

TRAVEL

Worth a second look ...

Much to his delight, **Ed Randell** discovers Hervey Bay is so much more than a base for winter whale-watching

THERE can be few better feelings in life than the satisfaction of knowing you were right when all those around you believed you were wrong.

Well that must be the feeling in Hervey Bay right now, after my recent trip there.

You see, I'd been there and done that. The city 38km north-west of Maryborough had shown me all it had to offer in two day-trips there.

I'd seen the whales, cruised down the west coast of Fraser Island and dined at the harbour.

And, aside from maybe a few fascinating facts about the city's recent growth in popularity, that was all I could expect from it.

Or so I thought.

Yes, I have to admit I am one of those people who, through gritted teeth, have to say "I was wrong and I'm sorry, Hervey Bay".

Take the Esplanade for example. It's so much more than simply a street which runs along the perimeter of the bay.

Dotted along a large portion of its 16km seafront are an array of boutique shops, bars and restaurants. For me, it's so much better than its namesake in Mooloolaba simply because everything is nicely spaced out.

It's the perfect place for an early morning walk or a bike ride to your favourite dining haunt, and it never seems to be crowded – even on the day of the annual cultural festival when I found myself free-wheeling down to Enzo's on the Beach for breakfast.

Of course, as Hervey Bay's main street away from the major stores and supermarkets of Boat Harbour Drive, The Esplanade is THE place to find a place to stay and make a weekend of it.

I found myself at the recently-opened Allegra, part of Accor Hotels' Grand Mercure range of accommodation. And how grand my five-star room was.

Behind the door marked 102 was a two-bedroom apartment complete with two bathrooms (one with a spa bath), kitchen, dining and living area.

Of course, being on the ground floor has its disadvantages. You don't get the calming sea views, for example. But what our room lacked in views, it more than made up for with outdoor space.

Still, in spite of the pleasant surprise that "somewhere like Hervey Bay" could be home to such plush, modern accommodation, my aim was to get out and see what else the area had to offer.

After having thought my trip was going to be doubly bad thanks to the fact it took place outside whale-watching season, I was ready for the next "I told you so" as I boarded the Tasman Venture at its moorings in the well-known Boat Harbour.

During the July-November whale-watching season, the Tasman Venture's four viewing decks and airconditioned underwater viewing rooms are the perfect way to get back to nature with the peaceful majesty of one



WORTH THE TRIP: Breakfast at Enzo's, a stay at the Grand Mercure Allegra Apartments and a visit to the Sandy Cape Lighthouse.

of the world's largest creatures.

But from November to March, the 20-metre craft becomes more of a school, restaurant and playground for its passengers.

After the two-hour cruise up the island, the Remote Fraser Island Tour takes you to, well, one of the most remote parts of the island – the Sandy Cape Lighthouse.

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Along the way, there is every chance your journey will be broken by pauses to get up close and personal with one or two of the many pods of dolphins which feed in the bay.

On this particular day, we were treated to three separate encounters with the playful mammals, so while sightings aren't guaranteed (or even mentioned in the itinerary), there's a fair chance you'll get lucky.

About a third of the way back down the island is the picturesque Wathumba Creek, the perfect place to splash about in a

kayak. So while half the group went off in the Venture's six-metre rigid hull inflatable, Extream, for what turned out to be a thoroughly successful fishing excursion (tuna and shark were the catches of the day), the rest of us were treated to a paddle over the bay's crystal clear shallow waters and up the whisky-coloured Wathumba Creek.

Later six of us were asked if we would like to ride along in Tasman Venture's wake as we cruised south, and I eagerly volunteered – fully clothed – for the opportunity.

It wasn't long before I realised I would have been better leaving my shirt behind as we criss-crossed over the catamaran-made waves at break-neck speed.

We finally came to a halt just as those who had remained on the Venture were gearing up for a snorkel over a patch of coffee rock expertly spotted by the boat's captain.

Here we all floated about in the luke-warm water and marvelled at the enormous logger-head turtle which was quite happily sitting on the bottom letting smaller fish clean it.

As I soaked in the hot tub back at my apartment, I found myself already thinking of a way to return to Hervey Bay.



CONTACTS

Grand Mercure Allegra Apartments:
Rates from \$185 per apartment per night ("Stay seven nights, pay for five" deal for bookings between May 1 and June 20)
486 The Esplanade, Hervey Bay. 4194 7200.
www.allegra-herveybay.com.au

Tasman Venture:
Day trip \$165 per adult, \$85 per child (November-March); Half-day whale watching trip \$100 per adult, \$65 per child (mid-July-November)
1800 620 322. www.tasmanventure.com.au, tasmanventure@bigpond.com.au

Bay Bicycle Hire:
Children's \$6 an hour or \$10 for a half day. Adults \$8 an hour or \$15 for a half day.
0417 644 814

Enzo's on the Beach:
351a The Esplanade, Scarness. 4124 6375

WHAT'S ON

July – Whale-watching season begins
August 17 – Fraser Coast Seafood Festival
www.herveybayseafoodfestival.com/



Pacific Sun

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N841#	15 Nov 08	7	Noumea, Lifou, Vila	waitlist	\$793	\$1192	\$1307
N905	31 Jan 09	14	Millford Sound, Port Chalmers, Lyttelton, Wellington, Tauranga, Auckland	\$1522	\$1617	\$2472	\$2662
N912	28 Mar 09	12	Noumea, Isle of Pines, Suva, Savusavu, Vila, Pentecost	\$1427	\$1523	\$2279	\$2472
N915	25 Apr 09	7	Whitsundays, Cairns, Port Douglas, Willis Island	\$874	\$926	\$1372	\$1476

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