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STAY AT MY PLACE ...



THE NOVOTEL MELBOURNE ST KILDA

THE real estate catch-cry "location, location, location" doesn't just apply to homes, but hotels too.

And the Novotel St Kilda, built just over 20 years ago on the site of the much-loved St Mortiz ice-skating rink, really has a prime position.

Set on The Esplanade, it's a family stroll across the road to St Kilda Pier or a rock'n' roll stumble from the famous Esplanade Hotel.

THE ROOM

The six-storey hotel has 211 rooms and suites in a variety of configurations.

Decorated in modern, simple style, rooms have all the usual mod-cons needed by family or business travellers.

But who's fussed about bathrooms, mini-bars, furnishings or telly, when the sixth-storey window offers such a fantastic view across Port Phillip Bay?

The panorama stretches from Elwood to the city, taking in Luna Park, the Palais Theatre, masts of yachts moored at St Kilda Marina and kitesurfers bobbing across the bay. There is something to see almost any time of the day or night.

THE FOOD

The Novotel has an inhouse dining room, 3182 Restaurant and Bar, but outside the front door, St Kilda boasts more restaurants and cafes in Acland and Fitzroy streets alone that you can poke a tablespoon at.

The beachfront boasts long-time Melbourne favourites Donovan's and The Stokehouse, but it's a newcomer



with bay views that gets the vote for dinner.

Captain Baxter is a restaurant and cocktail lounge upstairs in the St Kilda Sea Baths complex. We've arrived early enough to score a window table, which is just what you want to watch the sun go down.

Ocean flavours feature heavily among our dinner choices, and snapper with a red curry crust, along with a light zucchini salad, prove that it's always worth taking a recommendation from the waiter. He's also happy to talk through the lengthy cocktail menu which, suitable for the seaside setting, is set out like a ship's cargo manifest.

From something new to an old favourite.

Not that corner cafe/restaurant Pelican is terribly old – it opened on Fitzroy St in 2001 – just well-loved by local clientele.

At the manager's estimation, about 95 per cent of customers live nearby, keeping the kitchen busy from early till late pushing out tapas-style dishes designed to share.

The brunch crowd is thinning, leaving plenty of room to grab an early lunch and see what the locals love so much. I cross a few cultures to try some of the most often ordered dishes: Greek saganaki, Moroccan meatballs and Spanish patatas bravas.

THE FUN

Even from outside the gates, Luna Park is part of the St Kilda experience. Throughout the day, until the carnival rides' end (long after dark in summer), the



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sounds of bells, whistles, shrieks and squeals rise and fall like the carriages on the Great Scenic Railway that runs around the park perimeter. It's said to be the world's oldest continually operating wooden roller coaster.

This temple of fun, which is now co-owned by transport magnate Lindsay Fox, celebrated its centenary in December.

Though there are stomach-churning modern rides, the clock turns back for gentler thrills on the ghost train and ferris wheel, the slow turns of which allow plenty of time to enjoy the views from the top.

But amid the lights, the concrete and the people, a natural wonder is flourishing in St Kilda.

Each night a colony of little penguins returns to their nests among the breakwater boulders at the end of St Kilda pier after a day of feeding on anchovies in the bay.

Bird numbers have grown from 66 in 1986 to 1200 or so now.

A hot summer's twilight can bring curious visitors in their hundreds to see the penguins waddle, one by one, out of the water and into their burrows.

Hi-vis vest-wearing volunteer guides from the Earthcare environmental group are on hand to shine a torchlight on the birds and provide information while ensuring that onlookers don't disturb them.

The penguins' nightly return can be seen for the next month or so but the area will be closed off because of construction work on the marina area, which is expected to start in March.

THE DEAL

Novotel St Kilda's Wine and Wind Down offer starts at \$179 a night, and includes overnight accommodation, buffet breakfast for two, car parking and six bottles of wine to the value of \$200. Valid until December 31. Bookings, ph: (03) 9536 6191 or email novotelstkilda.com.au

For more see stkildamelbourne.com.au

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