



Luxury far away from fashionistas

SHORT BREAKS

ALISON COTES



WITHIN earshot of the surf, but far from the madding crowd. It may sound like an impossible dream as far as Noosa is concerned, but it is achievable just 12 minutes' drive from Hastings St yet a world away from the fashionistas on Main Beach.

Think lake rather than ocean, rays rather than red emperor, canoes rather than surfboards, stars rather than streetlights. Add absolute privacy and you have Lake Weyba Cottages.

The view across the sweeping lawns and through the sedge grass is of a tranquil lake, but at night, or when lazing on your balcony with a pre-ordered breakfast delivered exactly when you want it, the surf crashes on the shore and you might almost be at the beach.

Lake Weyba Cottages have been around forever, it seems, but they have recently value-added for people other than cosy couples, and there's a new two-bedroom Pavilion with four times the space and, if you can imagine it, even more luxury. A friend and I had to try it.

Send me to a five-star establishment and I immediately start nit-picking, fiddling with taps, checking storage space, looking for the coffee-maker and the fresh (as opposed to long-life) milk.

Are the towels big and fluffy, are the sheets pure cotton, are there blankets as well as doonas, and are the pillows comfy? And that's just the beginning. Do you have to feel guilty about taking a bath? (Not here. All cottages

have rainwater tanks for showers, and the bore water for the spa bath may look brown, but is as soft as velvet.)

What about toiletries, fresh flowers, maybe a welcome pack of biscuits and chocolates? (I'm talking five-star, you understand.)

The cottages came up with all this and more, including a huge tray of antipasto which lasted us two nights, a bottle of Margaret River dry white wine, and a genuine espresso machine so up-market that neither of us dared to use it, and stuck to the plunger instead.

There was a good selection of teas, bright lights over the bathroom mirrors and a plasma screen television with as many DVDs to borrow as we could have asked for, so I was hard-pressed to find fault, and came up with just two little nits to pick.

One was the cedar louver blinds in the bedrooms, one of which had been installed so that I had to climb into the bath to close the slats, and the other was a bedside radio with really bad reception.

On the other hand, who needs radio when there's the distant sound of the surf, a cheerful frog lullaby, and the comforting sounds of ducks settling down for the night, especially as we hadn't even had to cook our own dinner but had eaten three very classy courses from Cream Catering, delivered to our pavilion and served by chef Patrick himself from Chez Andre.

NOOSA

GETTING THERE: Lake Weyba is inland from Peregian Beach, two hours' drive north of Brisbane.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE: Peregian Beach is five minutes' drive away, and Noosa Heads 12 minutes.

Yandina Ginger Factory, 50 Pioneer Rd, Yandina, 5446 7100, www.buderimginger.com. Fairhill Native Plants and Botanic Gardens, Fairhill Rd, Yandina, 5446 7088. Cream Catering (an offshoot of Chez Andre Restaurant), 0423 669 355, www.creamcatering.com.au. Gail Hills Wildlife Walkabout, 5442 7274, www.wildlifewalkabout.com

WHERE TO STAY: Lake Weyba Cottages, 79 Clarendon Rd (off Murdering Creek Rd), Peregian Beach, Sunshine Coast, 5448 2285, www.lakeweybacottages.com



LAKE VIEW: The five-star Lake Weyba Cottages



Not cheap, admittedly, but as part of a special experience worth it as a once-in-a-lifetime treat.

And what would total luxury be without an in-room massage?

A 90-minute facial, which included neck, shoulders, hands and feet, was even better than the full body experience, and I had it on the veranda while my friend chased away the noisy mynah birds that were attacking her last croissant of the morning.

The Pavilion may only sleep four, but there's entertaining room for 20. It's ideal for a big group such as a wedding party or a Big Zero birthday group who want to take over the whole complex, as people often do, with other guests staying in the smaller cottages, all of which face the lake.

Let me share some jottings from my notebook as we sat on the 10m deck drinking freshly crushed apple juice and eating perfect eggs benedict.

Ducks fight on our private pond, until all eight of them settle down on the bank in the shade of a giant gum.

Two young butcher birds visit, sitting on the railing and singing their morning chorus just for us.

Reflections from the pond dapple the roof of the deck.

Two yellow butterflies perform a courtly dance.

A kangaroo hops across the lawn-like grass as if it had come straight off an old copper penny, then joins its own private mob under the trees.

Two guests appear from the long grass that fringes the lake, for all the world as if they are early European explorers. Eight white ibis form a living frieze on the handrail of the bridge near the gazebo.

We went out one day, to the Ginger Factory at Yandina, not to ride the train but to stock up on ginger chocolate and minced ginger, and then to Fairhill botanic gardens to see what indigenous plants were surviving the drought and were thus worth buying.

But the highlight of our stay, apart from the luxury of doing nothing, was a guided canoe trip on the lake with Gail Hall just as the sun was rising.

Gail is an ethnologist and naturalist whose passion is animal behaviour.

So to see birds through her eyes and binoculars is to enter a different world, where you find the answers to the great cosmic questions like why birds make different sounds at different times.

We paddled out of the sunshine into the majestic gloom of Murdering Creek, where about 80 indigenous Australians were massacred in the late 19th century, and could almost feel the horror among the reflections of dead trees in the water.

This was a cultural and ecological experience like no other I've had, and added to the uniqueness of our stay.

Perfection doesn't have to be majestic or dramatic. Luxury isn't necessarily having heaps of money to spend, it's more about having time to appreciate the little things.

And for utter luxury in a peaceful setting, I can't think of a better way to spend money than at Weyba Lake Cottages.



PEACE: A rainbow bee-eater, seen on the lake during a sunrise excursion; the living area at the new two-bedroom Pavilion; breakfast is delivered to the veranda