

DANIEL BATEMAN takes sanctuary in a sprawling B&B with a killer view of the Atherton Tableland

THE moment we turned the corner into Grandview Country Retreat, my girlfriend gulped. I had driven her 330km north for a surprise romantic weekend getaway.

However, when she caught sight of the B&B sign hanging over the driveway, she had a flashback to another one of my surprise holidays in another state.

There, we had been followed around, were stalked by overly attentive hosts, ever so eager to make us feel 'at home' to the point they were knocking on our bedroom door in the middle of the night, just to make sure everything was going well.

Fortunately, my girlfriend's apprehension disappeared as soon as we were shown to our room.

We had been signed up for the couples package at the retreat – a weekend of fine food, fine relaxation, and of course, the promised Grand View.

They had us at hello.

The house itself was simply gigantic: a ponderous maze of rooms that just seemed to unfurl one after the other.

Inside, we found absolutely everything we could have needed to help us unwind: port, poker cards, pool table, spa, a telescope, DVDs – you name it, we were set.

I joked that if the apocalypse struck, I'd know where I'd want to ride out the storm.

Outside the retreat was what could never be described as a wonderland.

Native plants flanked all sides of the building, providing guests with a playground of vegetative beauty.

There were plenty of corners to explore, each containing interesting iron sculptures, a hidden tennis court, even a giant chess set.

Following a short path through the garden off our deck, we easily found the promised Grand View, a magnificent vista of the emerald rolling hills of the Tablelands, overlooking Mt Bartle Frere and Mt Bellenden Ker.

It was there we decided, after gorging ourselves on fresh cheeses from the nearby Gallo cheese factory, that our weekend plan to explore as much of the Tablelands as possible emptied out as quickly as the accompanying bottle of wine.

Instead of bushwalking around Yungaburra's famed Curtain Fig, or busting to get the best sunset photo of Lake Tinaroo, we simply found ourselves stretching out on the deck, alternating between



Tableland retreat

reading novels and playing lethargic games of Scrabble.

It was, of course, that splendid view that attracted our hosts, Louise and Chris Knol, to the property four years ago.

The hardworking couple created their extraordinary two-hectare garden from the ground up, filling it with native plants.

The award-winning gardens regularly feature in the annual Australian Open Garden Scheme.

We saw our hosts only once or twice over the course of the weekend, in short little visits where they either dropped off a sumptuous platter of food for us to cook on the deck's barbecue, or extra tomato sauce to garnish our snags.

After an equally indulgent breakfast of bacon, sausages and eggs, we were again reluctant to leave the sanctuary of our temporary living quarters.

However, the Tableland's newest attraction, the Mamu Canopy Boardwalk, soon beckoned.

The \$10 million boardwalk, which opened August last year, is operated by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

It offers an easy amble along a boardwalk held 40m aloft amid the towering treetops.

The 30-minute walk itself is such an easy amble, it could be even done by your 90-year-old gran visiting from Sydney.

Diehard bushwalkers may not find the slow incline of the gravel path that much of a challenge, but nature lovers of all ages are bound to be agape at the sight that meets you at the end: yet another grand view of the Tablelands, overlooking pulsating waterfalls; and lush, dense tropical rainforest, doing its best to fill in the gaps left in the wake of destruction by Cyclone Larry in 2006. The forest walk was strangely devoid of wildlife, only the occasional chirp of an unseen bird and a flutter of a butterfly reminding us there were other denizens within the rainforest.

I imagined the forest inhabitants would return in time, once they got used to the idea of the boardwalk.

We rewarded ourselves for our minor physical exertion by lunching at one of the industrial pillars of the Tablelands, the Millaa Millaa Dairy Farmers Milk and Cheese Factory.

Putting their primary product to the test, my girlfriend gleefully slurped down a luscious banana smoothie.

In my case, I was intrigued by

the concept of the milk factory's cafe serving homemade juices, without a Boost-style beatbox or staff wearing luminous green headbands anywhere in sight.

I selected a juice infused with pineapple and ginger to complement the chef's recommended calamari salad.

Every single morsel in my glass and on my plate was vacuumed down with the force of a Category 5 cyclone.

After waddling out of the milk factory, we had planned to head to Atherton and wander around some of the town's local attractions.

Again, the best laid plans of men went astray when we momentarily – ducked into the Grandview to pick up supplies.

On the way out of our room, I spotted that damn view again. And then the couch. And then a nearby pillow.

Needless to say, zzzzzz...

By the time we awoke, it was fast approaching dinner. Our hosts had kindly arranged for us to eat at the nearby Tarzali Tavern.

At first impression, the pub is a rustic local, replete with wooden benches, timber supports and olden-day paraphernalia dotted around the pub's shelves.

Once you've been seated and

handed a long, tall glass of beer, however, the pub becomes a gourmet eatery.

We had rifled through the menu and landed upon the traditional chicken parmie, and a pizza.

Man, were we blown away.

The parmigiana's Neapolitan sauce and the toppings on my chilli beef pizza were all freshly homemade, produced from fruit and vegies grown in a neighbour's garden around the corner.

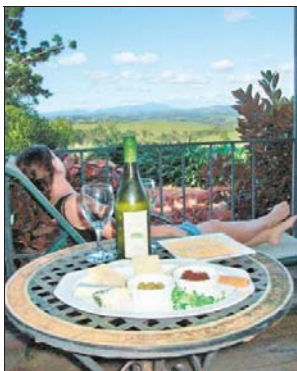
The chef had even gone to the trouble of adorning my side salad with some of the most exotic produce I have ever seen accompanying a pizza – tiny grape-like cucumbers, anyone?

I had been warned that the locally grown chillies had given my pizza a bit of a bite. But any explosion of hotness was easily washed down with a Fourx.

After our fantastic meal, all that was left to do was purchase a bottle of wine on our way out, and return to the retreat to enjoy it under the stars. Hell, we even had a telescope to do it with.


IF YOU GO

Grandview Country Retreat is located at 122L Hogan Road, Tarzali. For more information or to make a booking, phone 4095 1266, or visit www.grandviewcountry.com.au



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