



Hot lister chills late summer scorcher

A weekend away may seem extravagant when you're just a few kilometres from home, but in a belter of a Brisbane late summer if the offering includes a rooftop pool, cocktail bar and air-conditioning you won't have to pay for later, why not? The Emporium Hotel, in Brisbane's inner-north Fortitude Valley, is glamorous too, and located in a precinct known for excellent restaurants and cutting-edge boutiques.

What sets it apart for me, however, is the service. I've been to many functions at the property – most in the cocktail bar with its opulent onyx bar, antique German chandelier and 19th century Parisian stained glass wall – and have always been warmly greeted and well looked after by people who appear genuinely happy to work there.

This visit is a first, as we're staying overnight – in a king suite on the top floor, no less. Check-in takes place in the marble-tiled foyer, a showpiece of Queensland design with its striking red chandelier crafted by Sunshine Coast



glass blower Greg Royer, burl walnut table by the late iconic Brisbane furniture maker, Robert Dunlop, and glass-panelled walls overlaid with bronze, copper and gold leaf frangipanis.

The flower was chosen as the hotel emblem by Fran John, who developed the site in late 2007 with husband Tony John (a second Emporium Hotel is under way at South Bank). When the original Emporium Hotel opened it attracted accolades almost immediately, earning a spot in international *Condé Nast Traveler's* Hot List 2008 of the world's best new hotels. The awards have continued, including Queensland Tourism's best luxury accommodation

for the past three years and a spot in the hall of fame.

Our suite (left) on the seventh floor is handsomely furnished with dark timber, white and grey marble, polished chrome and wingback chairs upholstered in florals and zebra prints and butter-soft leather (there's even a matching ottoman in the spa bathroom). On cooler afternoons, sitting on the balcony would be pleasant but it's a sweltering 35 degrees, so we go for a swim instead and watch storm clouds roll in.

An early dinner is on the cards and James St, with nosheries such as Bucci, Gerard's and Harveys, is only a five-minute stroll away but we decide to pop next door to Tartufo for pizza. The restaurant is buzzing and the only seats are at the bar, which isn't a problem – the meal is splendid, a taste of Italy without leaving town.

The next morning, after a sleep-in and bacon and eggs on the balcony (breakfast is room service only), we have a final dip in the pool before making the short journey home.

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