

Title **Getting The Royal Treatment in Queensland**

By Lisa Arcella

While other travelers might make Sydney or Melbourne a first stop on any journey to Australia, I headed straight for Brisbane and the beautiful and sunny state of Queensland.

In the northeastern part of the continent, Queensland is actually a huge territory stretching from the city of Brisbane to Cairns and all of the amazing coastline in between, including the Great Barrier Reef. Warm days and cool evenings make the area a favorite destination for Australians and New Zealanders (Americans, we should listen), and it's easy to see why. Queensland is the kind of lovely place you never want to leave.

I only had a week, though, so I limited my travel from the beach town of Noosa on the Sunshine Coast, south to the capital city of Brisbane and then below that, to the fashionable Gold Coast before returning to Sydney.

What to See

A quick hour and a half flight from Sydney landed me at Brisbane airport, where I hopped in a car (driving on the opposite side of the road does take some getting used to)^[RS1] and headed straight to the famed Australia Zoo (www.australiazoo.com.au). This, of course, was made famous by the late Steve Irwin. The zoo is still run by his family—including *Dancing With The Stars* champ Bindi! The “Crocodile” lives on with daily shows to get up close and personal with the crocs. Crikey!

At the Sofitel Brisbane, a must-see is Stephanie's Spa Retreat for perhaps the most unique spa experience I have ever had. The Opal Rasul Temple treatment brings you to a Moorish-tiled room, and several body and face masks are provided for you to slather all over your body. Soon, the room is enveloped in an herbal steam, and all you can see are the twinkling lights above you that look like tiny stars. That's followed by a gentle rain shower until you are fully detoxed. An hour later, I was puddle of relaxation with glowing skin. (www.stephaniesspa.com.au)

In Brisbane, GoMA (the Gallery of Modern Art) is the country's best modern art museum and features five stories of galleries including a number of terrific interactive exhibits for children. It's a huge space allows for some impressively large contemporary pieces from Australia, Asia and the Pacific. I loved the outdoor sculpture garden. Since my appreciation of food is even greater than art, a delicious lunch at the GoMa restaurant on a balcony overlooking the Brisbane river made the experience even more memorable.

(qag.qld.gov.au)^[RS2]

Behind the museum I boarded a MV Mirimar Cruise (www.mirimar.com) for a leisurely cruise up the river to the Lone Pine Sanctuary - the world's first and largest koala rescue center and in my opinion, the best place ever! It is indeed a sanctuary more than a zoo, with an open area to walk among and feed kangaroos, emus, wallabies, and multicolored lorikeet birds, plus many other native species. There's also a topnotch sheep dog show that gives a little peak at what outback life is like. (www.koala.net)

Where to Go

The hip beach town of Noosa on The Sunshine Coast is a great place to soak up the sun and have fun. Take a stroll Hastings Street, the main shopping district where the vibe is quiet sophistication. Surfing, rock-climbing, mountain-biking, sea-kayaking, fishing, diving, snorkeling are all local favorites. (www.visitnoosa.com.au)

A must see in Brisbane is the Tangalooma Island Resort on Moreton Island, which is about an hour boat ride away. It's a popular weekend getaway for locals, who can partake in dozens of activities from tobogganing down huge sand dunes to scuba diving around a shipwreck. But for me the real reason to come here was a chance to see the wild dolphins that turn up almost every night at dusk to be hand fed by the resort's staff and guests. The dolphins come right up to shoreline and actually line up in an orderly way down the beach waiting for their free meal. It's an amazing sight. (www.tangalooma.com)

Where to Stay

In Noosa one of the best hotels in town is the Sheraton Noosa Resort & Spa (www.starwood.com/redirect/sheraton/noosa). The Lifestyle Spa Studios - there are seven here - all have large, private balconies, kitchenettes, big beautiful bathrooms with spa tubs and a sleek, modern design. I especially enjoyed the pool at this resort with its rock formations and infinity edge leading to the ocean. [RS3]

The Sofitel Brisbane (www.sofitelbrisbane.com.au) has a big, international feel, and guests at its luxury club level have access to the executive lounge, which offers incredible 360-degree views of the entire city. As you read earlier, the spa here is just fantastic, so of course, this is one of my top places to stay in Brisbane. [RS4]

The Emporium Hotel is guaranteed to appeal to those with a sense of fashion and an eye for design. The luxury boutique hotel has a gleaming red glass and chrome lobby and gorgeous suites. You must eat at the restaurant where they offer fresh seafood and the most incredible [insert dish here]. [RS5] (www.emporiumhotel.com.au)

The most romantic hotel you will ever see is Songbirds Rainforest Retreat at Tamborine Mountain. Individual villas in this lush, tropical setting provide for a very private and quiet getaway, plus I had a memorable encounter with a wild Wallabee. [RS6] (www.songbirds.com.au)

Only about 45 minutes away from Mount Tamborine is Surfer's Paradise and the incredible Palazzo Versace. High style is what you would expect from the world's first hotel to bear the name of the famous design house and my suite certainly didn't disappoint. Every inch was decorated in Versace décor and overlooked multiple pools (including one with a sandy beach and another indoor adults-only grotto). Just across the street is the white sandy beach that Australia is famous for. (www.palazzoversace.com) [RS7]

Where to Eat

In Noosa, try Berardo's Bistro on the Beach (www.berardos.com.au) which offers tasty Mediterranean and New Australian cuisine. The seafood, beef, and produce in Australia are some of the best in the world, if not the best. There's also an emphasis on free range organic and biodynamic cooking. All combined it adds up to be a food lover's paradise.

In Brisbane I loved the Riverbar & Kitchen, (<http://riverbarandkitchen.com.au>) which is a great place to eat outdoors with a cocktail and a huge plate of shrimp (I never asked if they were actually cooked on the barbie!)

Just before hitting the Gold Coast, I had a fun afternoon at Tamborine Mountain in the Hinterland, which is filled with fun shops and art galleries. Toward the end of Long Road, also known as the Gallery Walk is Witches Chase Cheese Company, which is a great place to have lunch or dinner. The complex houses an open-air restaurant, a microbrewery where you can sample a variety of local beers and a fine homemade cheeses. (www.witcheschasecheese.com.au)