

TravelToday

WINTER 2025

**Romantic
Getaway
Page 9**

**Touring on
a Trike
Page 14-15**

**Affordable
Albania
Page 23**





Discover More on a River Journey FOR LESS IN 2025

Save up to 30% on selected voyages

Discover the magic of a Viking river voyage in 2025 – for less. For a limited time, you can enjoy incredible savings of up to \$9,600* per couple on a range of 2025 river voyages. Explore the enchanting towns along the rivers of Central Europe, France, Portugal, Egypt or Southeast Asia in unparalleled comfort and style. Uncover centuries of history and culture, indulging in authentic regional cuisine and enjoy everything you need included. **Hurry, these offers are only available on new bookings from 8 May 2025 until sold out.**

BASED ON 6 NOVEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



RHINE GETAWAY

Amsterdam to Basel or vice versa

8 DAYS | 4 COUNTRIES | 6 GUIDED TOURS

From **\$3,095pp** in Standard Stateroom

SET SAIL: OCT & NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$5,800 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 8 NOVEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



ROMANTIC DANUBE

Budapest to Regensburg or vice versa

8 DAYS | 3 COUNTRIES | 5 GUIDED TOURS

From **\$3,095pp** in Standard Stateroom

SET SAIL: OCT & NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$5,400 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 16 NOVEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



DANUBE WALTZ

Budapest to Passau or vice versa

8 DAYS | 4 COUNTRIES | 6 GUIDED TOURS

From **\$3,095pp** in Standard Stateroom

SET SAIL: OCT & NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$5,400 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



GRAND EUROPEAN TOUR

Budapest to Amsterdam or vice versa

15 DAYS | 4 COUNTRIES | 12 GUIDED TOURS

From **\$6,995pp** in French Balcony

SET SAIL: SEP, OCT & NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$7,400 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 13 DECEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



CHRISTMAS ON THE RHINE & MOSELLE

Paris to Zürich or vice versa

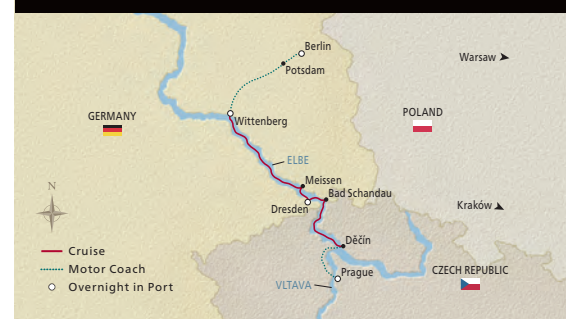
12 DAYS | 4 COUNTRIES | 10 GUIDED TOURS

From **\$5,295pp** in Standard Stateroom

SET SAIL: NOV & DEC 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$5,200 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 11 NOVEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



ELEGANT ELBE

Berlin to Prague or vice versa

10 DAYS | 2 COUNTRIES | 7 GUIDED TOURS

From **\$5,195pp** in Veranda Stateroom

SET SAIL: NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$8,200 PER COUPLE***

ALWAYS INCLUDED

Riverview stateroom | Shore excursions | Wine & beer served with lunch & dinner

All onboard meals | Unlimited Wi-Fi | Tipping & gratuities

*Conditions apply. Prices are per person, in Australian dollars, based on double occupancy, subject to availability, includes all advertised discounts, and correct as 21 May 2025. A partially refundable deposit is required at the time of booking. Rhine Getaway based on 06 November 2025 departure, Romantic Danube based on 08 November 2025 departure, Danube Waltz based on 16 November 2025 departure, Grand European Tour based on 24 September 2025 departure, Christmas on the Rhine & Moselle based on 13 December 2025 departure, Elegant Elbe based on 11 November 2025 departure.



Extend your journey
Pre or post voyage

2 NIGHTS IN BUDAPEST

Explore Hungary's legendary capital city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

2 NIGHTS IN AMSTERDAM

Navigate Amsterdam's picturesque canals while discovering its cultural and architectural treasures.

3 NIGHTS IN PARIS

Become enchanted by the romance of France's capital. Browse the art collections in the Louvre or stroll along the Champs-Élysées.

BASED ON 24 NOVEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



PARIS TO THE
SWISS ALPS

Paris to Zürich or vice versa

12 DAYS | 4 COUNTRIES | 10 GUIDED TOURS
From **\$4,595pp** in Standard Stateroom
SET SAIL: NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$7,000 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 29 OCTOBER 2025 DEPARTURE



CITIES
OF LIGHT

Paris to Prague or vice versa

12 DAYS | 3 COUNTRIES | 10 GUIDED TOURS
From **\$4,595pp** in Standard Stateroom
SET SAIL: SEP, OCT & NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$5,400 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 26 NOVEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



PARIS & THE HEART
OF NORMANDY

Roundtrip Paris, France

8 DAYS | 1 COUNTRY | 6 GUIDED TOURS
From **\$4,295pp** in Veranda Stateroom
SET SAIL: NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$8,200 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 9 NOVEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



LYON &
PROVENCE

Lyon to Avignon or vice versa

8 DAYS | 1 COUNTRY | 7 GUIDED TOURS
From **\$3,595pp** in Standard Stateroom
SET SAIL: AUG & NOV 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$5,800 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 16 DECEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



PHARAOHS
& PYRAMIDS

Roundtrip Cairo, Egypt

12 DAYS | 1 COUNTRY | 11 GUIDED TOURS
From **\$9,795pp** in Standard Stateroom
SET SAIL: AUG, SEP & DEC 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$9,200 PER COUPLE***

BASED ON 15 DECEMBER 2025 DEPARTURE



MAGNIFICENT
MEKONG

Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City

15 DAYS | 2 COUNTRIES | 16 GUIDED TOURS
From **\$10,595pp** in French Balcony
SET SAIL: DEC 2025

SAVE UP TO **\$9,600 PER COUPLE***

NO KIDS • VOTED WORLD'S BEST • ALL-INCLUSIVE PRICING

138 747 VIKING.COM OR SEE YOUR LOCAL VIKING AGENT



SCAN
FOR
OFFERS

Paris to the Swiss Alps based on 24 November 2025 departure, Cities of Light based on 29 October 2025 departure, Paris & the Heart of Normandy based on 26 November 2025 departure, Lyon & Provence based on 09 November 2025 departure, Pharaohs & Pyramids based on 16 December 2025 departure, Magnificent Mekong based on 15 December 2025 departure. Save up to 30% based on Rhine Getaway 06 November 2025 departure. Save up to \$9,600 per couple based on Magnificent Mekong 12 December 2025 departure in a Category C stateroom. All offers only valid on new bookings made from 8 May 2025 until sold out. For full terms and conditions visit viking.com.

Relaxing is addictive

There is something restorative about taking a break and going somewhere different for a few days, a few weeks or even a few months – probably why travel is a multi-million dollar industry and whole economies are based on it.

Just being somewhere else is sometimes enough to help you relax and take the weight of the world off your shoulders.

Whether its four days in the Blue Mountains or a Rainforest retreat, a trip to a local festival or event for the weekend, a trip around Australia on a trike or visiting Europe with friends or family getting away is good for the soul.

I hadn't had been away from my house for more than a weekend (other than our covid disaster two Christmas' ago) since 2019 and so our recent 30th anniversary trip south to the Blue Mountains was much enjoyed and very much needed. Of course, I did what most of us

do after a holiday – promptly came back and booked my next lot of leave. I don't where I'm going yet, just that I need more time exploring and enjoying the world even if it's just down the road.

It's a pretty normal reaction according to a travel agent friend – so normal that the industry calls the month after the Christmas holidays “Waves season” – more holidays, particularly cruises, are booked at that time of year than in another month. I suppose it's like not feeling hungry, eating and immediately wanting to eat again – you don't know what you're missing until you experience it.

Hopefully this edition of Travel Today will give you plenty of food for thought.

Tania Phillips
Editorial Coordinator
Travel Today



Early morning from my chair on the verandah of my hotel room in the Blue Mountains.

TravelToday

EDITORIAL
Tania Phillips Journalist
E: tania.phillips@StarNewsGroup.com.au

ADVERTISING
Andrew Guiver Group General Manager
E: andrew.guiver@TodayNewsGroup.com.au
M: 0408 483 479

Michelle Gibson Advertising Sales Executive
E: michelle.gibson@noosatoday.com.au
M: 0413 608 678

Donna Collier Account Manager
E: donna.collier@todaynewsgroup.com.au
M: 0456 765 091

DEADLINES 2025
Winter 2025
Publication week starting: 16th June 2025
Advertising Booking: 16th May 2025

Spring 2025
Publication week starting: 15th September 2025
Advertising Booking: 15th August 2025



Published by Ipswich Media Pty Ltd
Publisher: Damian Morgan
All material is copyright to Ipswich Media

Publisher's indemnity: Travel Today is published by Ipswich Media Pty Ltd. Those who make advertising placement and/or supply copy material or editorial submissions to the magazine, undertake to ensure that all such materials do not infringe the Trade Practices Act or other laws, regulations, or statutes. Further to the above mentioned, these persons agree to indemnify the publisher and/or its agents against any investigations, claims or judgments.

CONTENTS

A little slice of country magic PAGE 5	Touring sights on a trike PAGE 14-15
It's all happening in Gympie PAGE 6	A most favourite place PAGE 16
Counting down to Muster PAGE 7	Romantic getaways for all PAGE 17
Quirky festival welcoming PAGE 8	Wintering in Europe PAGE 18
Near Era of Romance PAGE 9	New era of speciality eats PAGE 19
Savour the Sunshine PAGE 10	Three nights, five countries PAGE 20-21
Illumina shines on K'gari PAGE 12	Symphony of Swiss beauty PAGE 22
Manta season on Lady Elliot PAGE 13	Affordable Albania PAGE 23

GYMPIE WE'VE GOT A BIT ON

visitgympieregion.com.au

A little slice of country magic

Just a short drive west of Brisbane, where the city skyline melts into wide open skies, is a little slice of country magic called the Lockyer Valley. It's the kind of place that invites visitors to pack the car, roll down the windows, and let the winding roads and fresh air set the pace. Known as Queensland's very own "Salad Bowl," the valley is a patchwork of fertile farmland, rolling hills and genuine country hospitality. And this spring, the region will be buzzing with colour, community and good old-fashioned charm as the Laidley Spring Festival returns from Friday 12 to Sunday 14 September 2025. There's something about spring in the valley that brings everything to life, and this year's "Retro Revival" theme adds a nostalgic twist to a well-loved tradition.

The festivities kick off Friday morning, as Laidley comes alive with colour, creativity and community spirit. Explore a treasure trove of events including the Spring Gardening Fair, Quilt and Craft Expo, Orchid Show, Gem Show, Under Five's Day, and a beautiful series of Open Gardens dotted around the region. It's a celebration of sights, scents and handmade wonders, with something to spark joy in every visitor.

Then, as the sun sets, the vibe shifts to a twilight picnic at the Laidley Recreational Reserve from 5pm to 9pm. Live music from local musos drifting through the air, festoon lights strung overhead, and market stalls serving up delicious eats. Grab some street food, throw down a picnic rug and soak up a relaxed country night with mates under the stars.

By Saturday morning, Laidley is buzzing with life—the scent of freshly brewed coffee mingling with spring blooms, and the region's largest country market ready for visitors to wander and explore. Then at 10am, all eyes turn to the main street as the iconic Street Parade rolls through town in a joyful flurry of colour, vintage cars, brass bands and proud community spirit



Enjoying the Lockyer Valley.

all fitting the 'Retro Revival' theme. The fun continues with family-friendly entertainment, including Elmo and Cookie Monster and high-energy hip hop group Gee'd Up. Car lovers will want to check out the gleaming classics at the Show 'n' Shine, while foodies can catch celebrity chef Matt Golinski cooking up seasonal delights with local produce. On Sunday, head to Forest Hill for Bee Happy Day at the School of Arts Hall from 8:30am to 12pm. This buzzing little event is perfect for families with kids aged 6 months and up, with

themed crafts, circus workshops, bubble discos, face painting, food stalls and a sweet artisan market. The best part? Most of the festival fun is free, with a few community events asking for a gold coin or small entry to support local organisers. There's free parking, a park-and-ride shuttle, pet-friendly vibes (on lead, of course), and accessible spaces throughout the precinct. When it's time to unwind, the Lockyer Valley has a stay to suit every traveller. Snuggle into a country motel, kick back in a quirky cabin or



Celebrating spring.



Floating down the main street.

glamping tent, or roll into a free rest area for those on a budget. Families will love creature-comfort campgrounds, and for those chasing luxury, boutique stays are just a scenic drive away. Wherever option is chosen, the welcome will be one of with genuine country hospitality and that easy-going Lockyer Valley charm. So go on—pack the car, call the road trip crew, and escape to the Lockyer Valley this spring. For all the festival fun, follow @LaidleySpringFestival on socials or visit www.laidleyspringfestival.com.

Hit the Road for 3 Days of Festival Fun!

LAIDLEY Spring FESTIVAL

12-14 SEPT 2025

Twilight Feast & Fest

Street Parade

Entertainment

Cooking Demos

Community Expos



COME & VISIT THE LOCKYER VALLEY! LAIDLEYSRINGFESTIVAL.COM





It's all happening in Gympie

Rally the troops and enjoy some exciting racing.

Gympie has got a bit on

The Gympie region is bustling with activity at this time of year, with major events showcasing the area's natural beauty and community spirit. Experience the adrenaline of fast cars, take in the sounds of country music and immerse in arts and culture. As the weather starts to cool down, things are heating up in the Gympie region.

Rally Queensland

Kicking off in July is a three-day offroad racing spectacular when the Australian Rally Championships come to town. It's an adrenaline pumping event with the whole region coming alive to celebrate the rally.

Gympie's iconic Mary Street is the hottest spot in town on opening night, Friday 4 July with "Wheels on Mary". The rally cars cruise down the main street, stopping for spectators who can get up close to these powerful machines and meet the drivers, while feasting on delicious street eats and soaking up an exciting, street festival atmosphere.

For those craving a deeper dive into off-road racing, the Rally Village at the Gympie Showgrounds is the ultimate destination. See behind the scenes of rally teams and their crews, with trade displays that will satisfy all automotive curiosities.

The race event lies within the stunning Gympie Region forestry, where spectators can immerse themselves in the thrill of live rally car racing. With numerous spectator points offering prime viewing spots, spectators won't miss a moment of the adrenaline-fueled action.

After soaking in some rally action, why not explore all the region has to offer. From the scenic countryside to the vibrant hues of the Great Sandy Strait, the Gympie Region is full of surprises.

Arts and Culture in the Gympie region

If art is more to taste, Gympie has plenty on offer with a month-long festival this July full of art trails across the region. There are four different trails to so you can choose your own adventure, you can even join the mystery trail. Take a rare opportunity to explore behind-the-scenes of private studios of artists and artisans



Getting ready for the good vibe and friendly atmosphere of Gympie Muster.

and discover a hidden side of the beautiful Gympie region. The Heritage Makers Fair is another opportunity in July to celebrate craftsmanship and meet the makers of heritage trades, fibre and textile arts. With exhibits and non-stop demonstrations by artisans, experience all the sights, sounds and skills of our heritage past on 5-6 July in Gympie.

Australia's biggest regional short film festival, the Heart of Gold International Short Film Festival also calls Gympie home on 10-12 October. This immersive three-day event features over 100 short films, live music, talks,

workshops, panels and parties offering a rich cultural experience.

Gympie Music Muster

Famous for its good vibe and friendly atmosphere, the Gympie Music Muster is a cherished Australian experience. Immerse yourself in the ultimate camping music festival in the picturesque Amamoor State Forest on 28-31 August, listening to more than 140 performers of country, blues, roots and heritage rock music.

Camping at the Muster is an essential part of the experience and festival tickets include

camping. Or if you don't have a tent, book in at the Tent Motel. Fill your four-day festival with family friendly workshops, dancing, bush poets, bull riding and horsemanship shows.

Stay a while longer and explore the region, there's so much to see. Head out to Rainbow Beach and go four-wheel driving on the beach to Double Island Point. Try sailing or fishing in the sheltered waters of Tin Can Bay. Explore the country towns of the Mary Valley, Goomeri and Kilkivan. Soak up the country atmosphere and make it to Gympie this year.

Website: visitgympieregion.com.au



(462545)



Camping in the forest is what makes the Gympie Muster such a unique experience.

Counting down to Muster

Immerse in the Ultimate Music and Camping Experience at the Gympie Muster Gympie Music Muster is the perfect festival for fans of great music, fun times, and camping under the stars.

Famous for its good vibe and friendly atmosphere, this event could be a must-see.

Mark the calendars because from 28 – 31 August, the Gympie Music Muster will transform the Amamoor Forest into a bustling camping city. Established in 1982 the Muster has become a prominent fundraising event, its core mission remains unchanged: to raise funds for those in need within the community. Over the years, the Muster has raised over \$21 million for various charities and community groups.

The Muster offers something for everyone – set amidst the picturesque Amamoor Creek

State Forest, the Gympie Music Muster is a cherished Australian tradition. With more than 140 performers, the lineup features country, blues, roots, and heritage rock music. To see the 2025 lineup, head to the website.

Beyond the music, the festival includes workshops, dancing, bush poets, and the excitement of bull riding and horsemanship shows in the Snowy River Muster Arena. Bring the family—kids 12 and under are free, and discounted tickets are available for teens.

Camping and accommodation is a big part of the must in fact camping at the Muster is an essential part of the experience. The venue is nestled in the scenic Amamoor Creek State Forest and so a festival ticket includes camping. Four-day ticket holders can enjoy free camping

for up to nine nights starting from 23rd August 2025.

For those without camping gear, the on-site Muster Banjo's Tent Motel can be booked for up to five nights during the festival and includes breakfast. Alternatively, accommodation can be booked in the town of Gympie, with a bus running to the festival site over the four days.

Muster goers can extend their stay in the Gympie region in fact when planning a trip to the Gympie Muster, consider staying a while longer to explore the region. Rainbow Beach has been ranked as one of Australia's best beaches, and four-wheel drive enthusiasts can access Double Island Point and Inskip Point, the southern gateway to K'Gari, the

world's largest sand island.

The sheltered coast and safe waters of Tin Can Bay are perfect for sailing, kayaking, fishing, and feeding dolphins. Explore the Mary Valley's country villages of Imbil, Kandanga, Dagon, and Amamoor—the home of the Gympie Music Muster.

To the west, Kilkivan and Goomeri are quiet villages with unique charm, perfect stops on the way to the South Burnett Wine Region. The Sunshine Coast, Gympie's neighbouring region to the south, offers many attractions. Noosa is only an hour's drive from the Gympie Muster festival site.

Tickets are on sale now. For all the info, visit www.muster.com.au.



VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR ALL 2025 ARTISTS

OVER 120 ARTISTS IN THE AMAMOOR CREEK STATE FOREST!

- FREE CAMPING FOR UP TO 9 DAYS • MUSTER BULL RIDE
- BUSH POETS & BALLADEERS • DANCING • FAMILY FRIENDLY FUN

**GYMPIE MUSIC
MUSTER**
28-31 AUGUST 2025

TICKETS ON SALE NOW!

MUSTER.COM.AU



12770366-RV24-25



And all that Jazz - the Warwick CBD is the beating heart of the festival. (Supplied)



Nothing is safe from a yarn bombing during JJJ.

Quirky festival welcoming

By Tania Phillips

The countdown is well and truly on as Warwick and the entire district prepare for the festival that many see as the quirkiest winter festival in Queensland - Jumpers and Jazz in July (17-27 July).

And if you've ever been there or even just seen the pictures it's hard not to agree.

Where else do you find trees, statues, caravans, cars, tractors and even the odd cow dressed in their colourful winter woollies while people of all ages, dance, sing and have fun - not just in Warwick but around many of the surrounding communities as well.

It's just under five weeks to the much-loved JJJ from 17-27 July when Warwick is transformed with jazz, textile art, and a uniquely local twist on winter fun.

Preparations are well and truly in-hand for the event with the organising committee meeting more and more frequently and creatives putting the final balls of yarn to their art works.

Management committee president Pam Burley said at this time in the lead up they are actually in a pretty good place.

"We beat the deadline for our program to go to the printers by two days - so that's a first - we are usually pushing ourselves trying to get everything done," she laughed.

"The events calendar is already up on the website so every one can have a good look - it's been there for a few weeks now and we will launch our full program today the 5th of June. It will be up online at 6pm tonight."

So, what can we expect from Jumpers and Jazz this year?

"One of the stats that I do like to share, that I'm very proud of, is there are 45 event hosts contributing to the full calendar this year which represents nine communities across the Southern Downs," she said.

"It's something that we are committed to because when the Festival began in the heart of the CBD with the trees it was very much centralised around the Warwick CBD. But we are a region, we are the Southern Downs. So progressively, almost since we as the JJJ Inc Management Committee took over (2017 was the first one we ran as a not for profit volunteer organisation and we retained the status quo that year) but from 2018 we've been growing it and morphing the festival into what it is today."

The event now encompasses, Allora, Goomburra, Maryvale, Swan Creek, Freestone, Mt Colliery, Killarney, Severnlea and Warwick.

"This year the Killarney Bowls Club contacted us and said they wanted in on it," Pam explained.

"It's really, really lovely when people reach out to us and say how can we be involved. The club is doing their locally grown pumpkin soup (or you can order from the menu) and then a bowls day. You have to dress in a jazzy jumper or a scarf. It's called Beanie and Scarf Bowling on the Killarney Green and it's on the first Saturday the 19th.

"We are very excited to get Maryvale in on our program again. We had them a few years ago and we're very excited to have them back on board. I can actually see them being another Freestone because they're starting to yarn bomb all these different areas around town.



Music.



Don't forget the cars!

The school is getting yarn bombed, the pub, the community hall and they are doing some things in the park and running a butterfly cafe on Sunday 20th which is our grand auto day. We've been promoting it as "if you are coming from Brisbane call into Maryvale on the way out and enjoy some country hospitality."

"That's probably one of the things that we are really emphasising this year - the country hospitality.

"Three of the churches in Warwick are doing morning teas through the week as well as the Freestone Hall. So, we are encouraging people to enjoy the iconic sandstone churches and buildings and our country halls. Obviously, Freestone are big players in program these

days and they love being involved. They will be yarn bombing something new this year. Every year they yarn bomb something else, last year it was a horse. Their repertoire grows every year as they find something new to do. They've done an outdoor dunny, a windmill and a tractor - they are absolutely spectacular."

So, don't standstill in Freestone?

"No, you're absolutely right - you might get yarn bombed," she laughed.

"Mt Colliery are doing their craft market, they have some quite unique things out there and again it's a very old hall - a hundred years old, owned by the CWA. Swan Creek do their Jazzy Dance - they are regulars in the program.

"We're very excited - we had them in the



And dancing.

program for the first time last year - Ridgemill Estate. They're doing the Naked Vines - we are very very excited to have our friends from the South in the program."

Of course, the heart of the Warwick CBD is still the heart of the festival - filled with fun, music, events, yarnbombed trees and bespoke businesses that you won't find anywhere else.

"When people contact us and say, when is the best time to come, I just say - for the 10 days," Pam explained.

"If you can only come for a day, you pick a day and you come but if you want to come at the best time come for the ten days and you will not be disappointed and you will not be bored and you still won't see everything."



Spa baths at Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat.



Rainforest Lodge Deck.



Dusk in a Luxury Mountain View Lodge.

New era of romance

New management, new offerings, same spectacular setting

Hidden within 250 acres of lush rainforest in Northern New South Wales, Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat has long been a destination for those seeking true seclusion, romance, and reconnection. Now, with the arrival of a new management team led by General Manager Matt Semark, this iconic retreat is entering an exciting new era, blending the timeless magic of its natural surroundings with carefully curated new experiences designed to elevate every stay.

Bringing extensive international experience from some of the world's finest boutique and luxury resorts, Matt and his team have spent the past 12 months enhancing the retreat's offering while preserving its essence of relaxed, immersive luxury.

At the heart of the transformation is the unveiling of a stunning Bar and Wine Lounge. Nestled within the rainforest, this stylish new addition offers an impressive hand-selected cellar of fine Australian and international wines. Guests will also find a nod to Matt's time in the Caribbean, with an exceptional collection of premium rums curated for tasting and relaxing by the fire. It's an atmospheric space where time slows, conversations flow, and nature feels closer than ever.

Another highlight now open to guests is the enchanting Creekside Pavilion - a private, beautifully designed open-air structure set against the backdrop of Crystal Creek's gentle flow. Whether it's used for a picnic, a quiet moment of reflection, or a marriage proposal destined to become a lifelong memory, the Pavilion embodies everything Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat stands for: connection, intimacy, and a sense of timeless escape.

The indulgences continue with the arrival of a new Executive Chef, who has crafted a range of fresh menus to complement the guest experience. Expanding on the retreat's much-loved tradition of in-room dining, guests can now enjoy refined slow-cooked meals, beautifully prepared picnic packs, and hampers perfect for enjoying by the creek or in the privacy of their cabin. Every dish is designed with simplicity, flavour, and the incredible local produce of the Tweed Valley region in mind.

"We've focused on enhancing the sense of romance and indulgence that Crystal Creek is famous for," says General Manager Matt Semark.

"It's about offering our guests new experiences that deepen their connection, not just to each other, but to this incredible natural environment."

Of course, some things at Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat remain gloriously unchanged. The retreat's 13 luxurious, architecturally designed cabins (many featuring double-sided fireplaces, private spa baths, king-sized beds, and handcrafted timber furniture) continue to offer unmatched privacy and immersion in nature. Each cabin is thoughtfully positioned to feel like a world of its own, where rainforest views flood through soaring windows and the soundtrack of birdsong and the nearby creek replaces the noise of modern life.

Located just 45 minutes from the Gold



Enjoying the serenity of Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat. (Supplied)



Luxury Rainforest Lodge.



Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat bar and wine cellar.



Glass Terrace Bungalow.

Coast Airport, Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat offers guests easy access to world-class beaches and towns, yet feels a million miles away. Bordering the World Heritage-listed Springbrook National Park, the property is a

sanctuary for guests who seek authenticity, luxury, and the simple pleasures of connection to nature, to a loved one, and to themselves.

As Matt Semark reflects, "Whether it's your

first visit or your fifth, there's something new and something timeless to discover at Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat."

For more information, visit www.ccr.com.au.



Asian Food Festival -The Curated Plate.



Beautifu Mooloolaba.



Enjoy the beautiful cuisine on over during The Curated Plate.

Savour the Sunshine Coast

There are places we travel to for the views. Others for the food. And sometimes, if we're lucky, we find a place that delivers both in a single bite.

The Sunshine Coast is a well-known holiday haven, but the region is fast becoming a playground for food lovers. And signature events such as The Curated Plate, which is being held from July 25 to August 3, provide a great reason to book your next holiday on the Sunshine Coast.

Over 10 immersive days, The Curated Plate transforms the Coast into a vibrant food trail, inviting visitors to experience the region through its ingredients, people and plates. Explore native ingredient workshops with Indigenous chefs or enjoy a long-table dining experience in a lychee orchard in the iconic Glass House Mountains.

Included in the lineup of activities are the Sunshine Coast Asian Food Festival (2-3 August) hosted by some of the best Asian restaurants on the Coast including The Tamarind, Rice Boi and Spirit House; the Mooloolaba Seafood Series (25 July to 3 August) celebrating premium local seafood; and Picnic on Kings featuring Bluey (Saturday 26 July).

Families can expect a fun-filled atmosphere at Picnic on Kings with entertainment, international superstars Bluey and Bingo and delicious local fare, all set against the stunning backdrop of Kings Beach. The event precinct will come alive with two interactive activation zones, each offering unique experiences to delight visitors of all ages.

The Curated Plate is a true celebration of food, chefs and producers - offering experiences for all ages. Many events are set on working farms, offering the rare opportunity to meet the growers, graziers and makers who shape each dish from the ground up. And the culinary talent? A who's who of local legends and national heavyweights who collaborate on one-off menus not to be found again.

Outside the festival, the Sunshine Coast offers its own attractions, from boutique accommodation in the hills of the Hinterland to beach escapes with panoramic ocean views.

Looking for an excuse to explore the Sunshine Coast - this is it. Come for the food, stay for the experience and leave with delicious 'Sunshine Moments.'

The Curated Plate runs this August across the Sunshine Coast. The full program and more can be found at visitsunshinecoast.com.



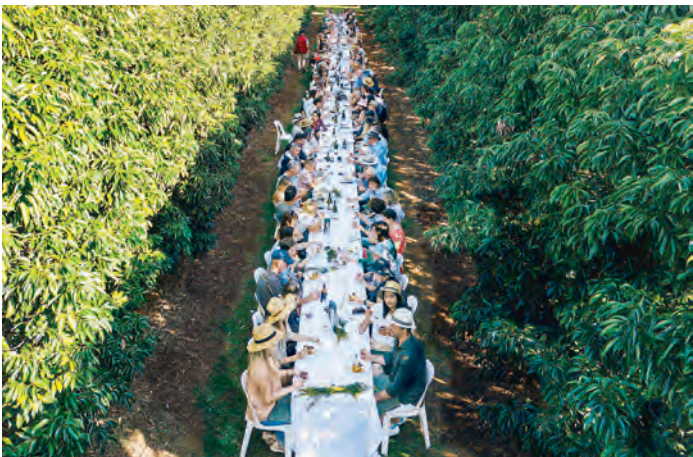
Finn Peters, Karly and Henley Mercer get ready for Picnic on Kings.



Spirit House, Yandina will once again be part of The Curated Plate.



Saltwater Eco Tours.



The 2023 Long Table Lunch. The event is once again part of the Curated Plate event (Supplied, Tourism and Events Queensland).



FIND YOUR SUNSHINE MOMENT FOR REAL

VISITSUNSHINECOAST.COM





The spectacle of Illumina at Kingfisher Bay Resort, K'gari.



The show is on nightly with guests claiming the show is truly stunning.

Illumina shines on K'gari

By Lee McCarthy

Illumina on Kingfisher Bay Resort is a light and sound spectacle launched at Kingfisher Bay Resort on K'gari (formerly Fraser Island), Queensland in October 2024.

Using the surrounding native environment as an artistic platform, Illumina uses a modern, theatrical show to immerse guests into the brilliance of K'gari by sharing visuals of the island's incredible ecosystem that's been recognised on the World Heritage list for over thirty years.

Illumina is the first permanent light, laser, and projection installation of its kind in Queensland and is now showing nightly at

Kingfisher Bay Resort.

Illumina uses cutting-edge lighting to take the audience on an incredible journey, celebrating the World Heritage-listed values that make the destination a global tourism icon.

Illumina begins with the 'Return to Sky' show - an extraordinary journey into the heart of K'gari, exploring the island's unique landscapes, regeneration, and growth.

The show captivates audiences with ethereal beauty, casting vibrant hues and intricate patterns across the sky, celebrating the movement, texture, and colour of K'gari as the narrative of the world's largest sand island unfolds.

Return to Sky fosters a deeper understand-

ing and appreciation for K'gari, and leaves guests in awe of the fragile ecosystem.

Light Artist Bruce Ramus said "This exquisite light portal lets you 'see the wind'... the light is offered, the island tells the story."

Joining a long list of nature-based tours and activities offered by Kingfisher Bay Resort, Illumina provides guests with a unique perspective of the island.

After the launch in 2024, Cassie Duncan, Senior Ranger at Kingfisher Bay Resort said the first impressions of the show were amazing.

"Guests of all ages were blown away by seeing the island's natural processes in a whole new light. It's been magical to watch

them connect with K'gari in such an innovative way."

David Hay, General Manager of Kingfisher Bay Resort, added, "For over thirty years our resort has been the gateway to K'gari. Illumina is a big, bold move by our pioneering eco-resort, one that we believe will deepen our guests' appreciation for the island's natural wonders.

We're looking forward to letting Illumina take us into the future."

As the first nighttime experience of its kind for guests immersed in an island escape at Kingfisher Bay Resort, Illumina will show nightly and can be booked on the Illumina K'gari or Kingfisher Bay Resort websites.

COMING SOON...

YOUR CHANCE TO WIN!

A TRIP OF A LIFETIME

Keep reading...

TravelToday

Manta season on Lady Elliot

While this season is better known as winter to most of us – on Lady Elliot Island, the southernmost coral cay of the Great Barrier Reef, it's Manta Ray season.

The island which lies 46 nautical miles (85 km; 53 mi) north-east of Bundaberg is known as the 'Home of the Manta Ray'.

The manta ray is the world's largest ray, with a wing span of up to seven metres.

These giant kites of the sea can be seen feeding around the island throughout the year but aggregate in larger numbers during the winter months.

Although the Lady Elliot Eco Resort cannot guarantee wildlife sightings, guests to Lady Elliot Island have a fantastic opportunity to spot manta rays from the air (scenic flight to the island), on the glass bottom boat tour and while snorkelling.

Visitors might even spot world's only pink Manta Ray 'Inspector Clouseau' last spotted by the resort team in August 2024. Clouseau has gained viral status on social media and has even earned his own cocktail 'Pink'.

During the winter months when Project Manta, usually based at the University of Sunshine Coast, are onsite, guests may have the opportunity to attend one of the Manta Talks that take place of an evening at the Lady Elliot Island Education Centre.

The Project Manta team visit Lady Elliot Island several times a year. On these expeditions the team conduct research which includes photographing, observing and recording manta ray behaviour. In the lab, they identify individual rays from photographs and enter the results in the database. They also collect samples of water and plankton and take oceanographic measurements of water currents, conductivity, temperature, and depth.

Many guests make their way to the island each winter trying to capture a photo of an unidentified manta ray – if they do, they get to name it. More than 1,000 individual manta



An elegant Manta Ray off Lady Elliot Island. (Ross Long)

rays have been discovered around the island (Clouseau is number 900).

'Citizen Science' is a major component of Project Manta for photo-ID data collection. Professional and recreational divers provide photographs and sighting information of manta rays along the entire east Australian coast. Involving the community with our research has led to increased public awareness about manta rays and their marine environment. Regular updates about Project Manta's recent discoveries and research news are distributed to the public through email, Facebook and other internet resources.

Fast Facts

Lady Elliot Eco Resort run Scenic Flight Day Tours to the island from Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Brisbane (Redcliffe) and the Gold Coast. On the day tours guests will have a chance to go on the Glass Bottom Boat/Snorkel tour.

For an even better chance of experiencing this majestic creatures up close, guests may wish to book accommodation and stay on the island in one of the 44 accommodation rooms to take part in a Snorkel Safari or Scuba Dive.



Glass Bottom Boat - Lady Elliot Island. (Ben Andryc)



A beautiful dot in the ocean. Lady Elliot Eco Resort.



The Coral Gardens of Lady Elliot Island. (Tourism and Events Queensland)



Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort

GREAT BARRIER REEF



GREAT BARRIER REEF



ECO RESORT

DAY TRIPS & OVERNIGHT STAYS AVAILABLE

With flights from Hervey Bay/Fraser Coast, Bundaberg, Gold Coast & Brisbane (Redcliffe) to Lady Elliot Island

Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort is situated at the Southern end of the Great Barrier Reef. The island is regarded as one of the best snorkelling and diving locations on the Great Barrier Reef and is famous for its unspoilt coral reef and amazing array of spectacular marine life. With exceptionally clear water year round, visitors will discover the wonders of this marine national park (Green Zone) and they might even encounter turtles, dolphins and our resident manta rays.





www.ladyelliottisland.com.au

+61 7 5536 3644 or 1800 072 200





David at Thunderbolts Way, 963 metres above sea level.



David about to tackle the mighty Nullarbor.

Touring sights on a trike

By Lee McCarthy

After living in Tannum Sands, Qld for 17 years and working in the coal industry for 38, trike enthusiast David Luhrs took three months off to shake off the dust and see the rest of Australia.

With friends Bruce and Janet Baldwin, David prepared his 2019 Boom Trike 1.6 litre and homemade square drop camper ready for the trip when his father passed away unexpectedly.

The long anticipated and well-planned trip originally organised as a reconnaissance for Bruce for a cycling trip to raise funds and awareness for brain cancer, became a bitter sweet journey and a memorial ride to his dad Reg.

The trio left from Gympie and spent 86 days on the road and David said he saw some amazing sights as they circumnavigated the mainland of Australia.

"The home-made camper never had an ounce of problems except losing one nut on the awning and the jockey wheel snapped," he said.

"It's got ducted reverse cycle air conditioning, a good kitchen and a 40-litre fridge, queen length bed, my CPAP machine, plenty of power solar and battery and we spent one night off the grid at Mary Pool, so there was no air conditioning that night."

"I did need a new set of brake pads at Esperance in WA, but the Boom Trike had no problems at all."

He said, "It's so hard to pick a favourite place because everything is so unique and special in its own way."

"We tried to visit a pub in every town but there is no top three as they were all so different."

"We very much enjoyed the Daly Waters Pub with live music, cold beer, and we stayed at the back of the pub with a full van park after a six-hour ride from the Barkley Road House."

The Lion's Den was still back under construction after the 2023 floods, but they travelled via Cooktown, Atherton Tablelands, Karumba, Normanton, Mt Isa, Daly Waters, Larrimah, Mataranka, Darwin, Katherine, Lake Argyle.

"We had a break for five days in Cable Beach, Broome and enjoyed a Paspaley Pearl Farm Tour, watching the manta rays frolicking along with turtles and the whales at horizontal falls and were very impressed with the whole experience with Kimberley Day Cruises."

"Cable Beach was enjoyable, and beaches are very picturesque with camel rides and 4WD's on the beach."

"Then on to Port Headland, Karratha and Dampier where we celebrated Bruce's 60th birthday at North West Brewing Company."

He said the temperatures alternated so much in September, riding into a heavy headwind and high 40-degree temperatures to the



The much photographed and stunning coastline including London Bridge on the Great Ocean Road. (Supplied David Luhrs)

turnoff to Exmouth and then they recorded 11 degrees the following morning.

"After a couple of days, we popped into Coral Bay in Ningaloo National Park which is an amazing place. A small town where you can walk 150 metres offshore and sit on the edge of reef. It met all the expectations of what I had expected and was a great place to celebrate Bruce's 60th birthday."

They moved on down to Carnarvon where the quokka blow holes and then Geraldton for a couple of days then on to Perth where David spent seven days and visited friends.

"From Perth we went to Busselton and a trip down to the Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse in Augusta on 19 September where the Southern Ocean meets the Indian Ocean."

"We visited Mammoth Caves and the famous Busselton Jetty which is 1.841 km, and we enjoyed the Valley of the Giants and the Tree Top Walk at Tingledale.

"That night we spent at Peaceful Bay where we ran into people from Gympie then had a cool five-degree trip to Albany and a night at Wave Rock before landing in Esperance which was a favourite and a place I would like to return to."

David said they popped up to Kalgoorlie to have look at the super pit then Balladonia for the 2024 AFL Grand Final.

The trio spent three days crossing the Nullarbor along the Eyre Highway before crossing into Eucla and Ceduna leading up the annual oyster festival.

"From there we triked to Port Lincoln via streaky Bay, Elliston, and Coffin Bay on the Eyre Peninsula and I would definitely go back as they were nice spots and felt right."

"We went through Port Augusta around Spencer's Gulf to Peterborough where we spent two nights, at the old railway town with a rail museum."

"We planned to stay at Hahndorf but due to no parking space, so we stayed at Bolivar where we watched the NRL Grand Final."

"We drove into the Barossa Valley for some cheese and chocolate and a hot rod show at Palmer where we caught up with some guys from the SA leg of the United Trikers who took us for a tour to Victor Harbour."

"We enjoyed The Big Rocking Horse, the Birdwood car museum, and the Taillem Bend racetrack, the second longest permanent supercar/superbike racetrack in the world."

"In Mt Gambier we camped at The Blue Lakes caravan park, and I had the best crayfish pizza ever at Port MacDonald at The Bay Pizzeria."

"As we entered Port Fairy, our seventh time zone since we left Bjelke Peterson Dam in Queensland, we explored the Great Ocean Road up to the 12 Apostles and onto Apollo Bay for a scallop pie."



David at Busselton Jetty during his trike circuit of Australia.



The beauty of the beaches of Esperance.



Some the breath-taking 12 Apostles on the Great Ocean Road.



The lady who likes purple in Ceduna.



David crossing the WA Border on his 2019 Boom Trike 1.6 litre and homemade square drop camper.

“We rolled into Queenscliff where we boarded the Searoad Ferry to Sorrento and into Cowes on Phillip Island for Moto GP. “

“We had three days of world circuit bike racing, and while the track itself was good with bikes pushing 300km per hour hitting turns and the racing was great, the facilities were disappointing with relocatable toilets, no entertainment, 90,000 people and no cover except the grandstand.”

He said for an international event it was well below expectations and feels it should have been prepared differently.

They are on the homeward stretch now with a visit to the Car Museum at Trafalgar and into Lakes Entrance, Merimbula, and up to Ulladulla with the weather starting to warm up now

The team enjoyed dinner at Mount Waragul along with a ride to Bald Hills lookout where pods of whales were spotted frolicking

on the highway and a trip across the Seacliff Bridge.

“We rode along the Old North Road, to Putty Range into Cessnock, and the Hunter Valley wineries. Cessnock where the Postie Bike Grand Prix was held.

“We headed out of Cessnock to Gloucester to Thunderbolts Way which took us into Barrington Tops Mountain Ranges, 963m above sea level and down into Port Macquarie before hitting Ballina then onto Gympie via the freeway.

“There are a couple of places losing that personal touch, but I feel everywhere we went was geared up for tourists.”

“We met a lot of good people from every state, walk of life and age. A lot of young people were travelling before they buy a home, and a lot travelled with kids.

“I can definitely say I did it my way. I recommend people do the trip and look around

Australia. There are wonderful people, places, and characters.”

“We attract people because of our mode of transport, and we had a lot of people saying, ‘we are living every man’s dream.’”

Non-negotiables- good sound system, wired for blue tooth to take and make calls, Spotify and commercial FM stations, intercom. Right weather gear, my jacket is a proper riding jacket, but I didn’t realise how cold it was going to be, but space is at a premium. Well maintained vehicle, eight-inch memory foam mattress, good fridge is a must have for beer and water. Be mindful of your possessions - don’t let an opportunistic thief spoil your holiday.



Sunset at Karatha.



Red Bluff WA



A ‘most favourite place’

By Rebecca Archibald

On our first date, my partner Andrew told me about Red Bluff. His face lit up like a five-year-old at Christmas and he leaned across the table to tell me about his ‘Most Favourite Place in The World.’

A desert station in Western Australia. A long, corrugated road across the red earth. A sweeping white sand beach. The ever-present summer winds. The flies, the heat, the unfathomable turquoise water. The ocean life. A headland. The high rock monolith looking over it all. The surf break peeling left off the point. His dream was to spend a year there. In that wild, splendid isolation. No phone reception. Eating crayfish he caught and fish he speared. Surfing every day. A boy’s own adventure.

And so, many months later – after a swift trip through Western Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, across the Nullabor, skirting Perth and up, up, up – we headed to this elemental, place, that had captured My Love’s good heart.

We woke in the caravan, and I did what I’d done every day of that journey and turned to the window to see what there was to see. Salmon coloured rock. A white sandy path. A glimpse of that sea, and above it all – The Bluff itself – grey in the early morning light.

As the sun rose, I came to know how the colours on that craggy cliff face changed from pewter to buckskin to tangerine and then settled in the bright sun, the colour of the rocks in Greece – the rock platform lapped by the stunning postcard sea.

We would snorkel in the mornings, along that rocky edge. Sliding off the sharp edges into the cool and sparkling sea. Water so clear I could see the hairs on my arms standing and waving gently – like the weeds growing from the dark, wet rocks.

We kicked slowly into a life-size aquarium. Fish were everywhere. Wild colours – the Parrot Fish were my favourite and the first time one of them eased across my vision I squealed and pulled on Andrew’s arm.

Examining coral, one early morning, something flashed across my mask deep claret, and a wide open, cartoon-eye watching me as it fled. Octopus

On the jet ski, we headed out from Gnarlaloo Beach and up towards the Ningaloo Reefs. A strong northward sweep floated us far from the ski as we floated, gazed, exclaimed and wondered over the busy and magnificent seabed.

We trekked back down the beach to where the ski was anchored, along white sand bereft of human tracks – creamy dunes looming high above us, corrugated by the wind as the seabed is from the tides.



Andrew devised a plan to swim beside the ski, holding onto it and guiding it away from rocks and coral, masks in the water so we could move along as though we were a glass bottomed boat.

We take to the desert on our Viking Motorbike. We headed out in the early morning light to the baked and endless desert surrounding our camp. Herds of goats, the colour of biscuits, trot away from our sound – heads and knees high, their long coats billowing as they scattered, only to stand, at safe distance, and watch us pass.

We take the Viking to the edge of a monstrous and sublime cliff face that leaves the Nullabor cliffs looking almost orderly. The Indian Ocean a kilometre below, dark and ominous, lurches and rolls and smashes onto the rock platform below. To the South, there are massive caves almost the height of the cliff itself. Everything is so gargantuan it is impossible to tell scale.

I leave Red Bluff having seen more sharks than I ever have in my life. Pods of dolphins flashing silver in the sunset, turtles, my octopus Friend, the Indian Ocean sublime and menacing, and the sweet comical goats. I’ve tasted the desert sand on my tongue and my clothes have a pink tinge to them. I’m the colour of the land – I’ve never been so tanned in my life, and my hair is the colour of straw.

As I bid my love goodbye and walk towards the tiny plane that will whisk me south to a city, my mind’s eye is bright with the lurid colours of land, sky and sea. My soul is calmed and washed clean by the ocean, and I understand, just a little, how this wild, barren place might get under ones very skin.



RED BLUFF

World class waves, pristine beaches and unforgettable camping experiences. Idyllically positioned on the Southern tip of the Ningaloo Marine Park, 125 KM North of Carnarvon, Red Bluff is the ultimate eco retreat to inspire body and mind.

- (08) 994 850 01
- bluffbliss@hotmail.com

Quobba homestead

Fishing, whale watching and shell hunting galore.. experience the best of what Quobba Station has to offer

- (08) 994 850 98
- quobbabookings@gmail.com

Experience a panoramic ocean vista, showcasing abundant marine life, luminous turquoise water. Surfing, fishing, diving,

ing, stargazing, spectacular sunsets, whales and turtles in season or just chilling out by the campfire.

Unpowered caravan and camping sites are scattered throughout The Bluff. There are long drop toilets located near every camp spot and a waste dump point near the entrance of the camp.

The road into Red Bluff is a track and is graded several times per year. The track does become rough and sandy in some parts and it’s suggested that those towing a caravan and not sure about the condition of the road, should pull up at Quobba for the evening and make a day trip out to assess the road.

For more information www.quobba.com.au.



A friendly local in the main street of Leura.



A very short walk through the park from our accommodation to the Three Sisters.



Our balcony. Even though it was crisp in the morning (a treat after our hot wet summer) it was a place I kept coming back to.

Romantic getaways for all

By Tania Phillips

There is something almost other worldly about waking up to endless blue hills, to sitting on a verandah with a freshly made cup of tea and a good book, wrapped in a fluffy complimentary robe and not having anywhere to be – except breakfast (made by someone else) in an hour or two.

For our thirtieth wedding anniversary my husband and I decided to eschew the usual card and dinner out with the kids. On the day itself we hardly even gave it much thought, I was working, he doing the retired house husband thing – not that we were ignoring it, instead saving it for a time when we could really enjoy.

Thanks to pandemic, my full time job and the stresses of raising families and just life – time to ourselves and a trip away had not been on the agenda for years. So, when this magic milestone came around we decided to celebrate in style – and well out of our home region.

Instead, we returned to a place we've always loved – the Blue Mountains. But while previous visits were spent in cheap hotel accommodation, staying with friends and in family friendly motels – this time around my husband took the recommendations of Sydney-based friends and contacted Lilianfels Blue Mountains Resort and Spa.

While we weren't in the beautiful main Lilianfels Resort, we were still able to avail ourselves of all the facilities – indoor pool, restaurant, main lounge, gym and gardens – while staying just across the road at the adjoining Echoes Boutique Hotel. With just eight well-appointed rooms, all with balconies with stunning views across the beautiful Jamison Valley and with it's own restaurant for breakfast and dinner – it offered everything the main resort did but with less people.

Being greeted by a short note and a box of chocolates congratulating us on our anniversary set the tone for our four-day visit, quality hair and skin care products in the bathroom, a queensized bed with a view across the Valley and tea and coffee making facilities in the room didn't hurt either as did being at Echo Point just a short walk to the Three Sisters Lookout. As a young couple we loved to travel – exploring new places was more important than where we stayed but now a little bit of luxury, a slow pace and time to just relax and be, is just as important as exploring.

Lilianfels and Echoes offers all sorts of Spa services and packages as well as other luxuries including a high tea which we enjoyed on our final night – served in the main lounge of Lilianfels – where we sat in plump lounge chairs, books in hand and a bar nearby if we needed more than the tea, coffee and bubbles. We also took advantage of the breakfast package enjoying a choice of six- different cooked breakfasts served with tea, coffee and juice and the fruit, danishes, yoghurt, toast and cereal of a continental buffet each morning (a luxury to a busy



Can I fit this in my backyard? Taking inspiration from Lilianfels.

working mum).

Mornings were spent strolling the resorts beautiful gardens and nearby parks or reading in one of the many little nooks in and outside Lilianfels and Echoes.

From mid-morning it was time to jump in the car and out into the Blue Mountains proper – heading out to visit several of the beautiful gardens open to the public around the region, up to Bilpin to enjoy pies and pick apples, taking in all of the amazing lookouts and a few easy bush walks.

We bypassed Scenic World this time – it's worth the visit especially if you've never done it – a chance to travel across the gorge in a gondola to take in the Three Sisters or travel down the bluff to enjoy views and walks instead choosing instead to avoid too many tourists and wander the many shops along the Main Street of Leura (stopping for BLT's and Soup at the Red Door Cafe for lunch – one of the best meals of our trip) and Katoomba and get out into nature.

A lot has been made about the condition of the main street of Katoomba in the news

recently and it did come as a little of a shock to see.

Like many main streets around Australia there are for lease signs and one of the areas most iconic cafe's has been been little more than a building site for a while. However while Katoomba's main drag isn't looking her elegant self, it's a little run down and looking a lot more shabby than chic it's still worth a wander. There are antique stores to visit and still plenty of eateries to enjoy from traditional fish and chippies to cafes and restaurants. I'm a big fan of a Reuben sandwiches so when we passed The Yellow Deli I had to drag Mr "Fish and Chips with aoli is too fancy for me" in for lunch. The Reuben was lovely and traditional and served with a side of potato chips (crisps) and a pickle which delighted me and had the Big Guy taking a rare food selfie to send his mates.

My must for this trip was the High Tea at Lilianfels which didn't disappoint but the Big Guys' was the Mountain Culture Katoomba Brewery in Parke Steet, just around the corner from the Main Street and a short walk from the

Katoomba Station.

Their Katoomba Brewpub is housed in a restored 1900s heritage-listed building that has lived many lives – rustic and industrial in style, the pub offers snacks and burgers as well as beers for drinking and tasting. Sent by a mate to try a couple of varieties, he wasn't disappointed and left with an expensive but "worth the money" four pack tucked under his arm – and me rolling him into the car and driving us back to our hotel. Who said romance is dead!

Getting there:

We chose to drive – the Pacific Highway is a pretty smooth run these days other than Coffs Harbour (where we skirted around the City Centre) and Hexham (we travelled out to East Maitland to have a night with friends and family and so avoided that bottle neck).

If you don't want to drive, flights are available to Sydney regularly from the Gold Coast and Brisbane and a train and buses can carry you up the Mountain, while a tourist bus is available from Katoomba – allowing you to get on and off all day at different spot around the region.



The Prague Castle lit up with the sunrise.



The city of Toledo was like walking back in time.



The Sagrada Familia is a building you can marvel at for many hours.

Wintering in Europe

By Lucy Waldron

While most Australians were dusting off their swimmers and gearing up for beach days, my family and I pulled out our winter coats and boarded a plane bound for the icy embrace of Europe.

What awaited us wasn't just a white Christmas (spoiler alert: there was no snow on Christmas), but a five-week adventure through cultures, histories, and more museums than I ever thought possible.

Our first stop wasn't Europe at all, but Seoul, South Korea, a city that greeted us with the sharp reality of language barriers, unfamiliar currency, and the betrayal of Google Maps. Yet, as we wandered through Incheon, the rhythmic pounding of drums lured us toward Gyeongbokgung Palace.

Standing before its intricate rooftops and sprawling gardens, it was impossible not to be awestruck by the way centuries of history coexisted so seamlessly within a modern metropolis. But Seoul gifted me something even more magical: seeing snow for the first time.

From there, we flew to Prague, and it was like stepping into a Christmas postcard. Twinkling lights draped the narrow streets, music filled the air, and the scent of roasted chestnuts floated from every corner.

Despite the festive atmosphere, the true charm lay in the buildings themselves. Prague wears its history like a badge of honour, and nowhere was that clearer than from the wind-whipped heights of Prague Castle. The view was breathtaking, almost enough to distract from the bite of the wind in my bones. Almost.

The next chapters of our European journey, Berlin and Amsterdam, blur together under a haze of winter colds. My immune system struggled with the leap from Warwick's sun-soaked 40-degree days to Europe's sub-zero freeze.

Still, determined not to let a runny nose and aching bones ruin the trip, I soldiered on. In Berlin, we stood before the Berlin Wall and Checkpoint Charlie, and traced the grim shadows left by the Nazi era.

We were after a white Christmas, and for maybe a second, Christmas Eve provided it as the thick raindrops turned into little snowflakes, but blink and you would've missed it.

Christmas Day was spent basking in the rare Berlin sunshine at Brandenburg Gate, and ending the evening in classic fashion: curled up in our Airbnb, watching a Christmas movie.

In Amsterdam, museums were the main event. We admired Van Gogh's iconic brushstrokes up close and stood quietly outside Anne Frank's house, the tickets for entry sold out long before we arrived, but the solemnity of the place needed no explanation.

New Year's Eve brought us to Paris, where we joined the crowd of bundled-up tourists under the Eiffel Tower, ringing in the new year with fireworks overhead. No trip to Paris would be complete without a visit to the Louvre, and after weaving through its notoriously long lines, we finally stood face-to-face with some of the most famous artworks in the world.

One of my favourite experiences was cruising the Seine River, wrapped in scarves and



I didn't want to leave the Colosseum.

beanies, passing decorated bridges, historic landmarks, and even the small-scale Statue of Liberty I never knew existed.

When we finally touched down in Madrid, the warmer temperatures and a language my family could speak were a welcome relief. A highlight here was our day trip to Toledo, a medieval city perched high above the Spanish plains. Walking across its ancient drawbridges and through its maze of cobbled streets felt like stepping back in time.

As we explored its blend of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish influences, the city whispered tales of coexistence and history from every corner.

Barcelona, though, stole all our hearts. Whether it was the comfortable weather, proximity to the beach, or the rare luxury of a spacious hotel room, it's hard to say, but this city left the deepest imprint.

From our balcony, we could see the towering Sagrada Familia, a masterpiece still under construction long after its visionary architect Antoni Gaudí began it, fully aware he'd never live to see its completion. We wandered through Park Güell, marvelled at Gaudí's whimsical designs, visited the Picasso Museum, and of course, I couldn't resist dragging my family to the Barcelona Football Stadium for a souvenir or two.

Florence offered us The David, Michelangelo's masterpiece, standing tall and unyielding. My dad, who had seen the sculpture as a young man, now stood beside his family, watching us marvel at the same stone figure. I wondered if one day, I might bring my family back to one of the places we had visited so far.

And then there was Rome, a living, breath-



The Eiffel Tower was a bucket list item ticked off.

ing museum. The Colosseum, the ancient ruins, the cobbled streets, every corner of the Eternal City felt like it deserved a place on a postcard. Even Vatican City left its mark, though by the time we toured the endless halls of art and history, my sister and I had met our lifetime quota of churches and museums.

The journey home came via Hong Kong, where my parents' work commitments earned us one last treat, a complimentary



Even the statutes on the bridges of the Vatican City deserved to be in a Museum.



Walking up to the Prague Castle we were met with a busker feeding his cat a tin of tuna.



The Trevi Fountain was another must see.

breakfast buffet.

Looking back now, it's easy to laugh about the terrifying Uber drivers, the endless search for a decent meal, and the sound of our teeth chattering through the cold.

But beyond the inconveniences and the weather, this trip gave me something unforgettable: the chance to see the world, one extraordinary place at a time, with my family by my side.

New era of speciality eats

MSC Cruises is bringing greater convenience, value and ease to its specialty restaurant offering worldwide with the launch of the line's updated specialty restaurant experiences.

The cruise line is introducing updated specialty restaurant menus and packages across its entire fleet, making it easier than ever before for guests to enjoy the range of gastronomic experiences on board and offering a fixed-fee menu for greater value and transparency.

At the core of this new approach is putting guest choice and simplicity first — meaning greater value, variety and ease for guests, creating a seamless dining experience from start to finish.

Highlights of the new specialty dining experience include:

One menu, one price: Guests will now be able to choose from a rich variety of dishes out of the full restaurant menu, for one fixed price. This not only provides greater variety, but also greater value and transparency, making specialty restaurants more accessible to everyone. Menus will allow guests to choose at least one starter, one main and one dessert for a fixed fee. Menus will also offer extra-special dishes, such as Ozaki Wagyu beef, for a small supplement charge.

Flexible, customizable dining packages: Guests can now pre-purchase packages with one to four specialty dining experiences, which are more customisable than ever before. These are fully flexible and can be used to repeat favorite restaurants*, giving guests freedom to create their ideal onboard culinary itinerary.

Greater value with advance purchase: Guests who purchase their specialty dining package before their cruise, can enjoy savings of up to 20 per cent off the price.

"With increasing demand from our guests



Butcher's Cut as seen on MSC World America.

for flexibility, transparency, and personalisation, this upgrade further strengthens our culinary product, offering today's cruisers what they expect and deserve," MSC Cruises Senior Vice President On-Board Revenues, Georg Schmickler, said.

MSC Cruises Food and Beverage Product Senior Director Stephane Franchini said the group hoped the innovations would make things easier for passengers.

"Simplified single-price menus mean greater transparency for guests, and cus-

tomisable packages add flexibility to create a seamless dining experience for our guests," Franchini said.

"With these enhancements, MSC Cruises continues to redefine dining at sea, offering guests an unforgettable gastronomic journey with world-class cuisine and ultimate versatility."

MSC Cruises is known for offering unique and authentic gastronomic experiences on board its modern and glamorous ships. Using quality ingredients, guests can taste traditional



Kaito Teppanyaki as seen on MSC World Europa.



Hola! Tacos and Cantina as seen on MSC World America.

favourites and sumptuous new flavours from around the world in a way that suits them – whether it be in the elegant main restaurants, more relaxed buffets or signature specialty restaurants.

The new specialty restaurant packages are available to book now. Further enhancements are also being planned to make the experience even more streamlined and are expected to be announced at a later date.

Head to www.msccruises.com.au for more information.



MSC
CRUISES

FOR A GREATER BEAUTY

DISCOVER THE MEDITERRANEAN WITH MSC WORLD EUROPA



WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN
MSC WORLD EUROPA
7 Nights
Embarking from Barcelona

SEASONAL SALE

Starting from **\$1,205_{p.p.}***

UP TO
\$1000
TO SPEND
ONBOARD*

KIDS CRUISE
+ **FREE***

SAVE UP TO
+ **25%***

PLUS MUCH MORE

Contact your local travel agent
or scan to find out more



*T&Cs apply. Based on interior cabin twin share departing 12 December 2025, includes port taxes and hotel service charges. More details visit www.msccruises.com.au.

Three nights, five countries

By Paul Thomas

When three mates set off for a quick European escape, choosing cities they'd mostly never visited before, they didn't expect the logistics to fall into place so perfectly. But incredibly, every leg of the trip came with a direct flight, and each city revealed a new layer of culture, cuisine, and camaraderie.

One of the biggest surprises? The travel itself. Despite hopping between five countries in less than three weeks, and relying mostly on low-cost carriers including the often-maligned Ryanair, every single flight ran on time. No delays, no lost bags, no dramas. It was a masterclass in efficiency and a great reminder that with the right planning (and a little luck), budget airlines in Europe can absolutely deliver.

Stop One: Bucharest – Castles, Cobblestones and a Tour That Turned Into a Party

We kicked off in Bucharest, Romania's gritty yet fascinating capital. It turned out to be one of the most surprising highlights of the trip, an incredible blend of old-world charm and modern energy that none of us expected. Sometimes called the "Little Paris of the East," the city surprises visitors with its wide boulevards, Belle Époque buildings, and unexpected mix of French-inspired architecture alongside stark Communist blocks.

We stayed at the Hilton Garden Inn Bucharest Old Town, perfectly placed in the heart of the historic district, an area that buzzes with bars, music, and late-night culture even in early March. Just a short walk from the hotel, we found a row of restaurants with outdoor seating, many enclosed in plastic bubble-like pods with heating. We enjoyed both breakfasts and dinners there and were frequently coaxed in by the fun and persistent hosts trying to win our business. It became part of the entertainment, dodging or accepting their offers and sharing a laugh or a chat whether we stayed or not.

Our first full day took us deep into the heart of Transylvania on a guided bus tour. The schedule was flipped, so we began at the iconic Bran Castle, perched on a hilltop shrouded in mist. While its Dracula links are more marketing than reality, the castle's creaky staircases, stone walls, and medieval weaponry made for an evocative start. March added an eerie edge, bare trees, chilly mountain air, and fewer tourists made it feel like a Gothic film set.

Next came Brasov, a medieval Saxon town surrounded by the Carpathians. Its pastel buildings, narrow alleyways, and wide-open town square felt almost Alpine. Then we wrapped the day at Peles Castle, an opulent Neo-Renaissance palace built in the late 1800s by King Carol I. This royal summer residence is a stunning blend of German, Italian, and Romanian styles, inside and out.

Back in Bucharest, we joined a walking tour called Bucharest: History, Art and Secrets Guided Tour, which started at the Romanian Athenaeum. It was meant to include more than a dozen stops, including landmarks like the Royal Palace, Revolution Square, Kretzulescu Church, Pasajul Englez, Umbrellas Street, Odeon Theatre, and the stunning Stavropoleos Monastery. The full route even featured CEC Palace, Macca Vilacrosse Passage, National Museum of Romanian History, Manuc's Inn, and the Palace of the Parliament.

Although our guide, a passionate local woman, arrived 45 minutes late, we did get to see the early part of the tour. We covered highlights like the Romanian Athenaeum, Revolution Square, and the Royal Palace, and came away with a much deeper understanding of Romania's modern history, particularly the Communist era, the fall of Ceausescu, and the story of King Carol I, whose German ancestry and royal lineage were crucial in shaping Romania's national identity. Unfortunately, we only made it to Caru' cu Bere before the tour came to an unofficial end. That's where the "walking" stopped and the celebration began, five hours of traditional food, music, dancing, and lots of local beer. March might be chilly in Romania, but the hospitality is undeniably warm.

For running, Cismigiu Gardens, just a short jog from the Old Town, offered a peaceful path through a park still waking up from winter. In



Tour exploration in Brasov.



Enjoying a beer Caru' cu Bere where the tour stopped.

March, the trees are bare, the air is crisp, and shade is the last thing you need. At about 1 km per loop, it was the perfect setting for a 10 km morning run in long sleeves and tights to stay warm.

Stop Two: Malta – Rain, Sun and Sea Breeze Cocktails

Next up was Malta, the sun-bleached island nation steeped in 7,000 years of history. Over the centuries, Malta has been ruled by a succession of powers, including the Phoenicians, Romans, Moors, Normans, Knights of St. John, French, and British, all of whom left their mark on its culture, language, and architecture. During World War II, Malta's strategic location in the Mediterranean made it a vital Allied base, and the island endured heavy bombing while resisting Axis advances. For their bravery, the entire population was awarded the George Cross by King George VI.

Today, Malta's architecture is a stunning blend of baroque cathedrals, fortified cities, limestone cliffs, and harbourside palaces that whisper tales of its military and maritime past.

We stayed at Mercure St Julian's, near Spinola Bay, close to restaurants, bars, and transport. Right across from the hotel was Made In Puglia Fratelli Campanella, a charming family-run restaurant that brings authentic flavours

of Puglia to the table. Originally opened in Matera under the name Barracuda, the restaurant was founded by two young brothers who share a passion for cooking and the sea. The menu includes a wide selection of dishes, from fresh seafood specialties to land-based options, all prepared using high-quality ingredients. The warmth of Puglian hospitality and the scent of the sea fill the air, making diners feel instantly at home. It was a warm and welcoming spot, simple, traditional, and absolutely delicious.

The following night, we dined at Lore and Fitch, a stylish restaurant with a stunning view over the bay. Known for its magnificent steaks, the portions were generous and the meat perfectly tender, one of the best meals of the trip. We shared the meal, which only made it more enjoyable, pairing the flavours with great conversation and the unforgettable setting.

Lore and Fitch was the realisation of a dream for Riccardo Loreface, who grew up in a family of goldsmiths in Sicily but found his passion in food. As a teenager, he was already running much of the family's restaurant and dreamt of creating an experience that was all his own. Riccardo and his brother, the self-described "two naughty boys from a little Sicilian village," went on to open Tana del Lupo and Monelli, bringing authentic Sicilian cuisine to



St Julian's Malta at dusk.

Malta. Eventually, Riccardo launched Lore & Fitch, named as a tribute to his family's heritage. Everything in the restaurant, from the premium cuts of meat to the wine selection and the attentive service, is executed with the care of a jeweller and the heart of a gourmand. As Riccardo puts it: "Love, passion, and the finest raw materials that nature has to offer are the three ingredients of the Lore and Fitch steak experience."

Our first day came with heavy rain, streets glistening and locals ducking into cafes. But by the next, the sun broke through and Malta showed its brighter face. We took a boat cruise along the island's rugged coast, past medieval fortresses, hidden caves, and honey-coloured towns like Valletta and Mdina.

We finished with drinks at Salt Water, a relaxed spot in Mdina with sweeping views over the marina, perfect for soaking in the moment with a cocktail in hand. They were running a two-for-one cocktail special, and when we ordered three drinks, we didn't expect six to arrive at the table, but that's exactly what happened. The light, sea breeze, and sudden burst of spring warmth made for a perfect afternoon, made even better by the generous pours and surprise surplus of cocktails.



Beach in Playa de las Americas Tenerife. (Supplied: Paul Thomas)

Stop Three: Madrid – Football, Fine Dining and Tapas Heaven

Spain’s capital in March is alive with early spring optimism, blue skies, blooming trees in Retiro Park, and locals spilling onto terraces to enjoy the sun with a glass of vermouth. We stayed at the Mercure Madrid Centro, right behind the Prado Museum and within walking distance to everything that matters.

The main event? Real Madrid vs Rayo Vallecano at the iconic Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. The atmosphere was electric, the chanting deafening, and the football sublime. Seeing Kylian Mbappe—arguably the best player in the world—score the first goal was unforgettable. For any Australian visiting Europe during the off-season, catching a La Liga match should be top of the list.

We also dined at Real Gran Peña, a private gentlemen’s club steeped in tradition. It was an elegant contrast to the late-night tapas crawls we enjoyed elsewhere—anchovies, croquettes, jamón, and Rioja flowing freely as we wandered from bar to bar in the city’s buzzing backstreets.

Madrid’s Retiro Park was also my go-to spot for daily runs. With a 5 km loop weaving through gardens, sculptures, and fountains, it’s a paradise for runners and walkers alike.

Stop Four: Tenerife – Beaches, Volcanoes and Electric Nights

From mainland Spain to its most tropical outpost, we flew south to the Canary Islands and landed in Tenerife, a volcanic island where spring seems eternal. In March, the island enjoys mild, sunny days in the low 20s—perfect for both beach and exploration.

We checked into Hotel Cleopatra Palace, a sprawling beachfront resort that leans hard into its Roman-themed decor. One night we embraced the island’s famous nightlife—bars packed with locals and travellers, music spilling onto the streets, and an energy that didn’t let up.

But Tenerife has more than just parties. We hired a car and drove into Teide National Park, where the stark, Martian landscape of volcanic rock and ash fields blew us away. Mount Teide, Spain’s highest peak, loomed above us in the clear blue sky.

We landed at Tenerife North Airport, but most international flights operate from Tenerife South. The trip between them by bus

is long but scenic, offering views of green hills, banana plantations, and volcanic ridges.

Running in Playa de las Americas—the town where we stayed—was limited. A short coastal promenade was the best option, great for a few easy kilometres with ocean views but not ideal for longer runs.

Stop Five: Munich – Beer Halls, Baroque and Brisk Walks

Our final stop was Munich, a city where Bavarian tradition meets urban cool. March in Munich is still brisk, you’ll need a jacket, but the snow is melting, the beer gardens are tentatively reopening, and the city has a quiet confidence in the shoulder season.

We stayed at the Mercure Hotel München Altstadt, just steps from Marienplatz, Munich’s historic central square. Known for its fairy tale charm, Marienplatz is home to the Glockenspiel, a giant cuckoo clock that springs to life every hour with its mechanical jousting knights and dancing figurines. Below the New Town Hall (Neues Rathaus) lies the Ratskeller, a traditional cellar restaurant serving hearty Bavarian fare in an atmospheric setting. The square itself is always alive with street performers, shoppers, and camera-toting tourists, its festive energy a constant delight.

We headed first to Haxnbauer, a long-standing Munich favourite that recently moved to a new, more modern location just off Marienplatz. While the iconic street-facing rotisserie grill is now gone, the restaurant retains its traditional charm, with waitstaff still dressed in classic Bavarian lederhosen. The food remains as hearty and authentic as ever—their slow-roasted pork knuckle, crisp on the outside and tender inside, was a perfect finale to our culinary journey through Europe.

Before wrapping up the night, we also stopped for a drink at Tegernseer Tal Bräuhaus, a laid-back spot with classic Bavarian beer and a slightly more relaxed vibe, perfect for winding down before the final toast.

We then made our way to the world-famous Hofbräuhaus, a 16th-century beer hall that once served royalty and now pours litres of beer beneath frescoed ceilings to visitors from all over the world. It was the ideal final toast before closing time, a quintessential Munich experience to end the adventure.

Three Nights Per City, A Lifetime of Stories



The iconic Bran Castle (Dracula’s Castle)



Three mates on tour in Europe.



Enjoying a Pork Knuckle and a beer at Haxnbauer Munich at Hazen.



The historic and sun-bleached island of Malta.



quick travel tips and highlights

Top Flight Tip We used low-cost carriers including Ryanair, Air Europa, and Condor. All flights ran on time, but beware: most only allow one small under-seat bag. We had to upgrade baggage on several legs, and costs increased significantly—something to factor into your budget.



hotels

- Hilton Garden Inn Bucharest Old Town (perfect location)
- Mercure St. Julian’s Malta (walk to everything)
- Mercure Madrid Centro (behind the Prado)
- Hotel Cleopatra Palace Tenerife (beachfront, Roman-themed)
- Mercure München Altstadt (right at Marienplatz)



must do moments

- Dracula’s Castle and Peles Palace in Romania
- Real Madrid match at Bernabeu
- Cocktail mischief at Salt Water

- in Mdina
- Tapas crawl and steak night in Madrid
- Teide National Park, Tenerife
- Pork knuckle feast and beer halls in Munich



running routes

- Cismigiu Gardens, Bucharest: 1 km loop, cool mornings in March, 10 km total
- Retiro Park, Madrid: 5 km scenic loop
- Playa de las Americas, Tenerife: short coastal path
- Surprise Highlight:** The walking tour in Bucharest didn’t go as planned, but ending up at Caru’ cu Bere for five hours of beer, food, and dancing was unforgettable. As a bonus motivator, I had signed up for the Larapinta Trail Run in August—an 80+ km trail event over four days in the Northern Territory. Keeping up some running on the trip was a must. Each morning jog became a way to explore the cities more intimately and keep up training for the challenge ahead.



Business Directory

WINERIES

NUOVA SCUOLA WINES

TASTINGS & VINEYARD TOURS

MON to SUN - Tastings 10am to 5pm

FRI 3PM

SAT & SUN 11AM & 2.30PM

Wine Experience Tours

Amazing local wines served up in our distinctive, professional, informative style.



BOOKINGS BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

www.nuovascuola.com.au | Cellar Door Ph 0410 940 859

Winery / B&B 0408 850 595



12771617-KF23-25

BUS TOURS



gregross.proma.global



G&D ROSS
Bus Charters

 ganddrossbuscharters.com.au

 greganddonna@ganddrossbuscharters.com.au

12771498-EA23-25

ACCOMMODATION



Luxury rainforest sanctuary

Book direct via
www.lovestonecottages.com.au
or call 07 5442 9186

SWISS ADVENTURES



Basel Christmas Market Münsterplatz.

Symphony of Swiss beauty

By Tania Phillips

The world's eyes were on Basel, Switzerland in May with performers from all over Europe plus Australia gathering for the 69th Eurovision Song Contest.

"Postcards" during broadcast introduced viewers to this beautiful old city keeping the region's tourism body busy answering 1000s of requests from media and would-be tourists.

Eurovision is always a major shot in the arm for tourism in the host country and city as Basel has just discovered first-hand and as a city in this year's winning country Austria is about to find out. At this stage Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck, Linz and Wels, Oberwart have all put their hands up as potential hosts.

At the height of Eurovision, Basel Tourismus were swamped by inquiries and were determined to make the most of this rare opportunity. The historic city's population - usually about 190,000 - swelled by thousands of people from all over the world for the contest with millions watching on television.

But for those of us who couldn't be there for Eurovision, Leonie Koch PR Team Basel Tourismus said there were plenty of great events to come and enjoy all through the year (as well as soaking in the culture and history year round).

Basel has more than 2000 years of history - there has been a settlement on the location since Celtic times.

Its geographic location between Vosges, the Black Forest and the Jura Mountains gives the city an exceptional amount of sunshine and one of the warmest climates in Switzerland and as it's on the Rhine it is also a major stop for river cruise lines.

So is there a time of the year when Basel particularly shines? Here are Leonie's answers.

"Now during Eurovision of course, as a once in a lifetime moment for Basel," she said answering my enquiry during the contest.

"But the short answer is yes in June Basel shines a lot while the Art Basel week is happening. A lot of artsy international people are in town. But, in no particular order, also during the Autumn Fair, an old tradition of Basel, during Christmas (as many cities in Europe), Christmas market, Zauberhöfe, Christmas ferry etc, during the Carnival in February/March and as a world cultural heritage site.

ART BASEL

Held in June, Art Basel showcases art from the 20th and 21st centuries, and is undoubtedly the international art market's most important global exhibition. More than 300 carefully selected exhibitors from the world's major galleries turn this exhibition into a major temporary museum. Artists, collectors and many famous names from the cultural scene meet in Basel during the exhibition.

AUTUMN FAIR

26 October to 10 November 2024

The Herbstmesse of Basel is more than your average funfair. This tradition can look back on



Beautiful Basel from the Rhine.



The sites and colours of Basel Carnival.

a history of more than 550 years, and is spread over seven of the city's squares and a hall at the trade fair centre. For two weeks, seven of the city's squares and a hall at the trade fair centre are transformed with fairground rides and delicious culinary treats. The numerous stalls of the large market on Petersplatz are even open for two days longer.

CARNIVAL

The Basel Fasnacht Carnival begins on the Monday following Ash Wednesday and signals three days of exceptional fun.

The "drey scheenschte Dääg" (three best days), as the locals call them, are also an incredible experience for visitors to the city. Around 20,000 active participants celebrate for three days, accompanied by music and beautiful carnival lanterns. Anyone really wanting to get to know Basel should not miss the carnival.

CHRISTMAS

The city's cultural institutions host countless festive events in the run-up to Christmas. From Advent concerts and Christmas markets to special exhibitions, Basler Weihnacht offers something for everyone.

The city's churches will also host a series of events throughout Advent. The gospel night at Basel Cathedral (Münster) in particular is one of the most important events of Basler Weihnacht and is not to be missed. Other festive highlights include the Palazzo Colombino Christmas variety show at the Rosentalanlage and the Santa Claus Harley Davidson parade.



Berat castle local.



Walking through Berat.



The beautiful views of Albania.

Affordable Albania

By Kylie Mitchell-Smith
PR/ travel writer/ podcaster
travellingsenorita.com

Arriving in Albania is kind of like stepping back in time, steeped in tradition, the people are inviting and eager to show you what their country is made of.

A short flight from Catania Sicily, we arrive in the capital Tirana, hire a car at the airport and hightail it to the mountains. Weaving through the traffic (we were pre-warned) we arrive in Berat-an old city, set beside the Osum River in Central Albania.

We book a new hotel in the centre of town with views across to the commanding mountains in the distance. Hotel Plaza offers European standards, accommodating the growing number of tourists visiting the region. We seek out local knowledge and learn that with the country opening up to tourism, after forty years of dictatorship (ending in the early nineties), the impact has been felt across generations.

Walking the cobbled stone piazza to the centre of town, there's a sense of peace, with tranquil gardens and the calm of the flowing river. Framed by the unique stone houses and shaped glass, Berat is known as the 'Town of a Thousand Windows', from the design of the homes, embedded into the cliffs.

Legend has it the town, built between Mount Tomor and Mount Shpirag, was created by a rivalry between two brothers. The pair were both vying for the same woman and it's said the dual between them formed the mountains and the woman's tears created the Osum River. It's a tale the locals love to tell.

We take a winding road from the town, to visit the Sheshi Sallabanda castle, where locals live and work. It's free to enter and technically open 24 hours a day. The views are sublime and the people are welcoming, with an array of traditional eateries where you can sample local food, including sauteed meats, baked vegetables and 'Bryrek' Pie-a delicious filo spinach pastry.

Next stop, the majestic and hard to find Bogove Waterfalls. We drive the 'locals' road up the mountain, dodging sheep, dogs and wandering folk along the way. There aren't many signs in Albania, it's part of the allure of the country- an organic experience off the beaten track- for now anyway.

Leaving the beauty of Berat behind we head a couple of hours though the picturesque mountain ranges, to the coast, known to locals as the Riviera. We stop at the popular 'Blue Eye' (this one's clearly sign posted). It's a natural phenomenon, a water spring in the shape of a large, oval eye-with insanely clear water in shades of dark blue and aqua that make it resemble an eye.

We reach Sarande as the sun sets, the main port town and our base for the week. We opt to stay in the marina, in a retro style hotel called 'Porto Eda' a delightful, whitewashed building, with epic views. We get a sense of the people, as they gather around the local fishermen each morning-laughter and singing can be heard from our rooftop abode.

Sarande is located in an open sea gulf in the Ionian Sea, we can literally see Corfu from



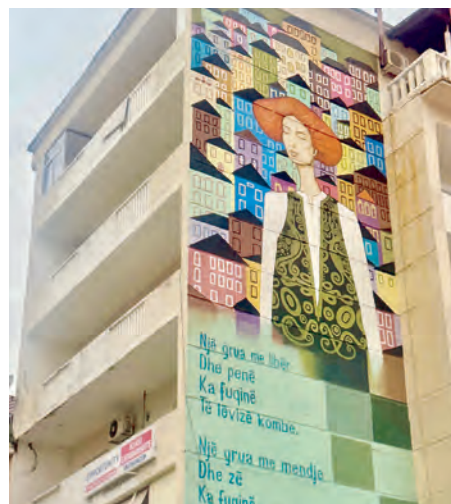
Beautiful Albania.



Sarande Marina.



Kasmil Beaches. (Supplied Greg Smith)



Berat street art.



Berat old town.

here, it's a short 30-minute hydro foil ferry to Greece, but more about that another day.

While the Albanian Coast is gearing up for a busy summer, we've arrived pre-season, warm enough to swim, we enjoy a number of affordable restaurants, cafes and bars minus the crowds.

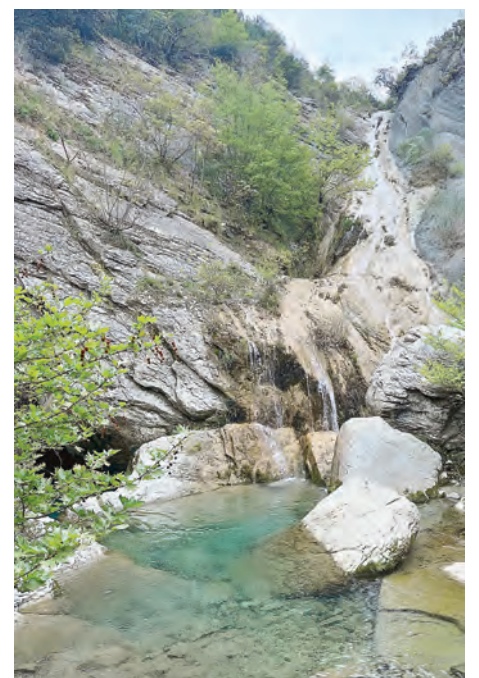
The coastal region is surrounded by stunning limestone mountains and a rustic fortress overlooks the city. We hire a scooter to explore the coast and check out the many ruins along the way. Butrint National Archaeological Park is a must see, located on the southern tip of the coast, it's an old Roman and Ottoman empire by the sea.

Heading back to Sarande we stop off at the popular Kasmil town, made up of beach bars, pop-up eateries and jade green swimming inlets, we imagine the vibe in summer as the tourists arrive. Kasmil offers an array of secluded beaches to explore, like Mirror Beach where you literally see you yourself in the water. The ideal time to visit is May or September, sunny days slide into cool evenings.

Albania is an affordable and desirable destination, abundant in beauty, the people are kind and willing in nature- it's the next 'go to' place to visit in the Balkans.



Beautiful back streets.



Bogove Waterfalls.

INCLUDES HOTEL STAYS IN
DARWIN & BROOME

INCLUDES
ESCORTED TOURS

SELLING FAST

Darwin Adventure & All-Inclusive Silversea Expedition Kimberley Coast Cruise

 15 Nights  22 July 2026

 **SILVERSEA®**

Your Holiday Includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

10 night all-inclusive luxury cruise
on board *Silver Cloud*

Visiting: Broome, Buccaneer
Archipelago (overnight in port),
Adele Island, Hunter River
(overnight in port), Ashmore Reef,
Vansittart Bay, King George River,
Darwin (overnight in port)

Includes one shore excursion per
guest at every port

Pre-paid gratuities and
complimentary WI-FI on board

In-suite butler service and fully
stocked fridge for all suites

All-inclusive beverages
including fine wines, beers
and premium spirits

Hotel Stays

2 night four-star stay in Broome
at the Mangrove Hotel

3 night four-star stay in Darwin
at the Hilton Garden Inn Darwin

All hotel stays include breakfast

Escorted Tours

Darwin City Tour

Jumping Crocodile Cruise

Litchfield National Park

All Flights, Taxes & Transfers



CRUISE CODE: AUS7526

VISTA SUITE FROM
\$13,959PP

VERANDA SUITE FROM
Sold Out

DELUXE VERANDA SUITE FROM
Sold Out

SILVER SUITE FROM
Sold Out



Visit us online
imaginecruising.com.au



Call us on
(07) 3558 9908



Contact your
local travel agent

