

# Above the coastal din

An escape musical by name and magical by nature enthral **JANE PARSONS.**

**T**HE word “escape” often conjures up that get-away-from-it-all feeling, particularly for those harried adults keen to leave the daily grind behind.

But when it comes to escaping to a “hinterland paradise” the word takes on a whole new meaning.

The towering Tamborine Mountain within the Gold Coast Hinterland proved an oasis of good taste and exhilarating experiences when we left all our cares behind for four days of fun and adventure.

If spectacular views mean anything to you, then look no further than this mountain setting, featuring the three heritage communities of Mount Tamborine, North Tamborine and Eagle Heights.

Relaxed and carefree are some of the words to describe this fabulous locale, but there are also some serious enterprises going on behind the tranquil rainforests and cascading waterfalls.

The quaint village life has given many of its inhabitants a chance to discover and cultivate some beautiful and enriching pastimes that have led to fully fledged businesses of world renown.

The close proximity to the Gold Coast, just an hour away, has meant it is an easy run to the mountain and all it has to offer.

The first taste of the mountain is its jaw-dropping scenery, with the ocean and high rises of Surfers on the horizon.

But the extraordinary natural setting is the winner and for people making their home there, capitalising on this impressive display is all important.

Many of the business owners we spoke to were proud that they not only lived and worked on the mountain, but actually lived on the site of their business.

Our first stop was all important – the accommodation. With mist rolling in during the late afternoon, the Witches Falls Cottages seemed an ideal, if not magical, setting and base for further adventures.

The secluded cottages, which are right next door to Queensland's oldest national park, are nestled among flowering scented gardens and tall rose gums.

The split level stone gable cottages are billed as a romantic getaway with its cosy wood fire and everything at your fingertips, including an outdoor barbecue area.

But the pièce de résistance is the ultimate in bathrooms, an indoor/outdoor creation where you literally bathe among



**COOL WATERS:** Peppers Ruffles Lodge & Spa pool bar at Vue 175 Restaurant.

rainforest ferns. The large light-filled airy bathroom features a double spa bath, plenty of bench space and an expanse of daylight or moonlight sky.

The owner, David, leaves a basket of breakfast goodies, complete with deliciously fresh warm homemade bread, at the door.

He is expanding the accommodation to include two all-abilities cottages that have specific features for guests wanting to travel with friends or family that can enjoy privacy yet stay connected.

The beginning of our getaway from it all was dinner at a restaurant offering “a quiet and peaceful country experience”.

The experience at the Old Church delivered all it promised with a location that included a two-acre setting, with garden courtyards, verandas, rolling lawns and tall pine trees.

Chef Andrew Quarantini has 22 years of fine dining experience and like other professionals in the industry we would meet, sourced his fine produce locally.

The experience was divine, particularly the outstanding dessert tasting plate.

If my stress levels hadn't already lowered somewhat since arriving in this carefree setting, they would be even more mellow after a visit to Ruffles Day Spa.

Perched high on a ridge in the Gold Coast hinterland, Peppers Ruffles Lodge & Spa is a retreat surrounded by eucalypt forest, beautifully landscaped gardens and spectacular coastal views. Therapist Tania pampered me from head to toe with a facial and relaxation massage.

The therapeutic spa lives up to its aim of providing idyllic beauty and relaxation treatments, including hot stone massage, volcanic body wraps and deluxe facials, in first class facilities.

Lunch afterwards at the retreat's Vue 175 Restaurant provided not only stunning views but a chance to savour the most delicious cuisine again showcasing the freshest produce from the local food trail.

No visit to the locale would be complete without calling into the Tamborine Mountain Distillery. It is one of this country's most awarded and smallest operating pot distilleries. The distillery is again privately owned with the family living on-site.

A small pot is used to create the spirit which is the essence and foundation of the liqueurs, schnapps, vodka and eaux de vie that are now world renowned.

Tamborine Cooking School is also gaining an international following with visitors coming from overseas to learn to cook and enjoy a multi-course menu. Owner and chef Terri Taylor provides hands-on cooking classes and demonstrations at her stunning home on two acres of immaculate gardens on a western escarpment overlooking the Albert Valley. She sources the area's renowned local products and even includes some of her own into her classes.

A multi-course dinner in her dining room with full views of the undulating hills and valley capped off an amazing foodie experience.

Pethers Rainforest Restaurant has a reputation as one of south-east Queensland's most romantic dining experiences and it certainly lived up to its name. The restaurant is set around a massive open-side and elevated fireplace and overlooks a pristine rainforest. Chef Anthony provided superb cuisine, beautifully presented.

Getting the hang of navigating the



**HANDS-ON:** Tamborine Cooking School owner and chef Terri Taylor.

## IF YOU GO

Endless adventures, from active and indulgent to relaxed and carefree, await visitors to Tamborine Mountain.

■ Eagle Heights' Gallery Walk has unique arts and craft shops, fashion boutiques and plenty of coffee shops. It's easy to get around them all at Long Road.

■ National Park walks cater to all fitness levels. For beginners there's the 3.4-kilometre Witches Falls Circuit that has easy graded terrain or for a more testing hike why not try the Gold Coast Hinterland Great Walk and discover ancient landscapes of the region.

■ Weekend markets plus regular producers' markets are something the area is well known for and a source of pride for locals.

■ Other attractions include botanical gardens, glow worm caves, a historic museum, numerous waterfall rock pools, picnic and barbecue areas and a horseback adventure.

mountain villages can take a little time, particularly when the GPS at times failed to work, but establishments are more than happy to provide maps and instruction.

*The writer was a guest of Gold Coast Tourism.*



**BUSH RETREAT:** Witches Falls Cottages is a peaceful place to get away from it all.