

## Noosa Lakes Resort

# Raes of sunshine in the industry



Noosa Lakes Resort

By Grantlee Kieza,  
Industry Reporter

**The Rae family have been leading figures in management rights for almost 30 years. Grantlee Kieza put Ryan Rae the manager of Noosa Lakes and Noosa Blue in the hot seat to talk about his life in the business.**

### **How did you start in management rights?**

My parents, Ken and Maureen, had their first resort in 1994, the Cairns Golden Sands at Yorkeys Knob. They moved to Noosa about five years later and since then we've had a large variety of properties in Noosa and Brisbane, either myself personally or through my family.

### **What influenced your parents to go into management rights?**

They holidayed in Noosa a lot and in the early '90s they bumped into a local agent. My father was looking for new opportunities at the time and the agent asked, "have you heard of management rights?" It started from there. Originally, they wanted to come to Noosa but the property they were after fell through, and we ended up in Cairns.

### **There are worse places for a kid to grow up than a tropical resort?**

It's a beautiful place but it was a difficult time back in those days before the internet, and it could be tough work. The distribution was more challenging back then. Dad used to pack up the car and head down the East

Coast dropping in brochures to travel agents - that was the way people did things in those days.

I worked on the reception desk in Cairns and then I did my business degree from 1998 to 2001 at the University of the Sunshine Coast. Literally, I was straight out of university when my parents bought management rights on Hastings Street at Noosa. The property was called Maison La Plage Resort, which has now been rebranded as Maison Noosa and myself and my now wife Natalie moved in to run it. That was December 2001.

### **Then you had a career change?**

We ran Maison La Plage for a few years. One of the founders of Wotif was holidaying at the resort. He suggested I come and work for him. I was still young and looking to expand my horizons, so I decided to move to Brisbane. I ended up working at Wotif for almost seven years until 2011 and it evolved into heading up the entire hotel division for the company.

### **Meanwhile, your parents moved to Brisbane and acquired three sets of management rights?**

They said they were looking to step back a little and would I come on board and run the family business so that's what I did. The properties were Evolution Apartments, the Central Brunswick Apartments and the MacArthur Chambers building (the headquarters where American General Douglas MacArthur directed the war in the Pacific during World War II). They opened Evolution off the



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plan, a 176-apartment high rise building. In the process, I also acquired another two properties myself, so we ended up having five properties. Mine were Soho and Greenwich on Cornelia. They were both permanent complexes in South Brisbane.

**So, you were managing a lot of rooms at this stage?**

It was getting close to 500. We had a fairly big staff team, with many great people who

really helped, but I still got a lot of grey hairs early on.

We got to a point of expansion where (in my opinion) you have to go really big, or you hit the ceiling. We did explore going really big, we talked to a number of industry people and considered being absorbed by another business such as BreakFree. In the end we decided that my parents were getting older, and they wanted to think about downsizing rather

than upsize, to simplify their lives. Around 2015 we made the decision to wind back and I sold my management rights. We have three young kids, and my wife and I decided we would probably prefer to raise them in Noosa instead of Brisbane.

I acquired another management rights at a property called Noosa Place Resort and we had that for about three years. At the same time, I was still running the Brisbane

operations for my parents, but progressively they sold all three.

**Then you took a break from the industry?**

Yes, I tried my hand at retail in 2018-19. I ran the Athlete's Foot retail store in Noosa with the view to buying it, but the company took a bit of a shift, moving away from a franchise model to the corporate-owned store model. After I increased the store's profit by 30 percent, they didn't want to sell it anymore! ▶

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**How did you end up with Noosa Lakes and Noosa Blue?**

After Athlete's Foot, I went to work at a body corporate management company, which was owned by a friend of mine, who is also a triathlete. I was working away there minding my own business and Mike Phipps, who's been in the industry forever, and Barry Davies, who's also been in the industry forever, were putting together a partnership group to acquire Noosa Blue and Noosa Lakes. They needed a managing partner.

We were due to take over in November 2019 at both properties but due to the size of the transaction and with multiple partners involved the transaction was delayed.

We eventually took over on January 14 last year. We had one full month of trading in February and then COVID hit.

**Not much of a welcome back. What's your advice to someone starting out in the industry?**

I've had a love hate relationship with the industry because

you have very high highs, and you can have very low lows. You've got to appreciate the highs and work through the lows because you are going to have days where you question everything about the job and the role and why you're putting yourself through the stresses that come with being a resort manager. But the very next day it could be totally different. You must look at the bigger picture rather than individual days.

What stresses me out the most are changes that occur to the business that are outside your direct control. You have to accept that there are some things that you can only influence but you cannot control. Then there's external factors such as COVID and airline strikes, there are multiple issues that have affected the industry throughout the years. But the highs in the industry are tremendous.

**What do you see as the future of the industry?**

I think the industry is generally behind the eight ball when it comes to technology. I'm not a tech guy but I'm always investigating ways we can improve the guest experience.

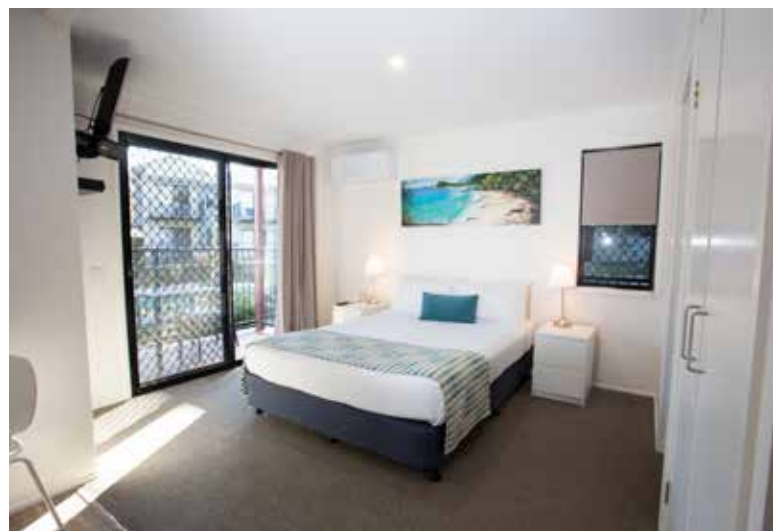
**Running a shoe store is a big change to overseeing 500 rooms in the accommodation sector?**

I'm a mad keen triathlete so that's where the interest came from. During my time at Wotif, I was sitting at a desk all day and a guy I was working with said 'we should start running'. Then

the running turned into 'hey, we should start swimming' and it progressed from there to where it's just a part of life. My dad does triathlons as well. I did the Hawaii Ironman with my dad.

He thought he was going to retire but instead you got him doing triathlons?

Not me! Mum makes him do it, so he stays out of her hair.





Technology is constantly changing... now there are phone apps that act as a room key to help when guests arrive late. I was running the property in Hastings St, Noosa when the internet started to become a big thing in the early 2000s. I think across the board the professionalism in the industry and the expectations of onsite managers and resort managers

has lifted substantially. Not only investors but body corporates and committees have higher expectations, and that's a good thing because it's moved the industry forward.

The management rights industry attracts people to it who are motivated to pursue improvements and strive to do better. ■

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