

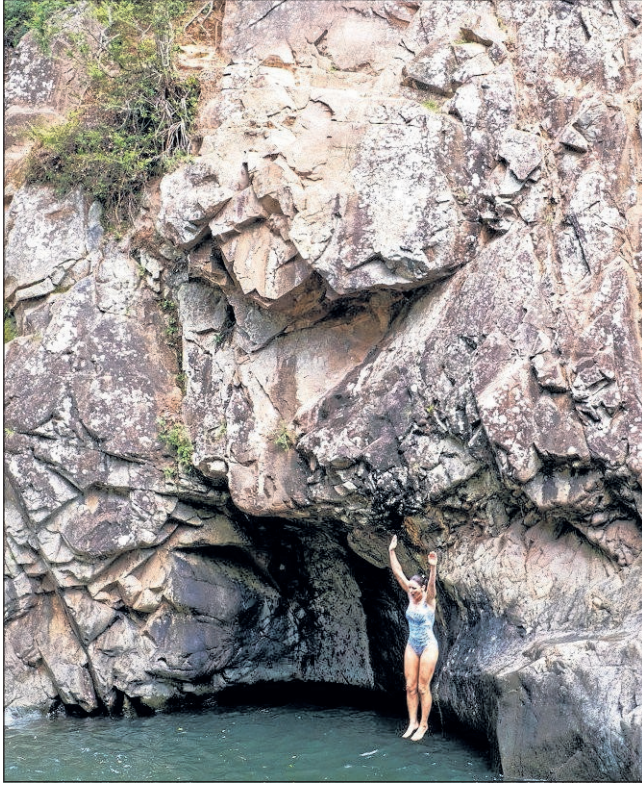
An empty-nesters' haven

LYNN GAIL indulges in a romantic, empty-nesters getaway in the Gold Coast's scenic hinterland.

CLUSTERS of cotton ball clouds are floating past our A-frame window as dawn pushes over Mt Tamborine's mountains on the Gold Coast Hinterland.

A ray of sunlight is playing hide-n-seek, hinting at a spectacular sunrise. But the sky turns dark, there's no sunrise, and it doesn't matter. I'm tucked up with my husband, sharing breakfast in bed in a cosy alpine cottage in the Polish Place, listening to the bubble-wrap pop of rain on the rustic tin roof.

As recent empty-nesters we are luxuriating in a three-day getaway, enjoying the start of the "offspring-have-sprung" chapter of our lives. To begin our mini-escape, we stopped by the Fox & Hounds Country Inn for a traditional English pub meal after driving from Brisbane. Decorated from corner to corner with English memorabilia, its welcome vibe was akin to sitting in grandma's dining room for some hearty home cooking.



JUMP IN: Child-free after 25 years, it's time to take the plunge into new adventures. Photo: Lynn Gail. The writer was a guest of Gold Coast Tourism.

We're taking time to explore like we used to, more than 25 years ago, when our only concern was airport check-in times.

Our first stop is Cedar Creek Falls in Tamborine

National Park. Being February, it's the wettest time of year, but with typical on-off monsoon weather, the sun joins us as we follow surging falls to reach a pocket of freshwater swimming holes

edged by lush rainforest. It's too clear, too inviting, not to jump in. We try to swim to the waterfall, but the water's too strong and we retreat to the edge where we flop onto the rocks like basking seals.

The empty-nester's syndrome is often associated with feelings of loss and loneliness. Studies show mini-breaks can strengthen long-term relationships. Taking time out to play together on a weekend retreat can create a chance to reignite a dwindled flame - and rekindle romance.

We head into Mt Tamborine's countryfied town in search of refreshment. We pass ice-creameries, fudge shops, spiritual stores selling healing gemstones, and earthy cafes cooking up dishes for the health-conscious. There's no rush to find somewhere to eat and after chatting with friendly locals we head to Fortitude Brewing Company to share a wild mushroom pizza as we work our way through a tasting paddle of boutique beers.

Continuing our "us-cation", we drop into Witches Falls Winery to be guided

through a wine tasting with a difference. Melissa Bell, who knows all about the fruitful facets of wine, shares the back story of each bottle as we sample cheeses, sip wine, and nibble on crackers spread with fig and pear paste.

"It's more than a normal wine tasting," she says, "it's a wine conversation about earthy aromas, vintages and harmony, and the balance of flavours." A corking afternoon soon passes as we are taught the finer aspects of bouquets and Bordeaux.

As the temperature dips, we head back to our cottage. The potbelly in the corner is ready to fire up; we light it to further enhance our feel-good mood as we sit on the deck overlooking cloud-shrouded mountains. Dusk's orchestra is warming up. Butcherbirds call to one another to come home, and katydids play backup as currawongs create a noisy chorus.

We retreat inside to plan the next day's adventures with a sense of newfound freedom and a renewed sense of "us".

IF YOU GO

Stay: Self-contained two-storey cottages - www.polishplace.com.au/cottages

Visit: Cedar Creek Falls: www.parks.des.qld.gov.au/parks/tamborine/

Eat, drink: foxandhounds.net.au, fortitudebrewing.com.au, witchesfalls.com.au

Events: Organisers continue to plan but recognise events may be cancelled in the light of COVID-19. Check before making plans.

VIVA Surfers Paradise, July 10-19, Australasia's largest tribute artist festival - surfersparadise.com/whats-on

Groundwater Country Music Festival, July 24-26, 50-plus artists, 15 stages - groundwatercmf.com

Bleach The Gold Coast Festival, Aug 12-23, contemporary arts program - bleachfestival.com.au

SWELL Sculpture Festival, Sept 11-20, Currumbin Beach - swellsculpture.com.au

Supercars Gold Coast, Oct 30-Nov 1 - supercars.com

Pan Pacific Masters Games, Nov 6-15 - mastersgames.com.au

■ destinationgoldcoast.com

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PORT OF ECHUCA
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