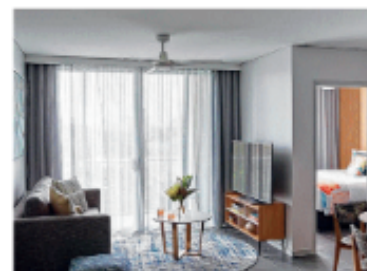




Crystalbrook Bailey in Cairns, left; tapas at Pachamama, steak at CC's Bar & Grill; and inside one of the Residences at Bailey.



# Northern light

A Cairns luxury hotel is the gateway to a gourmet food experience in the state's far north

Story ANOOSKA TUCKER-EVANS

An in-house DJ pumps up-tempo Latin beats, as professional salsa dancers spin, twist and dip in rhythmical harmony to the music. Amateurs are encouraged to join in, attempting the fast-moving footwork amid outbursts of laughter, while others watch on, smiling and sipping sangria and salt-rimmed margaritas.

Pachamama at Crystalbrook Bailey in Cairns sure knows how to turn on the good vibes. Opening mid 2022 beside the hotel's pool, the Andes-inspired bar and eatery in the CBD boasts stop-and-stare views of the mountains and ocean and an atmosphere guaranteed to put you in party mode – empanada in one hand, espresso martini in the other. It's this lively spirit that Cairns' post-Covid renaissance is all about.

Crystalbrook Bailey – and its various

food offerings – puts visitors right in the heart of the action. Guests can choose to stay in colourful and contemporary hotel rooms occupying one of the property's two towers, or the more homely, commodious "Residences" with one, two and three-bedroom apartments perfect for families or groups of friends. We're in a modern one-bedroom complete with an exceptionally well-equipped family-sized kitchen, spacious living area, large bathroom and wrap around balcony with glimpses of the palm-lined ocean. There's also, of course, airconditioning – a must in Cairns; while for those who would prefer to cool off in water, the Residences has its own intimate pool next to an indoor kids space, in addition to the hotel's main pool.

In the morning, we hit the hotel's sizeable gym for a quick weights session and a few minutes on one of the treadmills,

then it's a choice of where to go for breakfast. Cairns loves a morning meal and does it well with cafes like the eclectic and contemporary Candy on Grafton St a top pick (order the Spanish beans), alongside the beautifully appointed The Chambers on Spence St in an old bank building where a cold brew coffee goes down a treat.

Or you can simply roll out of bed and head downstairs to Bailey's signature steakhouse CC's Bar & Grill, which also serves up breakfast until 10.30am, with the likes of croissants, pastries, potted muesli, tropical fruits and a few hot options. But CC's is perhaps best saved for dinner, with the slick and sophisticated venue priding itself on serving the finest local beef from dry and wet-aged to grass-fed and grain-fed cuts usually from the Atherton Tablelands. Our waiter here is exceptional, boasting an in-depth knowledge of the menu and making recommendations of local delicacies like the Atherton red claw, which may just be as good as the signature steak.

For a more casual affair, Cairns is a melting pot of flavours with cheap and cheerful Chinese eateries sitting alongside top-notch vegan joints, lively and fun Italian trattorias, mad Mexican hangouts and more. All are just a leisurely stroll from the hotel, or travellers can hire a car from the Cairns airport and go exploring the food bowl that is the Atherton Tablelands.

**BOOK IT NOW**

Rooms at Crystalbrook Bailey starting from \$205 per night for an urban king [crystalbrookcollection.com](http://crystalbrookcollection.com)

About a 90-minute drive from the CBD, there's a clutch of distilleries, including Eventide Hills, Wild River Mountain and the award-winning Mt Uncle, plus coffee producers, dairies, wineries and more. Or head north to the idyllic Palm Cove, where acclaimed chef Nick Holloway serves up gourmet bites on the beach at Nu Nu. We're seated on the restaurant's deck outside under blue skies and swaying palms, the Pacific just a stone skip away. Sipping chilli and passionfruit margaritas and nibbling on miso-buttered barbecue corn, we contemplate whether there's a Queensland dining destination with a better view.

You can keep heading north to the magical seaside town of Port Douglas, aflutter with bustling restaurants, boutiques and thriving brewery Hemingway's all an hour out of Cairns, or relax back at Bailey, knowing there's a wine bar on the ground floor ready with some of the world's best vino, and Pachamama on the rooftop with carafes of sangria and those Latin beats.

The writer was a guest of Tourism Tropical North Queensland