



THE VERITY FAMILY
(Paul and daughters,
Eve and Zoe)

SANCTUARY RETREAT, MISSION BEACH



1. Are there special responsibilities or obligations that come with running a business based on eco tourism and what challenges and opportunities does this present?

I think all businesses nowadays have a greater sense than previously of their environmental responsibilities but for businesses such as ours that essentially trade on the natural assets on which they are located, then it makes good business as well as environmental sense to conserve and protect that asset. Sanctuary Retreat is located on 50 acres of lowland coastal rainforest of which we use just 0.5 per cent of the land area for our business. When we bought this property 12 years ago, it was one of a number of large freehold acreages on the beachfront at Mission Beach. It is now one of the last. Having entered it into a perpetual conservation agreement, we would like to think it will forever be a natural refuge for both humans and wildlife.

2. All good business plans are required to allow for contingencies but what about when your business is devastated by a natural disaster of the scale and extent of Cyclone Larry?

Well at the time, the one and only important document you have is an insurance policy - that's it. It's a humbling experience really. Nothing else mattered, just this one bit of paper between you and bankruptcy. Through good luck rather than good sense, we had increased our coverage by \$500,000 a few months before and even then, it was a bit of a line call as to whether we were covered sufficiently. It was impossible to know how long it would take to rebuild as getting tradesmen at the best of times is difficult. We 'guess-timated' it would take three to four months but out of prudence, cancelled all bookings for six months. As Murphy's Law would have it, we were just cleaning things up a half an hour before we opened to a full house six months later.



3. What is the most rewarding aspect of running your business?

Well it's not the money. It is seeing the joy in people's faces when they find they are in just the right spot for them. We run a pretty unique business in an environment that doesn't suit everybody but for those it does, then they have a great time. We've had lots of people who have met here and married after, lots of conceptions and many, many good memories.

4. Given the business experience you have gained, is there anything you would do differently if you had the opportunity again?

Hmmm, the trickiest of questions. Would we have done it at all if we knew what the future held? I think if you approach things with sincere intentions, you can't be unhappy with the outcome. We are proud of what we have created here, happy to be part of the joy people have experienced and glad we have managed to create an economically and ecologically sustainable business in this beautiful part of the world. Would we have done things differently? Perhaps, but I'm glad we didn't. □