



SYDNEY TO COFFS HARBOUR

Coffs Harbour, 558kms north of Sydney on the mid-north coast of NSW, is this state's most popular holiday destination. Whether you want to do the whole tourist thing or just chill out, whatever you're looking for you're bound to find it in Coffs. From art galleries, museums, wineries, pottery, and crafts to theme parks, gardens, and kilometres of pristine beaches, from world-class restaurants and sporting facilities to cosy little cafés and bushwalking trails, from international resorts to bush camping, Coffs Harbour has it all.

On a sparkling and very warm Friday afternoon, with our little dog, BJ, happily ensconced on the back seat, we set off for Coffs Harbour for some much-needed R&R with son, Rob, and his family. Where to stay was not a problem; the book "Holidaying With Dogs" has over 2000 listings of dog-friendly caravan parks in Australia and we settled on the Bonville Caravan Park on the Pacific Highway at Bonville, about 15kms south of Coffs Harbour, arriving at about 4:30 in the afternoon. The park is quiet despite being right on the highway and the tourist sites, though few, are big and roomy; there was more than enough space for our van and Rob's tent. The amenities are old but clean, the water hot and there's plenty of it.



The front entrance of Coffs Harbour Zoo

Saturday dawned sunny and hot and the family decided to do the typical tourist thing, starting with the zoo but John and I opted for a quiet day with BJ. We had a quick stop at the Information Centre in town, where we picked up a brochure on dog friendly places to visit and then set off for Sapphire Beach.

It was a hot day but on the beach a strong wind was blowing; BJ didn't mind in the slightest. He ran, dug holes and rolled in the sand, and ran some more, as little dogs do, dragging John along with him. Sapphire is not a leash-free beach. But that didn't worry this little black dog. The only problem, as far as BJ was concerned, was that wet stuff that kept chasing his feet!



BJ taking John for a walk



John and BJ having a run

Sitting on the beach watching them play I couldn't help thinking how beautiful it all is. The water, so clean and clear and the salt air so fresh, why would anyone ever want to leave?

Just off shore is Split Solitary Island. If you look closely just to the right you can see a boat. It was hard to make out at that distance but I think there were divers there. This whole area is the Solitary Islands Marine Park and the amazing diversity of marine life, found nowhere else in NSW, is a major attraction for divers.



The wind was blowing even harder now than it had been before and, by this time, BJ had had enough of trying to avoid the water. I've never known a dog like him; simply will not get his feet wet in the surf!



There are about 70 different places to eat in Coffs Harbour and, understandably, none of them are dog friendly. So a picnic was the order of the day. We bought a couple of Subway rolls and a drink and found a big shady tree in a park next to the parking area at Park Beach Plaza. Away from the water the wind wasn't nearly as bad and we sat for a while and talked about what we would do this afternoon.

John wanted to see Moonee Beach where there's a long walk out over the sandbar before you actually reach the surf. It's also dog friendly. Moonee Beach has a camping reserve and caravan area that is very popular with families because of the shallow water; along the shore there are small pools where children were playing. I'm not sure if the tide was out but I suspected that it was; this area looks like it would be deeper at high tide.



BJ and I went for a walk out to the surf but, again, he didn't want to get his feet wet. When we had to walk through one pool to get to the other side he simply refused and dug his heels into the sand! Short of dragging him the only way to cross was to carry him! Who said he was spoilt? There were a few swimmers in

the water but no one was surfing, there wasn't much swell.

Leaving Moonee Beach we stopped at the Coffs Harbour Jetty on our way back to camp. The Jetty Pier is quite a landmark. Originally built in 1892 it was completely rebuilt in 1997. From the pier you can fish, take a walk, or just enjoy the view out to Muttonbird Island and beyond.



The Jetty Pier and Muttonbird Island

Muttonbird Island, a great place for whale watching, is joined to the mainland by a breakwater. It is home to a large colony of wedge-tailed eagles and they breed there during the summer months. Sometimes you can see them but we weren't that lucky this time.



The sun was starting to go down and with it, the temperature but there were still a few hardy souls braving the surf at Jetty Beach. Just watching them made me shiver! South of here is Boambee Beach where 4x4 driving is allowed and dogs can run leash free. But it was getting dark so we gave it a miss, much to John's disappointment,

and made our way back to camp.

Sunday, another hot day, it was off for a quick visit to the Big Banana, Coffs Harbour's most recognisable attraction. Set amidst banana plantations this theme park is a must-see. There are rides, plantation tours, souvenir shops, and a café specialising in all things banana.

Having BJ with us limited what we could do here but not everything was a no-go. Adventure Trike Tours is tucked away in the caravan and coach parking area and as soon as John saw those three-wheeled motorbikes his eyes lit up! And when the fellow in the office told us we could take BJ, well there was no stopping him! There were, however, some rules. BJ was our responsibility, he had to wear a seatbelt and, as he was a passenger, we had to pay normal fare for him. No problem! This was going to be fun!



And fun it was! We opted for only the short ride of about 7 or 8 minutes because we didn't know how the dog would handle it; this would be interesting. But BJ sat between us and at first he held his head up with the breeze blowing into his face. After a while he put his head down onto John's knee and, I swear, he went to sleep! So

much for worrying about him! Meanwhile, we were having a blast! Our rider, Keith, was terrific. He took us up the Pacific Highway for a short way and then back towards town before coming back to the Big Banana and making a circuit of the parking areas. We waved at everyone and most folks waved back; those that



Ready to go, with our rider, Keith

didn't were probably envious! Adventure Trike Tours has mature riders who put your safety first and ensure that your ride is fun and exciting. I know we'll be going back on our next visit to Coffs Harbour and then it's going to be a longer ride!

Returning to the Banana the kids, including John, wanted to go for a toboggan ride. This is amazing and you can actually get up to quite a speed. That is, as long as there's not a slower person in front of you. Each toboggan is fitted with a brake to slow you down, if need be.

By now I was ready for a coffee. The café has all manner of different coffees as well as banana-oriented snacks and BJ was allowed to sit at the outside tables with us. After coffee I took him for a walk, as all little doggies need to do from time to time,



John on the toboggan ride - his 2nd!

while John and the family visited the candy shop to watch rock candy being made and to have some free samples. As you do.

All too soon it was time to make tracks for home. We'd had a wonderful couple of days and it was with some reluctance that we bid farewell to Coffs Harbour; we could quite easily have stayed for a week. There is any number of things to do in Coffs Harbour and we've only made mention of a few here; to list them all wouldn't be practical. Suffice to say that a minimum of 2 weeks would be needed to do it justice and even then you wouldn't see and do everything. But for a short break to recharge the batteries, a weekend is fine. Holiday times it is extremely busy but whether your tastes run to five star hotels or a tent on the riverbank, Coffs Harbour is sure to please.

