



Luxe Cafe



Our Stories - A Great Place To Do Business

Catering for a fine food experience

The fresh local produce and the modern Australian coastal flavours of Port Macquarie's food scene lured chef Chris Harris back home.

For Hastings foodies, Chris' return to the turf where he cut his teeth as a promising chef has brought with it a dynamic and fresh approach to the vibrant café-culture that has become a signature of Port Macquarie's appeal. The establishment of Luxe Café in the heart of the central business district added a new element to the café experience delivering a laid-back convenience and menu full of culturally distinct, healthy offerings sourced, prepared and served with a passion and philosophy that has become a trademark of the business.

With his wife Leasa, who has a diverse local background in marketing and sales, the couple have successfully established Luxe Café as a destination of choice appealing to both the local and bountiful tourist market with a catering service to corner executive and events opportunities.

It comes after 16 years of hard work gaining industry experience across Australia and for Chris, learning more about what he had to offer the food scene as opposed to what it could do for him.

Chris began his apprenticeship locally at the iconic Sandcastle, then one of the area's only premier holiday locations overlooking Town Beach when Port Macquarie still maintained some remnant of the sleepy coastal town lifestyle.

Before long, Chris was firing up the hotplates at some of Sydney's

best including Bilson's Restaurant overlooking the harbour, increasing the pace with a move to the Gold Coast and the bright lights of Jupiter's Casino and Royal Pines Resort. His journey took him along Australia's east coast and south to the country's foodie capital Melbourne, a stint in the kitchen at Government House and to sea working as a private chef on a luxury 100-foot motor yacht. He donned the head chef hat at acclaimed Gold Coast eatery Restaurant B before chasing his own dream back to Port Macquarie in 2004. "By working in so many places before opening up my own business gave me a great feel for what was happening in the industry and the knowledge and experience to know exactly what I wanted," Chris explained.

"My time on the boat for Adco made me realise that my heart was with the good food philosophy and catering and I came back here with a very clear idea about how Luxe would work."



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Staying focused on that vision and true to his 'fresh food, fresh experience' philosophy, Chris and Leasa have enjoyed a remarkably unscathed journey into the world of business. The café now offers a breakfast and lunch service with all food prepared fresh on the premises using top quality ingredients as well as cultural and seasonal inspiration.

The couple admit that to make their mark, and quickly, in a highly competitive local market meant they had to make sure they had the right ingredients from the start.

"We knew we had to make the café work first before we even considered the catering end of the business. People had to get to know us, trust what we were doing, become acquainted with our food and our style," Chris said.

"We now have a solid customer base with people who regularly come back to see us as well as referring us to new faces."

For the 'chef' in Chris, the food comes naturally, but the at business end of the enterprise considerably more hard work goes into keeping the ovens fired up. Managing staff, finding a crew that shared their vision and passion, administration, accounts and marketing – all must be approached with the same enthusiasm for the business to succeed.

They are members of the Chamber of Commerce, Customer Care program, Business Enterprise Centre and Journey of Flavour program – which



Our journey:

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Leasa and Chris Harris, Luxe Cafe

have all provided them with invaluable networks and support.

"We really thought a lot about how we would market ourselves and how we would stand out. Our position at the business end of town really determined who we were. While we aren't really catering for the tourist market, the opening of the Mercure did change the dynamics."

The café offers an open-kitchen layout where you can watch as your food is being prepared and become a part of the entire experience. The flavours are modern Australian and in essence that means an emergence of all the cultures that now define us as a nation. "When we go on holidays I like to relax but I also like to emerge myself in the local culture and find out what they're eating, what's in season and the new flavours that could bring something more dynamic to my own menu." Luxe Café now employs 12 staff with three chefs and an apprentice managing the kitchen. Chris enjoys working alongside his team and making sure all the little things are done right – that's the essence of good business, he says.

"Now is the time for us to focus more on the catering side of the business. We are now generating a lot of repeat business and I think in time we will reach our target of being one of the best catering service's in town."



● *Luxe Cafe is a proud supporter of the Journey of Flavour and Customer Care programs*



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