

# Sun, sand and fun!

A stone's throw from  
Brisbane, beautiful  
Moreton Island is a  
paradise for lovers of  
action and adventure.....

Words **Vicky Gray**





Moreton Island was never really on my “to do” list. If I wanted a tropical getaway I always thought I’d head up towards North Queensland, maybe Magnetic Island, but as I’m in the real world and our family’s budget doesn’t quite stretch that far, the next best thing was within an easy driving distance away.

We caught the ferry from the well-hidden terminal in Holt Street Wharf and within 75 minutes we pulled up at Tangalooma Island Resort on the landward side of Moreton Island.

The three kids and I were in awe of the sight in front of us, while my husband was being held captive for 20 minutes or so by a dozen or so Asians posing with photos of him as he was wearing his Akubra hat.

Although I’d seen all the photos of the resort on the internet, part of me did think that for advertising purposes they could have been exaggerated. Perhaps the sea had been given that extra splash of colour with the help of Photoshop, but I was astonished to see that

it was exactly like it had been portrayed. The resort itself was situated on the beach front, nestled in lush greenery. The clean, white sand ran as far as you could squint, past a distant ship wreck about a kilometre away and with the clear blue sky amplifying the shimmering crystal waters. It really was total unspoiled beauty.

### BEAUTIFUL CREATURE

We hurriedly made our way to our holiday apartment; feeling sweaty and uncomfortable after heaving our bags along the boardwalk, we dumped our bags, threw on our swimmers and made the 200-metre beach dash to the shore to cool off.

The water was heavenly; warm, clear and tranquil. For the next 10 minutes we simply wallowed in it like contented hippos, grinning at where we were.

We were happily splashing about and making plans for the day, when my teenage son suddenly bolted out of the water, gasping for us to follow him. There was

a shark heading for us! Without hesitation I whipped up the other two kids, when my husband calmly, but firmly shouted, “Stop!”

My immediate thought was that maybe he was insinuating that I shouldn’t panic and flail about if a Great White is headed my way. But then he started chuckling. It was just a dolphin.

This beautiful creature came within arm’s reach; its dorsal fin firmly on show, and it swam majestically between us for several minutes, intrigued by our lack of fins. Once he realised we had nothing for him to eat and we were actually quite boring compared to his usual marine friends, he turned and swam back out to sea, leaving us with our jaws open.

It was an unbelievable experience and we were blown away by how lucky we had just been.

### DIVING IN

One of the main things I wanted to do at Tangalooma, was snorkelling. I’d done it years before



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on the Great Barrier Reef, so I had no expectations that it was going to be as incredible as that, but I was looking forward to sharing the experience of underwater life with my family.

We hired our gear from the kiosk on the beach and took the one kilometre walk along the shoreline towards the ship wrecks.

The wrecks consist of 15 vessels that had been deliberately sunk to form a type of harbour for small boats and of course the wreck dive and snorkel site.

Many tourists were there when we arrived, all rigged up and ready to go diving. The wrecks provide depths of up to 10 metres, so there’s some great diving if you’re into that.

From the shore to the wrecks was about a 70-metre swim. It was easily done with flippers, so I spat in my mask, washed it out with sea water (like the professional snorkellers I’d seen on TV) and made my way out.

I watched under the water as the white sand disappeared from under me until it was no longer visible and all that was left was a dark abyss. Then panic took over.

I breathed in through my nose, sucking all the oxygen out of the mask and temporarily making my eyeballs bulge, so with one frantic swipe I

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whipped off my mask and flipped back to the shore, coughing and spluttering, with sea water stinging my eyes and streams of dribble hanging off my chin.

The rest of my family had made it to the wrecks without a problem... I felt such a wimp as my eight-year-old daughter was calmly splayed out like a star watching the fish.

It took all my courage (and my son's bodyboard for security) to head back out, but this time I didn't look down – I just swam like fury until I was with the others! When I got there they were all in some weird trance, and when I looked under the water I realised why... Marine life of every imaginable colour could be seen beneath us.

They were attracted to the wrecks and were now living there, unaware of their magnificence. It was amazing to be able to be amongst them, to gently swim along and find a school of glittery tropical fish following behind. I was so glad I'd pushed past my initial fear to be there.

### DESCENT OF DOOM

The next day we booked ourselves onto a sand tobogganing trip. We boarded the off-road-style bus and started the 20-minute journey over the cavernous sand terrain.

It wasn't long ago that we had visited Fraser Island, renowned for its four-wheel driving activities, so we weren't too shocked about the idea of being flung about in our seats like rag dolls.

A few of my friends had warned me about sand tobogganing, expressing fears that safety could be an issue and that everyone sliding into one another could cause all sorts of crippling injuries, but this certainly wasn't the case.

Every safety procedure was clearly spelled out to us by our tour guide before we climbed the towering sand dune armed with our piece of hardwood to lie on ready for our 35 miles-per-hour descent.

My heart was pumping so fast that by the time I'd got the top, I wasn't sure if it was just because I was

Top left and right, sand tobogganers enjoying their speedy descent. Above and above right, hand-feeding the friendly and inquisitive dolphins. Right, snorkellers survey the colourful marine life at the Tangalooma shipwrecks.



unfit or if it was the fear of hurtling, face first, down a gigantic steep hill. I also had my doubts as to whether my four-year old son should do it, but as he was keen and the guide assured me that many kids of his age do it, I let him go.

Unfortunately my fear unfolded before me as he let go of the edges of the hardwood plinth and planted his face firmly into the sand all the way to the bottom of the dune.

The tiny speck screamed as he lay covered from head to toe in an overcoat of sand, whilst at the top of the dune, an audible gasp was heard, before everyone stared silently at me.

"I'd better go and get him then," I said in shock, as I lay down on my hardwood plinth.

I took practically no notice of the actual ride itself, so whether or not it was exhilarating or not I don't really know; my focus was on my sad little boy. My teenager and husband had a great time though and

**'At the top of the dune, a gasp was heard, before everyone stared silently at me'**

went down the giant sand dune many times; meanwhile I had the task of trying to pry my son's eyes open to wash

out the sand with ice cold water, not so thrilling.

### AND SO ENDS THE DAY

The evening soon came round and we took advantage of the complimentary dolphin feeding experience.

The dolphins have been coming to the same spot here since 1992 to be hand fed by tourists, so there was quite a buzz on the beach as we all lined up excitedly to meet them.

It was a lovely evening; the balmy, warm breeze around us; the floodlights from the jetty shining down on the dolphins, and the putrid smell of fish entrails in the bucket for us to feed them.

It just cemented how lucky we were to have had our own personal wild dolphin encounter the previous day... And it was a perfect ending to our whistle-stop tour of Tangalooma Island. 🇦🇺

■ Vicky Gray is the author of *Didgeridoos & Didgeridon'ts*, now in its second edition, available from Amazon.

