

FEATURE STORY
BORN FOR MAGIC

foccuts

COFFS COAST

May 2011 // Issue 08

DAVID STRASSMAN
International comedy star David Strassman returns to Australia with his brand new show, Chuck's Revenge!
JOHNNY DEVLIN
One of Wintersun's guests this year is Johnny Devlin New Zealand's 'answer to Elvis'.

INSIDE 08



lily
McDonald

In the spirit of Mother's Day, we thought it would be nice to introduce you to a local Super Mum!



MY holiday

// GOLD COAST



focusTravel

JO ATKINS, SUB EDITOR FOR FOCUS, DISCOVERED THERE'S NO NEED TO TRAVEL FAR FROM HOME IN SEARCH OF THE ULTIMATE HOLIDAY.

The Gold Coast and the Scenic Rim provide the perfect place for singles, couples and families to shop, eat, relax and be pampered ... or to rev it up a notch, with outdoor adventures!

Like many, I have fond memories of childhood holidays spent on the Gold Coast. You know the ones: mum, dad and the kids pile in the car (which in those days, was most likely to be either a noisy Ford or Holden of some description), drive over the border to accompanying wails of, "Are we there yet?" to land in a different world. Days would be spent touring the magical theme parks with thousands of ice-cream-eating tourists, building sandcastles at the beach and marvelling at the bright city lights at night.

The Gold Coast still offers this idyllic holiday experience – but it's also so much more! Forget smorgasbord ... we're talking a degustation of tastes, sights, scents and experiences.

Despite the terrible floods experienced by Queensland earlier in the year, the state is definitely open for business and is ready to roll out the welcome mat to visitors of all kinds.

I was fortunate enough to be one of the journalists invited to explore the Gold Coast and the Scenic Rim – an arc of splendid mountains lying from south of Beaudesert to south west of Ipswich – as part of a recent global media event.

I was really surprised to discover that the area is not just a destination for families – although it certainly has that demographic covered. Singles, couples seeking a romantic getaway, groups of friends ... nature lovers, thrill seekers, shopaholics, epicureans – you're all catered for here!

Read the itinerary I followed during my stay, and you'll discover that one of the world's most versatile holiday destinations is only a short drive (or flight) away ...

Day 1

I flew to the Gold Coast on Virgin Blue airlines. I was particularly excited that my first two nights' accommodation was going to be at the Hilton Surfers Paradise. It didn't disappoint – I had a luxurious two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment in the recently completed Boulevard Tower. The Hilton is still undergoing construction, with its second tower – the Orchid Tower – due to open in mid 2011. The Hilton is offering a new style of accommodation in Surfers Paradise – its apartments, or residences, come in 1, 2 or 3

52 coiff's coast focus

bedroom – perfect for singles through to families. Hotel rooms will also be available in the Orchid Tower – so for my money, it's a fabulous place to stay.

Drinks at the Skypoint Observation deck in the Q1 Tower? Yes please. Panoramic, 360 degree views of the city by night plus an educational display of some of the Gold Coast's best attractions, culture and history made me forget that I was on the 77th floor (gulp). The elevator conveniently reminded me of that fact, however, on the way back down – it was able to negotiate all 77 floors in just 42.7 seconds and came complete with a flat screened monitor attached to the ceiling that provides a view of your ascent (and descent!).

Dinner was at Vie Restaurant and Bar, Palazzo Versace. The food was sublime (as one would expect), and the service was divine. I cannot go past mentioning the dessert. I love savoury food and don't have much of a sweet tooth, but donuts are the exception. Mini jam donuts with espresso jelly and pannacotta, anyone? Even the spoon was edible!

Day 2. A VIP tour of Sea World transported us to another world. I hope I don't sound too much like a giddy tourist – but I GOT TO PAT A DOLPHIN! It was a humbling experience from my perspective – one I'll never forget. Sea World is home to all kinds of creatures of course – fish, sharks, dolphins, turtles, polar bears. Yes – polar bears. These magnificent creatures are certainly worth a closer look. Some of my fellow journos expressed interest in swimming with the sharks – an experience you can take advantage of at Sea World. Count me out, thanks. Dolphins' teeth are friendlier.

A learn to surf lesson with Get Wet Surf School at the Spit provided hours of fun, a sense of accomplishment for those who managed to get vertical (and sore muscles the next day!) And if that wasn't enough excitement, an aerial tour of the Gold Coast by sea plane followed after lunch. There's no better way to see the stunning panorama. Cloud 9 Seaplanes and their intrepid pilot gave us an amazing tour – demonstrating the manoeuvrability of these incredible planes.

Dinner that night was at the Northcliffe Surf Club – fabulous food in a family-friendly atmosphere. And the beer on tap wasn't bad either!

Day 3.

We drove in our super-comfy Kia Carnival to Mt Tamborine – a beautiful, green and lush area and our first experience of the Scenic Rim. I couldn't resist having a campy photo taken next to the Mount Tamborine sign. Isn't that what all good tourists would do?

Now came the true test of my mettle ... I had to not only get on a bike, but ride it for 2 hours. For someone who hadn't been on a bike for over 20 years – that was, well ... scary! But, after many false starts, a patient crew of journos and the wonderful Bunyip Bike Tour leader's helping hand, I made my wobbly way along the beautiful tracks – and actually got to admire some of the gorgeous scenery (when I wasn't worrying about falling off!) Bunyip Bike Tours are great for inexperienced and more experienced riders, and a sumptuous morning / afternoon tea was included.

I loved the bike ride (I can say this in hindsight – but, it really was a blast!) and I equally loved the cheese tasting at Witches Chase Cheese Factory and the beer tasting at Mount Tamborine Brewery. Locally produced and brewed products – and all amazingly good.

Lunch was at Songbirds in the Forest Restaurant at the Songbirds Rainforest Retreat, where some of the journos stayed overnight. Perfectly cooked Wagyu filets, accompanied by a bottle or two of fragrant red – gorgeous.

Lunch was followed by a 20-minute rainforest Skywalk adventure, showcasing the stunning Mt Tamborine flora. The walk departed from the Rainforest Eco Gallery and continued along a spectacular high-tech steel structure, putting us right among the middle and upper canopies of the forest. The skywalk itself is an amazing 40 metre long cantilever poised 30 metres above the valley. The view was unsurpassed.

My accommodation that night was at Witches Falls Cottages. This is a haven for couples – charming, fully self-contained cottages with a quaint, old-world charm. But the bathroom – it had to be seen to be believed. Bathing in nature was a new experience – with an enormous, double spa bath in a glass-walled bathroom, complete with tropical ferns and palms. Throw in a pamper pack or a massage from Ripple Day Spa – and you've found Utopia in the rainforest. If you're feeling particularly energetic afterwards (not likely!) there are some stunning bush tracks to explore. And a

couple's indulgent weekend wouldn't be complete without a luxurious breakfast hamper – complete with home-made bread, the biggest collection of spreads I've ever seen, fresh fruit, yogurt, juice, and a ham, cheese and avocado platter.

Day 4.

En route to Mount Barney, the next stop on our Scenic Rim tour, we called in at Rathloggan Olive Grove for an oil and olive tasting. The grove contains over 1,000 trees and produces fine olives, which are all harvested by hand and cold pressed within 24 hours into a premium, full-bodied extra virgin olive oil. Visitors will be amazed by the amount of time and effort that goes into creating the end product, with an informative demonstration and video presentation, followed by morning / afternoon tea or lunch. The scones are a winner here too everyone, and I know a few journos were stashing bottles of olives away in their luggage afterwards!

My last accommodation spot for the trip was at Mt Barney Lodge. This place really has it all – nestled into the foothills of the world heritage listed Mt Barney National Park. Accommodation ranges from campsites, deluxe camper trailers and rustic cabins ... to – get this – your very own Queenslander homestead! You don't just get to rent a room in the Queenslander – you rent the whole house. This is definitely the place for groups of friends or a family – minimum of 4 – to stay. There is no TV or computer to be found here – just the soothing sounds of nature, the scents of the bush and mountain-fresh air.

Activities range from an eco walk at sunset, guided walks up Mt Barney, rock climbing and abseiling, through to chilling on the charming verandahs with a local bottle of good red and a good book. Something for everyone!

I had to fly home the next morning to meet press deadlines for FOCUS, but the trip has left a lasting impression. The Gold Coast and the Scenic Rim truly surprised me with its variety in activities and accommodation options, and I have to thank Molly from Gold Coast Tourism and Nikki from Tourism Queensland for being fabulous hosts.

I only have one complaint about the whole experience – it was too short! When can I go back?

Visit www.queenslandholidays.com.

au or www.visitgoldcoast.com.au for more information about any of the fabulous things to see and do on the Gold Coast.