

A brief history of discovery, settlement and development

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Once there were koalas

If we can rely on anecdotal data, the answers to what is truly Australian will start with mention of the koala, go to kangaroos and then include the rest of Australia's peculiar (to foreigners) fauna. The only exception might be that if we asked a male from the Asian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) what he identified Australia with, he might answer 'Cricket'. Putting that aside, the Gold Coast is very likely to be in the mix of Australian icons. To capture the essence of the Gold Coast, we need to talk about its history in more detail.

Recapping a little history¹

From the day that Brisbane (Moreton Bay, as the penal settlement was called) was chosen as the site for a northern convict settlement in 1824 it was inevitable that the Gold Coast's natural resources would play a significant role in the future of the nation.

Location matters, and not only to real estate agents

Today the Gold Coast is about one hour from Brisbane by motor vehicle. In 1824 and for many years after there was no road or designated track connecting Brisbane to the Gold Coast. There was, however, a 'freeway' provided by nature – the sheltered waters of southern Moreton Bay. The large sand islands, North and South Stradbroke (then joined as one island), protected the bay waters from the wind and waves of the Pacific Ocean. This sheltered waterway was the route for the first commercial trade between the Gold Coast and Brisbane.

When John Oxley put ashore at Mermaid Beach on the Gold Coast in 1823 he was, as far as the history books relate, the first European to walk on Gold Coast ground. Cook had sailed past many years earlier and given various prominent places, for example Point Danger and Mount Warning, appropriate names to guide future sailors.

The first Europeans to gain an appreciation of the area south of Moreton Bay were escaped convicts, on the run from the law. They scurried south through bush, scrub and, once on the coastal strip, along beaches. In fact, no sooner had the penal colony in Brisbane