



Well named: Grandview retreat boasts a stunning outlook and a warm, friendly atmosphere

Suggested itinerary

Accommodation: Grandview Country Retreat, located at Tarzala, a few kilometres from Malanda

Dinner: Nick's Swiss Restaurant

Lunch: Malanda Dairy Centre

Must do: Malanda Falls guided rainforest walk



Music in his heart: Diners who can't get enough of Nick's Swiss-Italian restaurant can purchase Nick's legendary CD.



Getting there

Mid-way between Port Douglas and Mossman, take the Rex Range Rd through Julatten, Mt Molloy and Mareeba to Atherton. Drive through the town's major business area and turn left onto the Kennedy Hwy at the McDonalds roundabout. After 4km, take the Innisfail-Millaa Millaa Rd to Tarzali. Just after the 70km/hour sign, turn left into Hogan-Hosie Road and then left into Hogan Rd. Grandview is on the left.



WEEKEND escape

One of the problems with living in an international tourist destination like Port Douglas is you rarely want to go anywhere else for your holidays. Why spend a great wad of cash on airfares and accommodation when you're already living in paradise? Sometimes all that's needed is a short, relaxing getaway. One option for an experience that's completely different to the tropical coastline is the cool, rolling hills of the Tablelands. SUSANNAH THACKRAY reports.

HIDDEN away at Tarzali between Malanda and Millaa Millaa is the Grandview Country Retreat, a 2006 Tourism Awards winner and a perfect place for a true Highlands experience that's just two hours drive from Port Douglas and Mossman.

Owner/manager Louise Knol is a passionate advocate for the Malanda area and in between playing host to her guests, works part-time at the local tourist information centre.

Set on five acres of award-winning gardens featuring stunning sculptures and charming rustic nik-naks, the retreat offers three private luxury cottage-style suites, including the Highlander, Rainforest and Grandview.

While the retreat is an ideal getaway for couples, it is also extremely family-friendly, with all suites offering single beds and bunks for children and plenty of outdoor activities, including tennis, cycling and large fun garden games like chess, checkers, basketball, bocce, croquet and soccer.

For couples interested in a less active stay, the retreat also offers a pretty gazebo with views across the soft green

dairy country, as well as a large heated hydrotherapy spa and infra-red sauna.

The log fire is also an added bonus, particularly for coastal dwellers who aren't used to the chilly night air that's found at higher altitudes.

DVDs are also available for hire and a bar (with pool table) is open daily for guests.

All suites are fully self-contained and a barbecue on the deck offers a perfect opportunity for bacon and eggs in the open air.

For those who feel like venturing out for dinner, Nick's Swiss-Italian Restaurant at Yungaburra is a picturesque 15-minute drive away and offers a raucous night's entertainment.

The a la carte menu features such dishes as the Yodeller's Delight (smoked pork loin, homemade Sauerkraut and Frankfurter Sausage with hot or mild mustard), a 280gm slab of Jackaroo's sirloin steak and Nick's Hot Stone Grill which arrives at the table sizzling on hot stone and continues cooking as you eat. The food is the first of many surprises this unique restaurant offers.

In his own words (found on the back of the menu), Nick established the restaurant 20 years ago when he yodelled into the area as an ambitious but youthful one-time shepherd boy from the lofty mountains of Switzerland.

The restaurant's party atmosphere cranks up on Saturday nights, when Nick swaps his chef's hat for an accordion and drums up support from bemused diners, pausing only to turn his talents to the restaurant's impressive collection of Swiss bells.

Another focal point is the 'yodeller's bar', crafted from a slab of Tableland Sally Wattle (a rainforest timber), supported by local granite rock and finished with wrought iron trimmings.

Thanks to Nick's larger than life personality and musical enthusiasm, the restaurant offers an entertaining night out and the number of curious international visitors venturing off the usual tourism track also comes as a surprise.

Another hidden treasure for those curious about the history of the Tablelands is the Malanda Dairy Centre, which not only offers an

impressive menu of local produce (coffee, tea, fruit, vegetables, meats and cheese), but a huge heritage display (including an old-fashioned milking demonstration, complete with cow) featuring a huge number of historic photographs, traditional life displays, information boards, sound scapes, artefacts and local stories stemming from the area's early farming days.

Battling heat, transport and rain, these early pioneers was as tough as nails, carving out an industry that today is the area's lifeblood.

Visitors interested in the local environment shouldn't miss the opportunity for a guided walk through the Malanda Falls area.

The local Aboriginal guide and elder is a wealth of information, after growing up in the local rainforest that is now the preserve of scientists and visitors.

While Cyclone Larry took its toll on the area in 2006, mother nature has been quick to repair the damage, creating interesting new tracts of rainforest re-growth along the way.