

# taste of the tropics

Embrace the region you live in by using local produce, writes CRAIG SQUIRE.

It has been 10 years since a few passionate local chefs and food industry types got together to represent the produce of Far North Queensland. With nominal government assistance, no interest from local government and a little industry support we few took off to Adelaide to showcase our talent and produce at the bi-annual Tasting Australia.

Our culinary team notched up a respectable placing and we cooked and served 3500 portions of two uniquely tropical dishes – cold smoked barramundi with green papaya salad and sugarcane prawn sticks with lemon myrtle chilli sauce.

Thus a new collaborative body was formed called [australiantropicalfoods.com](http://australiantropicalfoods.com) – check out the website. Our aims were simple – to create a regional tropical cuisine, to promote and document niche local produce, to create a regional food trail and promote this to tourism and to connect these producers to each other and the market.

Under the auspice of the Cairns Regional Economic Development Corporation (which has since lost its funding), most of these aims were realised and concepts such as tropical food trails have been picked up by both the private sector and government.

One of the products we identified as tropical that needed some promoting was Endeavour prawns, hence the sugar cane prawn sticks, using smaller prawns in a value-adding way.

Endeavour prawns have a much maligned reputation, some believing them to be lacking in texture and appearance. I disagree and have been using them for the past 12 years both for hot dishes in the restaurant and chilled for salads and buffet catering. I believe they offer a sweeter more complex flavour.

Food that truly represents Australian tropical cuisine is the perfect combination of fantastic local seafood with local native flavours and exotic tropical fruit and vegetables.

Like earlier recipes I will provide the ingredients list and method yet also leave some quantities up to you, reflecting the concept of learning how to cook by thinking about what you are doing and not just blandly following recipes. Taste what you do and mix flavours by preference. This gives you the experience to make the same style of dish again, constantly creating without having to follow a set recipe.



Craig Squire is the chef and director of the award-winning Red Ochre Grill in Shields St.



## Endeavour prawn, avocado, bamboo shoot and taro chip tian – mango, lemon aspen and chilli salsa (\*gluten free)

Modern chefs tend to bastardise terminology for their own convenience or to make a dish sound nice. Thus a tian generally means a stack, as a form of presentation. In reality it's a French provincial earthenware dish, usually square. In Chinese Daoism it is also translated as heaven, which I like the thought of when eating this dish.



Serves 4 as an entree

20 freshly cooked Endeavour prawns, peeled and de-veined  
2 avocados, sliced  
60g marinated bamboo shoots, available at [info@AustralianTropicalProducts.com.au](mailto:info@AustralianTropicalProducts.com.au)

1 medium taro, available at Rusty's Markets

### For salsa

1 ripe but firm mango, finely diced

To taste:

Chopped chilli

Chopped coriander

Finely slivered ginger

60ml rice vinegar

40g lemon aspen, available from Red Ochre, and food wholesalers

60g palm sugar

1 star anise

Simmer the vinegar, aspen, sugar and anise gently for 5 minutes.

Strain through a fine sieve, pressing out and retaining all the lemon aspen juice.

When cool, mix lemon aspen liquid, mango, chilli, ginger, coriander with a splash of fish sauce and sesame oil.

### Taro chips

Peel and slice taro finely, fry in vegetable oil until golden, drain on paper towel.

### To serve

Slice avocado and assemble in layers with prawns, taro and bamboo shoots.

Drizzle salsa around stack. Serve with a fresh pinot gris.

## Prawn bisque

**Why waste all those prawn shells when you can enjoy a beautiful bisque. Normally a cold climate soup, this tropical interpretation will fit in with our hot weather. For extra flourish serve in a ½ coconut and retain a few prawn tails from the tian to garnish.**  
Serves 4

1 small onion  
1 stick celery  
15g ginger  
1 clove garlic  
10 coriander stalks  
Rough chop and sweat the above in olive oil in a heavy based soup pot  
Add about 20 prawn shells and heads

Crush all with mallet  
Add  
150ml white wine  
50ml brandy  
100g tomato paste  
Bring back to boil  
Stir in thoroughly  
1/4 cup flour or \*rice flour for gluten free  
Add  
1litre fish stock or seasoned water  
Add  
50g sugar and season to taste  
Simmer for 20 minutes  
Strain through fine sieve  
Add  
200ml of coconut milk  
Reheat and serve

Enjoy with a buttery chardonnay and crusty bread



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