

Karl Quinn finds a waterside getaway with room for the whole tribe - and then some.



Eyrie by the Inlet is just the sort of place you could picture the Brady Bunch getting away to. With its six bedrooms, there'd be tonnes of room for all the gang. The kids could double up, and Alice (the housekeeper) could come along too. She could even bring her butcher friend, Sam. Of course, he'd have his own room. This is a family holiday, after all.

But that won't trouble Sam. Not only does he get his own ensuite (the four "adult" bedrooms all do), just one look at that gas-fired Weber on the rear deck and he'd be heading right out there with his pound of rump clasped in his big meatcleaving hands. Looking straight ahead, he'd take in the wide-open vista of Anderson Inlet and the spur of land across it on which Venus Bay sits, hidden behind a long stretch of tea-tree forest. If he stayed out there long enough, he'd see the inlet drain to about half its level, and maybe even think about walking out to the sandbar in the middle. If he stayed a bit longer (another six hours or so), he'd see it fill up again.

Turning back to the house, Sam would be struck by a vista almost as impressive to a man with food on his mind: a big island bench and behind it, running the length of the six-metre kitchen, the main bench. And there's Alice, preparing potato salad while slyly sipping on a mango daiquiri (she has a pitcher of it stashed in the commercial-sized bar fridge off to the side). Mike, meanwhile, is revelling in the architecture of the place. He guesses it dates from the Post-Brady mid-'90s.

You don't see much seagrass matting in houses these days, Mike thinks to himself, but one glance up at the ceiling above the massive open-plan kitchen-dining area fills his groovy architect's heart with joy. There's almost as much grass hanging above his head as there is growing on the foreshore outside.

Carol is more into glass than grass, so she loves the huge picture windows and timber-framed sliding doors that make the magnificent Anderson Inlet seem just a step away. Putting on her cork-soled wedgies, she goes exploring. The property has genuine water frontage, but it's a good 10 minutes to the water's edge, and she'd have been better off in some Kickers - the descent is steep and the dirt path rather loose. It's pretty, all right, but swimming here is for the birds, she decides: the "beach" is a 10-metre stretch of sand surrounded by mud flats.

Much better to jump in the timber-sided station wagon and head to the inlet beach proper, a five-minute drive away (she follows the sign to the caravan park, and a suburban street deposits her at a parking strip right near the boardwalk). Cindy and Bobby love it at the inlet - the shallow water and the wide strip of moist sand, perfect for building castles (if only Mike would let them design their own). But Greg, Marcia, Bobby and Jan all want to go to the surf beach. It's not much further away - about five kilometres back towards Kilcunda. And Mike did want to check out that new RACV lodge, with its new-fangled architecture. So, back in the car they go. The Inverloch surf beach has a long, gentle decline and, most days the Brady Bunch visits, minimal surf action. But it's enough for the body surfers and boogie boarders, and there's a surf school set up for beginners. Back at the inlet, there are kayaks and sailboards for hire. Either way, it's best to hit the beach early in the day, because the sea breeze picks up later on.

Mid-afternoon, Carol rounds up the gang and heads back home for a session on the tennis court. A walk along Screw Creek wilderness trail appeals; maybe tomorrow.

The sun is setting over the inlet. The barbie is fired up. Some of the kids are in the TV room watching a corny sitcom. Mike is at the 14-seater dining table sketching away (all that seagrass has inspired him). Alice and Sam are nowhere to be seen (it's easy to get lost in this house, with its two wings separated by a large foyer). Jan is upstairs in the observation tower, taking in the view and whining about Marcia.

Carol is already picturing the Scrabble game that will come after dinner, with the board laid out on the big square coffee table in the lounge room, flanked by the Chesterfield couch and armchairs. They won't light the fire - it's too warm for that - but her game is red hot. She's already got a word she wants to lay out: contentment.

That's got to be worth something.

VISITORS' BOOK

Eyrie by the Inlet

Address: Lot 13, Townsend Bluff Road, Inverloch.

Bookings: 0439 888 893; 5674 2001; eyrie.inlet@optusnet.com.au.

How much: \$650 night (\$600 midweek), minimum two nights. \$3750 a week (high season).

Getting there: Monash Freeway to Cranbourne, then follow signs to Inverloch. From Inverloch, it's three kilometres along the Tarwin Lower/Venus Bay Road. There's a blue tourist route sign just before the turn-off (which is on the right).

To sum up: A massive family home that can sleep up to 14 people, with stunning views and great facilities. It's expensive, but split it between two family groups (as we did) and it's comparable to renting two smaller houses. It's also available for work conferences and workshops.

The verdict: 18

The score: 19-20 excellent; 17-18 great; 15-16 good; 13-14 comfortable, well-run. All weekends away are conducted anonymously and paid for.