



ESCAPE Summit Apartments, 15 Flame Tree Court, Airlie Beach | **Amanda Watt**

Why do south-east Queenslanders rarely stray from their comfort zone on weekends? Granted, the Gold and Sunshine coasts are stunningly good but with a little imagination, mini-breaks with a difference are just a plane ride away.

We had picked up return flights from Brisbane to Proserpine in North Queensland for a smidgin over \$200 each and after a 30-minute drive through canefields in our budget car rental, we were on the main street of Airlie Beach in search of our weekend pad.

Past visits to Airlie, the backpacker mecca and gateway to the Whitsunday Islands, have been noisy, cheerful affairs because of the proximity of accommodation to the main strip of souvenir shops and bars, but we were pleased to find ourselves following a winding road away from the hubbub. Our destination was Summit Apartments, one of the newest

additions to Airlie, which boasts of views of the Coral Sea from its 60 hilltop apartments.

I was dubious about a water view when we discovered our digs were on the first floor, but was happy to be proved wrong when we stood out on the large balcony at the rear of the open-plan apartment and took in the sparkling blue northern vista. To the south was an equally spectacular panorama courtesy of the ranges of the Conway National Park.

Those with an eye for interior decorating will be impressed by the cool green, white and chocolate colour scheme and modern furnishings. The apartment is geared for longer stays with a six-seat dining table, large chaise longue and groovy armchairs in the living area and a bigger-than-average kitchen kitted out with all you'd expect (dishwasher, oven, hotplates and full-size fridge). Rows of cupboards were filled with every possible piece of kitchenalia, glassware and crockery.

The main bedroom had a practical ensuite with bath and shower and a ridiculously large walk-in robe, but best of all was the Coral Sea views could be enjoyed here too, thanks to a large picture window overlooking the deck. Outside time was spent splashing around in the pool in the resort's communal rec area and lolling about on the lounges within easy observation distance of a kids' games room.

There are lots of energetic activities to pursue offshore from Airlie (day cruises, jet ski hire and sea kayak expeditions can all be booked in town), or you could just kick back and enjoy a quiet waterfront ale. The Whitsunday Sailing Club at the eastern end of town had a spectacular outlook, as did Barracudas Oyster Bar and Grill on the headland, a short stroll north-west.

There were options for dinner at nearby settlement Shingley Beach, though we'd



Airlie opulence ... (from opposite page) The view from Conway National Park; poolside rec area; main bedroom with ensuite.

OVERLEND WAS A GUEST OF THE OPERATORS PHOTOGRAPHY: QUEENSLAND TOURISM

heard big raps for seafood joint Fish D'vine in the heart of Airlie, so after dark we ditched the hire car and descended on foot (an easy ten-minute walk). We were a little perturbed when we located the restaurant stuck in the middle of a tired-looking indoor/outdoor food court on the esplanade, but it was a good lesson in not being quick to judge. My fresh-off-the-boat barramundi with bok choy and macadamia nut pesto was excellent, and my partner raved about his dozen Pacific oysters and bucket of wild prawns. What the restaurant lacks in airs and graces (food is get-it-yourself when your buzzer sounds) it makes up for in spades with its chilled-out, happy vibe and top-notch spread.

And in one of those combinations you only tend to find in North Queensland, the restaurant doubled as a specialist rum bar – the largest in Australia is the claim, with 120-plus rums on the shelves to try. I had been dreading the killer climb back up the hill to the apartment after dinner but after three very decent mojitos, the pain didn't even register.

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WEBLINKS www.summitairliebeach.com.au; www.thewhitsundays.com.au

RATES Opening specials include 1br apartment for 7-night stay \$99 per night; 2br 7-night stay \$150 p.n. Mention *Qweekend* when booking to receive a complimentary 1pm late checkout and 10 per cent discount voucher at Waterline on Shingley restaurant.

THE VERDICT
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