



Situated barely a hop, skip and a jump away from the city, where the rainforest meets the reef, Palm Cove is the perfect weekend retreat. **JANESSA EKERT** discovers the coastal delights of this exclusive beachfront paradise, while enjoying the hospitality of the Grand Mercure Rockford Hotel.

Palm Cove offers a range of resort accommodation, dining venues and internationally award winning spa retreats, making it the perfect place to relax and rejuvenate. Although the region is host to thousands of domestic and international travellers each year, it maintains a quiet seaside charm.

Brett and I arrived on a beautiful sunny afternoon and even though we were only 20 minutes from town, I felt like I was a world away. After a tasty lunch at one of the many beachfront dining options, we headed to the Grand Mercure to check in and explore the resort facilities.

With its absolute beachfront location, the Grand Mercure is a recent addition to the Palm Cove esplanade, built only three years prior. It boasts stylish, contemporary architecture, perfect for the tropics. Accommodation choices range from luxuriously appointed studios to one and two-bedroom self-contained deluxe apartments, each with a private balcony. Taking pride of place in the centre of the resort is the large freeform lagoon style swimming pool, surrounded by lush tropical gardens. There is also a heated jacuzzi and other facilities include a fitness centre, barbecue area and a wide selection of restaurants, cafes and boutique shopping.

Our room replicated the same chic, contemporary design and had everything a couple could want including a fully stocked kitchen with compact dishwasher, a main and ensuite bathroom, washer and

dryer, dining table, two televisions with a selection of in-house movies, a stereo, writing desk and a private terrace over looking the magnificent pool. There were also two separate sleeping quarters.

Brett and I were booked in for a couples' massage, courtesy of the hotel, so after dropping off our bags and exploring the pool area we made our way to the internationally recognised Sanctum Day Spa. Miyuki and Jennifer were to be our massage therapists for the afternoon and I was happy to be led to their inner sanctum – it was heaven. Miyuki's expert fingers eased the week's stress from my back and while Brett was at first apprehensive, having never experienced a professional massage, after the allocated 30 minutes he was a true convert. We both left floating on air. Back at the Grand Mercure, we took full advantage of the lagoon style pool, before heading upstairs to dress for dinner.

There are a number of restaurants in close proximity to the Grand Mercure but as we were both in the mood for Italian, we decided to dine at Portobellos. This charming establishment boasts a beachfront location with views over the Coral Sea and offers inside and alfresco seating. The menu is a combination of traditional and modern Italian, with a range of pizza, pasta, fish, poultry, steak and vegetarian dishes. To start Brett and I shared a delicious plate of Portobello antipasto [\$16.90]. For our mains Brett couldn't resist the rib eye off the bone [\$39], cooked medium rare and served with smashed potatoes, brocolini, green beans and a mushroom sauce. I remained

true to the Italian theme opting for a prosciutto pizza [\$21]. Generously topped with mozzarella and parmagiana cheese, prosciutto and ragola, it was delicious. Embracing the holiday spirit I enjoyed a pina colada [\$8.50] while Brett enjoyed a beer. After the delicious meal, we took a stroll along the esplanade before retreating to our room to enjoy one of the many in-house movies on offer.

After a rejuvenating sleep in the queen size bed, Brett and I woke early for an indulgent breakfast at The French Corner. The menu offered a selection of hot and cold dishes, ranging from fresh fruit to a full English breakfast and a wide variety of sweet and savoury French crepes, which are their specialty. I ended my weekend away with poached eggs [\$13.50], while Brett couldn't go past the eggs benedict [\$16.50]. To wash it down we shared a caramel milkshake [\$5.90]. Our weekend stay flew by in a blur of luxurious accommodation, expert massage and European cuisine. It was an amazing experience and one that no Cairns local should miss. **CL**

FACT FILE

Grand Mercure Rockford Esplanade Palm Cove
Corner Veivers Road and Williams Esplanade
For more information please contact reservations
on 405 3999

Rooms start from only \$149 per night
Couples massages start from \$145 for 30 mins.