



The Treasury Casino is one of Brisbane's iconic landmarks.



sue wallace

If indulgence, pampering good food and warm weather are top priorities for your next getaway, Brisbane is the place to go.

IT'S a little like stepping into Aladin's glittering cave, with lights twinkling and steam rising.

The minute you sit down in the ornate chamber, thoughts of ancient rituals abound.

Three colourful bowls of warmed mineral mud are set before us, which are to be applied with a wide brush after a firm exfoliation.

There's something very therapeutic about covering yourself in rich-coloured mud designed to purify and detox, which also smells so good.

Just as the mineralised body masks starts to dry, warm herbal steam rises and you lie back on the warmed tiles feeling tension and stress dissolving.

The steam continues and the temperatures rise, triggering the benefits of the special mud designed to leave you with rejuvenated skin.

As the lights twinkle above, a gentle rain shower starts and you know it's then time to move next door to scrub off the mud, which leaves behind silky soft skin.

The Traditional Opal Rasul Temple treatment, is popular with couples, great for a girl's weekend away or can be done solo.

It's just one of the treatments available at Stephanie's Spa Retreat at Brisbane Sofitel.

The hardest part is returning to the real world again and, as tempting as it is to lounge poolside at the city hotel, Brisbane is a vibrant and cosmopolitan destination with lots to see and do.

Spend a weekend in Brisbane, known as Australia's fastest growing city, and the sunny days and balmy nights will no doubt entice you to return.

There's something about walking around in shorts and taking a dip when it's the middle of



winter back home that's certainly appealing.

Brisbane averages more than 300 sunny days a year and its year-round temperate climate is a way of life for relaxed Queenslanders.

The city lies on the banks of the serpentine Brisbane River and was named after Sir Thomas MacDougall Brisbane, a soldier, astronomer and colonial administrator from the 18th century.

The beauty of Brisbane proper is that many attractions are within walking distance or just a quick boat trip from the central business district.

The gleaming towers that define the city skyline reflect heritage with dutifully restored sandstone buildings while in the surrounding suburbs weatherboard Queensland cottages with their shady verandas and iron roofs give Brisbane its unique character.

The Brisbane River, the main stream of the city and an exciting way to travel for pleasure or business, meanders 114km eastwards from the Great Dividing Range to Moreton Bay.

There are several ways to explore the river, including the fast moving City Cats that run from 6am to 10.30pm seven days a week, as well as ferries and pleasure craft.

North Quay is a central city stop a few steps away from the Treasury Casino and the Queen Street mall where you can shop 'til you drop at the 500 specialty shops.

Across the river is South Bank, formerly the site of World Expo '88 and now a hub for recreation, culture, entertainment, education and dining.

There's a manmade beach, lots of interesting restaurants, barbecue and picnic areas and a cinema complex.

Take a seat in front of King George Square and watch the world go by.

From North Quay you can embark on longer river adventures such as the tour to Lone Pine Sanctuary, the world's biggest koala park.

Just a walk across the river is Brisbane's cultural precinct including the Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland Museum, State Library and Queensland Performing Arts Complex.

A short walk along the boardwalk down river from South Bank is the Queensland Maritime Museum, which

exhibits and preserves the state's rich maritime heritage.

Another great way to enjoy the city is to hop on a bike, grab a city map and head off.

There are 400km of bike and walking tracks on both banks of the river.

Some of the city's best parkland and places to explore are located along the river and you can take your bike on the City Cat.

The City Cat has 13 stops along the river, which, combined with the slower inner City Ferry and the Cross River Ferry, provides greater access to various scenic sites.

One of the highlights is Brett's Wharf, which puts you in Hamilton, an old and very graceful riverside suburb 10km from the city.

You can obtain a Heritage Trail booklet that highlights the old Queensland homes built at Hamilton Heights a century ago.

For a different look at the river, hop aboard the Club Crocodile River Queen and enjoy the old paddlesteamer while looking at the sights.

Pier Nine is another Brisbane icon, which is much awarded for its fresh seafood.

While there's plenty to keep you busy in central Brisbane, take some time out and spread your wings a little.

The city is the perfect base for exploring spectacular Moreton Bay, the beaches of the Gold Coast or the many regional hinterland attractions located within a leisurely hour's drive.

For a weekend getaway treat, Sofitel Brisbane is perfect and has undergone major refurbishments.

One of the hottest places for a drink is the new Cuvee Lounge Bar in the redecorated lobby, which has vintage and non-vintage offerings from 20 of the world's great champagne houses and a connoisseur's selection of Australian, European and New World wines.

Next door Thyme2 restaurant involves theatre and movement in an open-plan interactive kitchen where you can chat with the chefs preparing dishes reflecting international dining trends.

The restaurant offers an extensive choice of dining alternatives under the guidance of star chef Marshall Orton.

You will also find impossible to say no to sweet treats from the most celebrated of French culinary brands, Lenotre, operators of the world-acclaimed two star Michelin restaurant The Pre Catalan in Paris.

Treats include delicate cakes, tarts, pastries and desserts baked in the French tradition.

After all those calories, there's a new gym and fitness centre where you can watch the sun rise across the city from 30th floor — there's even an innovative gym instructor on an interactive touchscreen program. The hotel's premium Club Sofitel provides a private domain for business and leisure guests offering self-serve food and beverages.

If you are looking for a weekend of indulgence, head this way.



brisbane – what's hot

ESCAPE winter's cold embrace with Sofitel Brisbane's latest package.

The Winter Escape is priced from \$275 and offers overnight superior room accommodation, interactive breakfast for two in the newly opened Thyme2 Restaurant, sparkling wine on arrival, complimentary self car parking and access to the new level 30 SoFit gymnasium.

The hotel recently underwent a multi-million redevelopment, which, as well as Thyme2, transformed the lobby and created the elegant Cuvée Lounge Bar.

Sofitel Brisbane offers exceptional service, layered luxury and the subtle touches

that artfully blend its French origins with Brisbane's local culture.

The package is available Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights until August 31 subject to availability. For details phone (07) 3835 4444; 1300 Sofitel or visit www.sofitelbrisbane.com.au

For pampering head to Stephanie's Spa retreat at Sofitel Brisbane.

Treatments include a mix of the finest spa therapies with a selection of Tibetan, Indian and Middle-Eastern rituals, Thai body work and European skin treatments.

Phone (07) 3221 8800 or go to www.stephanilessparetreat.com.au



ABOVE: Brisbane's famous Storey Bridge is lit up at night.

BELOW: Head to Brisbane's colourful markets for great shopping.





RIGHT: The Traditional Opal Rasul Temple treatment at Stephanie's Spa Retreat leaves your skin feeling rejuvenated.