



Local allure

Brisbane has the capacity to surprise, writes **Tonya Turner**

WRITTEN on the outside wall of Jamie's Espresso Bar in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley in small red print is this quote: "Real travel consists not in seeing new lands but in seeing with new eyes."

It's easy to take things for granted. Good health, loved ones and jobs, all part of our day-to-day existence, can be familiar and unsurprising until we lose them or see them in a different light.

Travelling is a bit the same. Ticking destinations off our list, we can forget there is so much more to discover in a place — and within ourselves.

When it comes to taking a holiday, sometimes we don't need to look any further than what's right in front of our eyes. Whether it's travelling around the country or having a weekend away in your own city, there is plenty to unearth, no matter how well you think you know your stomping ground.

On a recent weekend "away" in Brisbane, it was a revelation to discover how different everything looked in the city when I wasn't on my way to work, racing around on a lunchbreak or trying to accomplish some other hurried task. The only goal was to get off my well-beaten city track and enjoy the next two days and nights ahead.

Staying at the Novotel Brisbane on Creek St offered central access to restaurants and shopping strips, and it also serves one of the best buffet breakfasts in the city. Small tubs of bircher muesli, croissants, danish pastries and a juicer to squeeze fresh fruit and vegetables are available, along with the regular hot and cold breakfast staples.

Checking in on a Friday night, my husband and I headed for pre-dinner drinks at trendy inner-city restaurant Zenbar (215 Adelaide St, tel: 3211 2333). Perched among a line of bamboo trees in Post Office Square and overlooking the park, visitors can duck in for a coffee, a cocktail, a quick bowl of noodles or long lunches and dinners.

Later we strolled down Edward St to Kabuki (corner Edward and Margaret streets, tel: 3221 1999), a Japanese teppanyaki restaurant in the Stamford Plaza where the chefs mystified us with their entertaining cooking skills and served up fresh, tender and tasty courses.

On Saturday morning, after a satisfying buffet breakfast, we hit Queen Street Mall for a relaxed day of shopping.

A mid-week lunchbreak can often find you racing into your favourite store for an emergency purchase but rarely offers enough time to explore.

On this day we managed to visit nearly every store in Queens Plaza, finding some surprise bargains on the upper level where we rarely roam.

A casual and affordable lunch at Jo-Jo's (level 1, corner Queen Street Mall and Albert St, tel: 3221 2113) overlooking the mall was somewhere neither of us had been for years. Not unlike an upmarket food court, we'd forgotten how great the aspect was, the modern and relaxed interior and variety of cuisines on offer across its four kitchens.

The highlight of our weekend was yet to come — a late-afternoon visit to Stephanie's Spa Retreat at the Sofitel (level 3, 249 Turbot St, tel: 3221 8800). An inner-city sanctuary of the highest standard, great attention to detail has been paid to the design, treatments and Turkish-inspired decor. Relaxed after a massage, we finished the day with drinks and a light meal at Siana restaurant at Riparian Plaza (71 Eagle St, tel: 221 3887) overlooking the Brisbane River before retreating to our hotel room.

As the weekend drew to a close and I mentally prepared to return to work on Monday, it felt as though I'd rekindled a flame with the city I call home.

On a mid-week lunchbreak back at Jamie's Espresso Bar (cnr James and Robertson streets, tel: 3257 1010), I am again faced with those words of wisdom. As I go about my week and weekends, I will try not to forget a change in perspective is as good as a holiday.



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