.com.
- **Staying there** Governor's Lodge Resort offers luxury accommodation. Executive lodges from \$250 a night. See governorslodge.nf.
- **Dining there** Fine-dining options include Dino's at Bumboras (phone +672 3 24225), the Garrison Restaurant (phone +672 3 22073) and Hilli Restaurant and Wine Bar (phone +672 3 24270). Try Two Chimneys Winery for fine wine and afternoon tea platters, phone +672 3 24410. Baunti Escapes offers progressive dinners at private island homes, traditional island food tours and farm tours, phone +672 3 23693. See www.bounty.nlk.nf.
- **Further information** see norfolkisland.com.au.



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Eye-opening ... (clockwise from top) historical Norfolk Island is a food-lover's heaven; a Two Chimneys Winery platter; Governor's Lodge Resort; and Dino's at Bumboras. Photos: Norfolk Island Tourism

