

travel

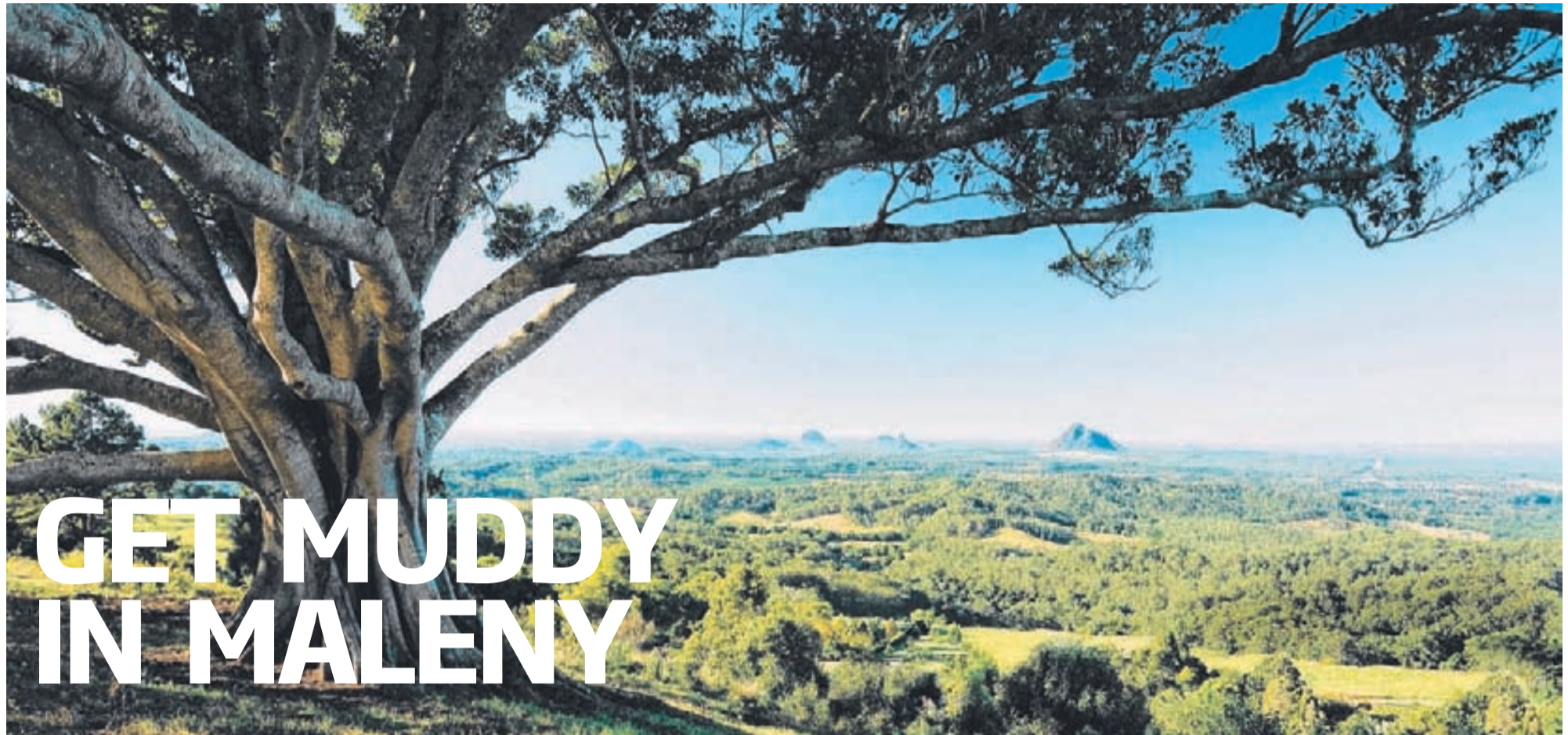


HOT: \$259

BROOME

Oaks Hotels & Resorts' Cable Beach Explorers Package offers a weekend of indulgence and adventure. From \$259 a night (three-night minimum), enjoy a pearl farm visit, tours, camel rides and more (some extra costs).

Ph 1300 880 861



GET MUDDY IN MALENY

Everyone is an artist at this lovely retreat, writes **Alison Cotes**

I'VE never considered myself a hands-on creative artist. That's because of a traumatic incident when I was six years old, when an insensitive teacher held up in front of the class what I thought was a brilliant drawing of a banana and rubbished it completely.

So it was with some trepidation that I stepped up to the bench for a clay modelling class at artist Cathy Lawley's Fried Mudd Studio, perched atop the Sunshine Coast hinterland at Maleny.

However, Cathy promised me that, even as a virgin sculptor, I would be able to produce something beautiful.

She was right. After two days I had created with my own two hands three chooks to ornament my hen house, a frog and an elephant for my daughter's Christmas presents and a



HINTERLAND MAGIC: The view to the Glasshouse Mountains (above); and (left) the Fried Mudd Studio.

wonderful copy of a 25,000-year-old fertility goddess called the Venus of Willendorf.

As I settled down in front of a big slab of raku clay, Cathy explained how to make pinch pots, coils and cylinders and take it from there.

OK, so my frog wasn't too good, but it was my first piece. And it was surprisingly recognisably a frog. I was proud of it, even though some of the others made far better pieces.

I went with a friend who had been a professional potter in a past life, with some of her pieces collected by the

Queensland Art Gallery, and even she said she learnt new skills.

Most of the class of eight went home for the night, but my friend and I had booked Victoria's Attic. This charming little purpose-built house next to the workshop is decorated in Cathy's inimitable style, with bargains from almost-antique shops.

The cottage sleeps three, with a big brass bedstead crammed into one room, and an old single metal bed in the other room, doubling as a sofa, and there's a sink and microwave and a refrigerator. As there was no proper

TRAVEL MATE

GETTING THERE: Maleny is about 95km north of Brisbane. Follow the Bruce Highway north and take the Landsborough exit.

STAYING THERE: Cathy Lawley's Victoria's Attic and Fried Mudd Workshop are at 295 North Maleny Rd, Maleny. Phone: 5494 2892; mobile: 0402 333 576; email: cathy@friedmudd.com; website: friedmudd.com. Two-day workshop, including morning tea, is \$200 a person. Accommodation in Victoria's Attic is \$200 a couple a night. Next weekend courses are December 1 and 2; January 5 and 6.

DOING THERE: Clay modelling, local attractions in your spare time. Eat at Upfront Organic Cafe or Colin James Fine Foods, both in Maple St.

cooking facilities, we drove the 3km back to Maleny the first night and ate at Upfront Club in the main street, which advertises itself as Queensland's only co-op restaurant. Here we dined heartily and at very little cost on mixed grills, an eclectic pasta and lemon and semolina cake, while drinking excellent organic shiraz. We were lucky to get a table, as locals were arriving in droves.

Back at the cottage, we sat on the little top deck and watched the clouds whipping past the moon and heard the quiet grunting of the two dogs that are Cathy's constant companions. The next morning they joined us in the studio, along with her resident Burmese cat, which obligingly posed for my friend's sculpture.

The second day we completed our works of almost-art, painting them ready for Cathy to fire later in the week, and drove home through the pure beauty of the hinterland.

Art workshops can be very demanding or very intimidating, but Cathy's are simple and friendly.

The writer was the guest of Fried Mudd Workshops

Doc holiday

Expert weekly advice on your travel dilemmas, edited by Anthony Dennis. Email us at doc@docholiday.com.au



IN MAY and June, we will be touring by car in the areas of Wales, Peak District, Yorkshire Dales and Moors and the Lake District. We would really like to do an escorted canal boat trip. Can you help with some ideas?

Many of the canal or narrow boat adventures are focused around single or multiple-day self-guided hire, says Kristen Angus from Visit Britain (visitbritain.com/en/au). However, there are a range of guided tours along the picturesque valleys of Wales and England. In London, the most frequent tours run between Camden and Little Venice, near Paddington. Canal Junction (canaljunction.com) offers day trips from a range of English destinations. In Wales, the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Llangollen Canal is a popular destination for narrow boat day trips with operators such as Jones the Boat (canaltrip.co.uk). Then there's the enticingly named Horse

Drawn Boats (horsedrawnboats.co.uk); and explore the 200-year-old Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal with Dragonfly Cruises (dragonfly-cruises.co.uk).

WE'RE thinking of travelling to Vietnam next year and maybe staying in Halong Bay for about nine days. Would there be enough there to fill the days with shopping and organised day trips or should we go with a travel company and see more of the country?

Nine days in Halong Bay, as beautiful as it is, would definitely be too long. It's certainly worth a stay of a few days, particularly aboard a luxurious cruise boat such as the *Halong Ginger*, *Jasmine* and *Violet* vessels. Many visitors opt for a rushed one-night cruise but I would recommend two or three days, which will allow you to fully relax and enjoy what is

an extraordinary place. The most common strategy adopted by visitors to Vietnam, especially first-timers, is to travel the country north to south, from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), or vice versa. Many Australian-based operators offer organised and independent tours of Vietnam including Wendy Wu Tours (wendywutours.com.au), Helen Wong Tours (helenwongtours.com), Travel Indochina (travelindochina.com.au) and Active Travel (activetravel.com.au).

I AM a single traveller who is planning to travel to Sri Lanka in February. Is it safe? What should I look out for?

One of the most beautiful, though troubled, islands on the planet, Sri Lanka is recovering from a civil war. It effectively ended last year when the Sri Lankan government announced it would end its state of emergency that had been in force since 1971. This

followed the bloody final defeat in 2009, under controversially savage circumstances, of the notorious Tamil Tigers separatist group, who were based in the northern part of the country. The Australian Government's Smart Traveller (smartraveller.gov.au) travel advisory website recommends that Australian travellers to Sri Lanka exercise a high degree of caution because of the considerable risk of politically motivated violence. Terrorist attacks were relatively common during the conflict but there have been none recently. So, in answer to your question, Sri Lanka is considerably safer than it has been in the past. However, it may pay to avoid the northern province of the island, where there continues to be a strong military and security presence. In the eastern province, some landmines and unexploded bombs are yet to be cleared, so stick to main roads and pay attention to warning signs.