



going nutty

There's no doubt that the big-ticket souvenir food item Down Under is a macadamia nut product of some kind – the Aussies just can't get enough of these crunchy, buttery kernels, writes **Philippa Jacks**



Above Freshly picked macadamias – two thirds of Australia’s nuts are exported worldwide

Above right Specialist shops sell all kinds of macadamia-nut products

Right Macadamias are the only indigenous food crop that Australia grows commercially

The tastebud-tickling smell of hot caramel wafts towards me as I stare, transfixed, at the drum of tumbling, glistening nuts. The phrase “like a kid in a sweet shop” has never been more appropriate. If it wasn’t for health and safety, I think I’d dive into the mixer head first.

Like all the best recipes, Archie Moroni got the one for his famous caramel-coated macadamias from his mum. “She used to make them when I was a kid and they were just fabulous. I started off cooking them in half-kilo batches on a camping stove while I was studying, and people just couldn’t get enough of them,” he explains.

KING OF NUTS

Morish Nuts in Perth now gets through up to 38 tonnes of macadamias a year, but they are still hand-cooked using a similar technique. Watching Archie’s team stir the golden caramel until it dries to a rich dark glaze, I wonder how his staff can handle such 9-to-5 constant temptation.

Morish Nuts does equally delicious things with peanuts, almonds and hazelnuts: Archie’s ‘specially-



created Premium Savoury Mix can be enjoyed on Virgin Blue flights in Australia. But it’s the macadamias which are the biggest sellers. These ‘king of nuts’ have a unique crumbly, crunchy, buttery texture and are native to Australia. They are called ‘*kindal kindal*’, ‘*boombera*’ and ‘*gyndi*’ in different Aboriginal languages.

Macadamias are the only indigenous food crop that Australia grows commercially, with around six million macadamia trees, in mainly south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales. Although two-thirds of

Go nuts!

Here are the places you can go to indulge your passion for all things nutty...

Australia

■ Morish Nuts, Perth. A nut factory and shop open for visits/group tours.

www.morish.com.au

■ MacNuts, Baldyville, 50 kilometres south of Perth. A macadamia orchard of 4,000 trees and a processing facility. www.macnutswa.com.au

■ Carr’s Macadamia Farm, Hunter Valley. A macadamia and citrus farm with guest house accommodation. www.huntervalleymacadamia.com.au

■ Yarralong Macadamia

Nut Farm, north of Sydney. A farm of 1,000 macadamia trees, with a café and store.

www.yarralongvalley.com.au

■ Trawalla Pecan Nut Farm, Moree. Just contact the Moree Visitors Information Centre to discuss visiting.

www.moreensw.com

■ Eltham Valley Pantry, a : pecan, olive and coffee plantation with tours and a café. www.elthamvalley.com.au

New Zealand

■ Emacadamia, New

Plymouth. A macadamia orchard and factory, with tours and gift shop.

www.emacadamia.co.nz

■ Macnuts, Helensville. A macadamia orchard and café just 50 minutes drive from Auckland. www.macnut.co.nz

■ Nutt Ranch, Marlborough. A hazelnut orchard open to visits by arrangement. www.nutranch.co.nz

Also worth visiting:

www.nutsforlife.com.au

www.macadamias.org.uk

www.macadamia.co.nz

Macadamias are the biggest sellers

these ‘king of nuts’ have a unique

crumbly, crunchy, buttery texture

the nuts are exported, Aussies still munch their way through an impressive 3,000 tonnes of kernel themselves each year. You’ll see the nuts on lots of restaurant menus, and they’re a popular snack item too. Their oil is a tasty alternative for stir-frying and dressings, and shops at Australian airports are packed to the rafters with macadamia gifts and treats. Brian Lizotte is owner and head chef at Lizotte’s Restaurant



Hand-cooking macadamias the traditional way



Macadamias are a tasty addition to cakes, such as this Shortcake Slice

in Kincumber, on the Central Coast north of Sydney. He uses macadamias in at least five of his dishes at any one time. "Macadamias are my favourite nut in the world," Brian tells me. "Their subtle taste works well with savoury and sweet, and they don't have the bitterness of some other nuts. We use them in pesto, dukkah dipping sauce, cookies, brownies... The sweet aroma of a toasting macadamia can be smelt at 10 paces or more in a busy kitchen." >>

Below Toasting macadamias in a hot oven will enrich their sweetness



Macadamia Shortcake Slice

MAKES 24

- » Preheat oven to 180°C (350°F). Grease a 30cm x 20cm x 4cm deep pan and line the base with baking paper.
- » Beat 250g butter and 170g caster sugar together in a bowl until thick and creamy (about five minutes). Beat in the eggs one at a time.
- » Stir in 220g sifted self-raising flour and 50g of macadamia halves to make quite a stiff mixture.
- » Using a spatula, spread half the mixture over the pan base, then spoon over six tablespoons of warm apricot conserve.
- » Spread over remaining cake mixture to reach pan sides. Press in another 50g of macadamia halves and sprinkle with caster sugar.
- » Bake for 25–30 minutes or until a skewer inserted comes out clean. Cover with baking paper if macadamias brown too much. Remove, stand for five minutes before turning out onto a rack to cool. Cut into squares.

■ Recipe courtesy of the Macadamia Advice Centre, www.macadamias.org.uk

Other nuts to try

Australia also has important almond and pecan industries. It can often supply fresh almonds when produce from the US and Spain is out of season. The nuts are grown mainly in the River Murray region, with 9,500 tonnes produced each year.

Pecans like a climate similar to macadamias, with Australia producing 3,000 tonnes a year. Gigantic Trawalla Pecan Nut Farm near Moree in New South Wales is the largest pecan plantation in the

southern hemisphere. Its 70,000 pecan trees produce 95 per cent of the country's crop.

New Zealand does not have a widely-eaten native nut, but it does grow walnuts, chestnuts and hazelnuts in sizeable proportions. Walnuts and chestnuts are grown mainly in the colder, South Island, while hazelnuts are based round Auckland and Canterbury.



HEALTH BENEFITS

But macadamias don't just taste divine – they're good for you too. Like most nuts, they're high in fat – about 70 per cent to be exact. But in macadamias, most of it is 'good', monounsaturated fat – the stuff that we need in our diet and that helps us feel full. Macadamias contain no trans fats or cholesterol, and have indeed been shown to help lower cholesterol.

In 2007, growers' associations from Australia and South Africa set up a Macadamia Advice Centre in the UK to increase awareness of the nuts with both consumers and health professionals. Dr Sarah Brewer is its spokesperson. She says the UK's perception of nuts is gradually changing, with less emphasis on calorie-counting for weight-loss and more emphasis on low-GI foods and high-quality foods.

But that's not a green light to eat as many macadamias as you like. "Everything in moderation," advises Dr Brewer. "A small daily serving is good for your health."

You can now find Australian macadamias on the shelves of supermarkets and healthfood stores throughout the UK. Australia's fresh produce markets, and specialist stores such as Sydney's The Nut Shop also

sell a variety of gourmet products similar to Morish Nuts. But to taste the nuts at their very freshest, you should pay a visit to one of the many plantations and factories in Queensland and New South Wales. Most are open to visitors so you can learn about the cultivation and processing of the nuts, try some macadamia home-baking fresh out of the oven, and buy gifts to take home (if you can bear to give the heavenly treats away).

There is also a thriving, if much smaller, macadamia industry in the frost-free parts of New Zealand. Linda Steen runs MacNut Farm and Café in Helensville near Auckland. It's the country's largest macadamia orchard and a tourist attraction in its own right. She says different varieties grow better in New Zealand, so NZ macadamias tend to be paler, larger and crunchier than their Australian counterparts.

But whether you try them in Australia, New Zealand or here in the UK, and whether you opt for caramel-coated, wasabi hot, chocolate-dipped, or abalone-flavoured (Archie's latest invention) prepare yourself to go as nuts for macadamias as I did. 🇺🇸

Above There are a variety of ways to prepare macadamia nuts, so just taste them and compare!

Above left Try for yourself some home-baked macadamias fresh out of the oven



Nutty facts

■ **Macadamias** were classified by two British botanists in the 1850s who named them after Dr macadamia nut toxicosis which makes them too weak to stand up – it usually passes within 48 almonds provide nearly all your recommended daily intake of Vitamin E. ■ Most nuts are in fact

Caramel and Macadamia Tart

» Roast 450g of plain macadamia halves at 170°C for around 10 minutes until golden brown. Knead 500g of sweet paste and roll out on to a floured bench to a thickness of 2.5cm.

» Grease tart tins with butter, then line them with the sweet paste. Let them rest in the fridge for at least 30 minutes.

» Boil 360ml of cream and set aside. Place 540g of caster sugar and 100ml of water in a pan and cook on a high heat until caramelized. Add the hot cream slowly, then stir in 30g of honey.

» Blind bake the tart bases at 170°C for 10–15 minutes until they turn golden round the edges. Then fill them with the roasted nuts and spoon over the hot caramel mix until just covering the nuts. Bake at 150°C until just set.

■ **Recipe courtesy of Robert Bok, Head Pastry Chef at SkyCity Auckland**



Below Those crunchy, nutty kernels can even help to lower your cholesterol



Macadamia Nut Crusted King Prawns with Lemon Myrtle Mayonnaise

SERVES 4

» Peel and de-vein 16 large prawns, leaving the tails on.

» Combine cup of plain flour with a pinch of salt and pepper. Dip the prawns first in the flour, then into an egg wash (two eggs, beaten), then lightly crumb them with macadamias (two cups of medium-ground macadamias).

» Heat 1 litre of vegetable oil in a frying pan and fry prawns until golden brown for approximately 30–40 seconds.

» To make the mayonnaise, place two egg yolks, a tablespoon of Dijon mustard, a little salt and pepper and ¼ cup of white vinegar in a food processor and combine. Add 300ml of vegetable oil slowly until mayonnaise is formed. Stir through ½ a teaspoon of ground lemon myrtle powder.

» Serve with a salad of herbs such as coriander, Thai basil and mint tossed with olive oil and lemon and lime juice.

■ **Recipe courtesy of Brian Lizotte, of Lizotte's Restaurant in Kincumber, New South Wales**



John Macadam from the Philosophical Institute of Victoria. ■ **Macadamias** are poisonous to dogs. They get hours. ■ Just two **brazil nuts** provide all your RDI of selenium, which can help prevent heart disease. Around 20 seeds. **Almonds, cashews, pistachios** and so on were once inside a fruit, so are classed as seeds.