

Bay's hidden treasure

ONCE I negotiate the Sydney city traffic as it oozes northbound over the Sydney Harbour Bridge and east along Military Road, I make it to the labyrinthine streets of Cremorne, home to one of Sydney's prettiest foreshores.

Had Ian Fleming tired of Jamaica, he certainly would have been seduced by the smugglers' cove that is Mosman Bay. This tranquil setting is also home to one of the area's other hidden treasures, Cremorne Point Manor.

Driving in tangled traffic is not the ideal way to get here. For a James Bond-style arrival, take the ferry from Circular Quay. Indeed, one of the joys of staying at Cremorne Point Manor is travelling to and from it across the harbour.

The hotel is believed to have been built in the late 1880s, when a coal seam was discovered in Cremorne. Fortunately, the plan to mine the seam was scotched, thanks to stiff opposition from locals.

Cremorne Point Manor has been a guesthouse for about 50 years; Jean Claude Branch and Christiane Freeman bought it in May last year, set about smartening things up and they've done a good job, catering to honeymooners and families alike.

Cremorne Point Manor has 29 rooms arranged to suit all budgets. The cheapest annexe rooms are fairly cramped but feature a queen-size bed, toilet and television, with a communal shower a couple of paces away. On the ground floor is a fully equipped guest kitchen and a coin-operated laundry.

The family room category is great value: it's a suite with double bedroom and a large children's room with bunk beds and a single bed. Both bedrooms come with flat-screen television and are well separated by a generous bathroom.

The showpiece of Cremorne Point Manor, however, is the upstairs king room, billed as the honeymoon suite with superb harbour views. White walls, smart furnishings and mahogany bedheads give this affordable suburban guesthouse a summery feel and a hint of luxury.

I stay in the ground-floor king suite, which may not be bathed with the light of its upstairs equivalent but features a vast bathroom, the centrepiece of which is a monstrous hot tub.

The guests during my stay consist largely of English couples in their 50s; the clientele also includes business travellers looking for alternative city accommodation, and local residents in need of a spare room



ROOM AT THE INN

Lex Hall

when relatives are in town. A glimpse at the guestbook reveals many visitors from Europe, most of whom have found out about Cremorne Point Manor by favourable word of mouth.

"It's a bit like living at Fawlty Towers," says Matthew Bennett, one of the two young British managers. And he's spot-on with this English seaside guesthouse reference: amid this classic decor, with its high ceilings, wide corridors and short landings between floors, I half expect to run into the Major, newspaper tucked under arm, inquiring: "Have you seen my paper?"

But that's where the Fawlty comparisons must end as the competent duo of Bennett and Justin Taylor — fresh from a stint at the Napoleon on Kent in the Sydney CBD — are no Basil and Manuel.

There's even a book exchange at Cremorne Point Manor, where an edition of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* props up a 30-year-old copy of Jean Giono's *Le Hussard sur le Toit*: perhaps to be read on the veranda overlooking



Home comforts: Cremorne Point Manor

beautiful Mosman Bay.

Lex Hall was a guest of Cremorne Point Manor.

Checklist

Cremorne Point Manor, 6 Cremorne Rd, Cremorne Point, NSW 2090.

Phone: (02) 9953 7899;

www.cremornepointmanor.com.au.

Tariff: Annexe room \$66-\$90; queen room, \$149-\$169; family room, about \$229; king room, \$225-\$235. Breakfast included.

Getting there: Forty minutes by taxi from Sydney airport. Eight minutes by ferry from Circular Quay.

Checking in: A mixed clientele, from honeymooners to families.

Stepping out: Ferry ride to city every 30 minutes; restaurants and shops along Military Road; foreshore walk and swim at McCallum harbourside pool.

Brickbats: The annexe rooms are good value but rely on a communal shower room.

Bouquets: The swing-around flat-screen TV in the king suites allows guests to watch in bed, in the sitting room and in the hot tub. Well-equipped kitchen and laundry.