Cruising in Caloundra

A smart new motel, bike rides along the shore and a sunset cruise on Pumicestone Passage make for one relaxing break

Story **PATRICK CRANNY**

To a kid of the 1970s there are few things more evocative than the word motel. Because if you lived that decade properly it should trigger memories of families jammed in cars, heading to holidays in magical places where you could park so close the bumper almost touched the front door and where you might occasionally find a coin-operated, vibrating massage bed.

So it was with an appropriate level of '70s kid excitement I grabbed the chance to stay at Caloundra's newest accommodation option, Motel Caloundra. Times have changed, very much for the better.

Recently redeveloped by Andrew and Lucy Pink – the team behind Maroochydore's Loea Boutique Hotel and the heritage Maleny Lodge – and Maeva Hospitality, the Sunshine Coast's first net-zero energy accommodation is unlike any motel I remember.

Of the motel's nine room options, we stayed in a beautifully renovated, two-bedroom apartment with a full kitchen, streaming services, kingsize beds, keypad entry … all the bases were covered. It was significantly better than a lot of "brand" hotels I've stayed in, so don't let the motel moniker fool you.

Not only is the refurbishment great but it's close to everything. It's two blocks from the town's main drag of Bulcock St, buzzing with shops and eateries and a vast market on Sunday mornings, and from there it's one more street down to the waterfront where we opted for Friday night dinner at Tides Waterfront Dining, an institution that boasts many food and wine awards.

Given the motel is so close to everything it's likely your car could remain tucked up in the motel car park for the duration of your stay which, as I discovered, opens up some new ways to see Caloundra.

The first was on two wheels with electric bike hire from ecoTekk. Business owners Stuart and Tracey deliver the bikes, set you up, give you a safety briefing then send you on your way. We had four hours and it gave

Pumicestone Passage, Caloundra, above; Motel Caloundra apartment's kitchen, living area and exterior; and Caloundra Cruise explores the marine park. Main picture: Visit Sunshine Coast

us the chance to really explore the coastal trails and enjoy the beaches without the modern-day misery that is finding a car park. The paths are well established and easy to navigate and the battery takes the sting out of the hills so you can literally ride for hours, finishing the trip without feeling sun-roasted and sweaty. I've always been sceptical of ebikes but finished a convert by the time the bikes were collected.

With plenty of energy to burn after the ride we took in the Downtown Caloundra Street Art Trail on foot before heading out on the water for a sunset cruise from Pelican Waters. Run by Caloundra Cruise, it headed out through the canals and into Pumicestone Passage where owner Ken McBride played the tunes and dropped interesting local facts like how the new

barway only exists because in 2022 Cyclone Seth removed a generous chunk of Bribie Island, splitting it and creating a passage. All good stuff to learn as Janis Joplin belted it out in the background. Our final stop was at a very busy Amici Restaurant and Pizzeria in the centre of Caloundra, which is obviously popular and, it turns out, for good reason, with its classic Italian menu, modern interior and attentive service.

Sunday morning is market day in Caloundra so we grabbed some breakfast, did a couple of laps around the stalls and really just made the most of not having to be anywhere. In the past I have been guilty of bypassing Caloundra en route to other places but a weekend exploring was the eye-opener that has given me a new favourite destination right on my doorstep.
The writer was a guest of Visit Sunshine Coast