

# Travel *Today*

SPRING 2025

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Longreach  
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Qantas Founders Museum – Wing Walk Tour

# Longreach Region

LONGREACH | ILFRACOMBE | ISISFORD  
EMMET | YARAKA



 Longreach Region Explore Centre  
07 4658 4141

The Longreach Region is where the spirit of the Australian Outback comes alive, offering iconic attractions, breathtaking landscapes and warm hospitality. This vibrant region encompasses four distinct communities: Longreach, Ilfracombe, Isisford and Yaraka – each with its own unique charm.

Longreach is renowned for world-class museums like the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and the Qantas Founders Museum. Visitors can enjoy scenic river cruises, historic train journeys, cosy coffee shops and boutique shopping. Just 27km east along the Matilda Way lies Ilfracombe, home to the award-winning Wellshot Hotel and the intriguing Lynn Cameron Machinery Mile.

Further south, Isisford offers a quieter retreat by the Barcoo River. Discover its fascinating dinosaur history and marvel at the Big Yellowbelly. From here, follow the Barcoo Way to Yaraka, a hidden gem, known for being the terminus of the railway.

From historic journeys to natural wonders, the Longreach Region is an extraordinary destination where history, adventure and outback beauty blend seamlessly.

## Spectacular Selfies

**Thomson River** – Capture unforgettable sunsets as fiery skies reflect across calm waters, creating the perfect Outback backdrop.

**Iningai Nature Reserve** - Bushwalking tracks open onto sweeping plains, where sunsets paint the horizon in golden light.

**Mount Slowcombe** – Soak up panoramic views of rugged ranges and endless plains, a favourite spot for photographers and sunset chasers.

## History-Making Places

**Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame** – Honouring the heritage, grit, and stories of Australia's stockmen and pioneering families.

**Qantas Founders Museum** – Celebrating the history of Australia's most iconic airline with immersive exhibits and restored aircraft.

**Powerhouse & Historical Museum** – Showcasing the region's industrial and social history through early electricity generation, machinery, and local artefacts.

## TOP NOTCH EXPERIENCES

**Longreach TownTour**, 1hour experience

**Thomson River Sunset Cruises**, with dinner & entertainment

**Longreach School of Distance Education**, 1 hour

**Longreach Birding Tours**, small-group birdwatching tours



### MOTOR RAIL EXPERIENCES

Outback Aussie tours offer unique rail journeys. Enjoy the rugged landscape while learning about local history.

[outbackaussietours.com.au](http://outbackaussietours.com.au)



### STARLIGHT CRUISE EXPERIENCE

Sunset Cruise on the Thomson River with dinner & entertainment afterwards.

[outbackpioneers.com.au](http://outbackpioneers.com.au)



### EXPERIENCE LONGREACH FROM ABOVE

Unforgettable scenicflights,experience the beauty of Australia's outback.

[queenslandhelicopters.com.au](http://queenslandhelicopters.com.au)



Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame



Mitchell Grass Retreat

## Stay in Style: Longreach's Signature Retreats

In Longreach, accommodation is as memorable as the experiences. **Saltbush Retreat** offers rustic luxury in heritage-inspired cabins, slab huts, and Stable themed rooms, complete with the indulgence of an exclusive outdoor bath terrace beneath star-filled skies.

Just outside town, **Mitchell Grass Retreat** delivers award-winning glamping in eco safari tents, where deep tubs, king beds, and sweeping views of native grass plains combine comfort with tranquility.

In the heart of town, **The Staging Post** blends boutique charm with pioneer heritage, its character-filled rooms styled to reflect Cobb & Co days while offering all modern comforts. Together, these distinctive stays capture the essence of the Outback—authentic, welcoming, and unforgettable—making them the perfect base to explore the region's world-class attractions and breathtaking landscapes.

## Scenic Flights from Longreach to Lake Eyre

Air Central West – Lake Eyre Scenic Flights  
Take to the skies with Air Central West and witness the rare spectacle of Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre in full flood after this year's rains. Departing from Longreach, one- and two-day tours trace the great rivers of the Channel Country, revealing how vast waterways feed Australia's largest inland lake. Along the way, you'll fly over Birdsville, Goyder Lagoon, Innamincka, and the legendary Burke & Wills Dig Tree. With expert pilots sharing local knowledge, these journeys are more than scenic flights—they're unforgettable experiences showcasing the scale, beauty, and spirit of inland Australia.



Air Central West

## Explore the Outer Region

### ILFRACOMBE – Hub of the West

Just 27km east, Ilfracombe greets travellers with its big personality. Wellshot Hotel – an award-winning outback pub filled with quirky artefacts and good humour. Lynn Cameron Machinery Mile – a mile-long outdoor museum of tractors, trucks, and farming history.

### ISISFORD – By the Barcoo

Settle into the slower pace of Isisford, where the Barcoo River invites fishing, birdwatching, and campfire evenings. Don't miss the Outer Barcoo Interpretation Centre, showcasing the world-famous *Isisfordia duncani*—a 100-million-year-old crocodile fossil. For a photo with a twist, stop by the Big Yellowbelly, a tribute to the region's favourite fish.

### YARAKA – End of the Line

Once a railway terminus, Yaraka is now a traveller's hidden gem. End of the Line Museum – celebrating resilience and history. Mount Slowcombe Lookout – panoramic views and unforgettable sunsets. Here, the silence, skies, and rugged ranges embody the essence of the Outback.



### GOLDEN WEST TOURS

Longreach Town Tour, 1 hour  
Ilfracombe Town Tour, 3 hour tour  
Winton Day Tour, full day.  
[goldenwesttours.com.au](http://goldenwesttours.com.au)



### DROVERS SUNSET CRUISE

Outback Aussie tours offer unique sunset cruise on the Thomson River.  
[outbackaussietours.com.au](http://outbackaussietours.com.au)



### COBB & CO STAGECOACH EXPERIENCE

Ride in a genuine stagecoach and enjoy the Old Time Tent Show.  
[outbackpioneers.com.au](http://outbackpioneers.com.au)



### Darr River Downs Tour

A guided tour of 'Darr River Downs', established 1873 and once one of the largest pastoral stations in the region.  
[darrriverdowns.com.au](http://darrriverdowns.com.au)



# Heading out to the west

Reading through Lee McCarthy's recent glorious trip to Longreach (Page's 5-8) and talking to her about it has made me a little nostalgic for my own childhood "Outback" treks holidays.

No, they weren't fun-filled adventures to out back Western Queensland with well organised tours and fabulous service - I didn't even really realise I was in the "outback" at the time - though, like Lee, my holidays were filled with salt of the earth unforgettable characters. The difference was I was related to them all.

While I got away for other trips thanks to school and two of my three brothers, the only time mum and dad went for a break from our little farm in Ariah Park - South Western NSW - it was further out west for a few days to stay with my oldest brother and his family or to visit my aunts and uncles at Booligal on the edge of nowhere in the middle of the Hay Plain. Hay, Hell and Booligal according to Banjo Paterson wrote - those sunlit plains extended.

For some of us the outback is our way of life - for other's a once in a lifetime visit a chance to take in those endless sunlit vistas, beautiful star domed night skies and enjoy a taste of a

different lifestyle.

For me as a kid, it was a chance to visit my large extended family - "the outback" didn't come into it - I was just visiting family, swimming in the muddy Lachlan with my cousins, nieces and nephews. Going to bush dances with my Indian-rubber like uncles, helping set up the Picnic Races on the family property and catching European Carp by the bucket load at my aunt's place. It was gardening with one aunt and helping look after a menagerie of animals with another. Or lying on a claypan at night under the inky black velvet sky watching endless stars.

It wasn't luxurious. It was packing up the old Holden Kingswood on a Friday night after school. Everything and the dog packed into the middle seats and around the edge of the back and we'd set off late at night in the cool, making Goolgowi around 2am where we'd stop and mum and dad would sleep in their seats in the front while I'd curled up with the dog on a mattress in the back for a couple of hours before we broke out the esky and thermos of tea for breakfast and set off again.

These days the family has dwindled out

there but there are still cousins and nieces and great nieces and nephews at Hay and over the years' it became a stop for a day or so on the way to my husband's family in Adelaide. We haven't done the road trip since before Covid (flying is quicker) but my own kids, now in their 20s, reminisce about stopping in the motels at Hay, catching up with family, eating in the hotel where the toilets are marked Ewes and Rams - and they talk about being able to drive the next time we road trip out that way. More nice memories.

But whether you travel by train and coach in a big group with an organised tour to Western Queensland or just in a beat up old Holden to the West of NSW - there is definitely something special about the Aussie outback.

**Tania Spiers Phillips**  
Editorial Coordinator  
Travel Today

My little touch of the outback for when I can't get there - my baby Old Man Saltbush Sherriff (named after one of the many bush characters in my family).



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## Jewel in The Outback

Saltbush Retreat's rustic but beautiful accommodation reflects the unique textures and tones of Outback Queensland. Our exquisitely themed 4.5-star homestead stables and 4-star slab huts deliver an authentic outback experience without sacrificing those all-important creature comforts.

All guests enjoy access to our outdoor bath terrace with optional pamper packs. Our well-appointed 3.5-star outback cabins are a true home away from home where tired travellers can relax on their private deck and gaze out at the outback sunset.

Enhance your experience with our gourmet breakfast hampers, cheese & antipasto hampers and mouth-watering BBQ packs.

**63-65 Ilfracombe Road, Longreach**  
P: 07 4658 3811 E: info@saltbushretreat.com.au saltbushretreat.com.au



The Qantas Founders Museum with the Luminescent Longreach Sound and Light Show was one of the trip highlights.



The writer and friend Kay Luhrs at the Wellshot Hotel in Ilfracombe where guests had a lot of fun amid the memorabilia and hat wall.



Outback Aussie Tours super Savannah guides, Rob Peacock and David Totenofor aboard the Silver-Tails Rail Sunset Adventure.

# Longreach truly has it all

With so many exotic destinations on offer vying for traveller's holiday dollar and time, it's easy to forget the true delight in discovering the Australian outback.

By Lee Mccarthy

Longreach is well known by caravaners traversing this huge land and gained more attention as a destination after the opening of the Stockmans Hall of fame in 1988.

The region was further in the spotlight in 1996 with the opening of the Qantas Founders Museum bringing with it more interest in the story behind the people and machines who were the backbone of the outback.

Little Yaraka won the right to host Lee Kernaghan's 'Pass the Hat Around' tour in 1998 which brought more national attention to this tiny town of 24 and put the spotlight firmly on western Queensland as a destination to spend time in, rather than just passing through.

But the reason Longreach is now firmly in the spotlight as a holiday destination is because of the hospitality.

There is something special about the west and the people of Longreach that puffs up your chest with national pride.

This is where the stories and heroes were made and the people of the region have recognised this and want to share it with the world, and they are equipped to do it.

## Outback Aussie Tours

We went to Longreach at the end of July as guests of Outback Aussie Tours owned by born and bred locals Alan and Sue Smith who need a staff of fifty to cope during the tourist season.

It is without doubt their hard work and vision that have added to visitor numbers since they began operations in 1988 with day tours from Alan's troop carrier, a camp oven and a billycan.

Alan and Sue are dedicated to tourism and ensuring those who do make the trek to Longreach will leave better for the experience.

They still offer a camp oven meal and billy tea and damper over an open fire, but it is enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors each



The birdlife all along the mighty Thomson River at sunset was another tour not to miss.

year, many of whom have never experienced this type of hospitality or a taste of the Australian outback.

We took the Whistle-Stop Tour of Longreach; five days to see the best of Outback Queensland, which included a comprehensive Longreach guided tour bringing together the region's most iconic experiences including the Qantas Founders Museum, Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, Outback Rail Adventure experiences, a trip to Ilfracombe and Rosebank Station and a lot of authentic Outback hospitality.

The brochure said, 'Travel in comfort aboard our touring coach, enjoy quality accommodation, discover the pioneering history and culture of Longreach and experience one-of-a-kind hospitality' and that's exactly what

was delivered.

## Rail adventure

We travelled to Longreach on the Spirit of the Outback with Queensland Rail (QR) and even before we left, all our interactions with the staff were remarkable and this continued throughout the trip.

We spoke to kind patient staff by phone who went out of their way to help us as we changed times and added travellers and this culture was evident at the Gympie station, Longreach station and with all staff aboard both our twenty-two-hour economy trip out to Longreach on the Spirit of the Outback and back via a magical sleeper.

After we dropped the majority of travellers at Rockhampton and turned west with only six people left in our carriage, we experienced

first class hospitality with a special mention to Ivana who was a goddess, especially at 6.30 the next morning with a freshly brewed coffee.

The seats were wide, with plenty of leg room, a spare seat next to us, very comfortable and high backed, ambient temperature, clean toilets and showers, well priced food and drink with our glorious morning cappuccino only \$3.50.

This got our trip off to a fantastic start and we arrived in Longreach rested, fed and watered and were met by our Savannah Guide for the trip Bob Stephen.

We met the remaining members of our group at a scrumptious barbeque welcome dinner at the Woolshed Restaurant, and they were to become one of the reasons the trip was such a joy.

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TOURIST PARK

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# Exploring Longreach



Smithy's Outback Dinner and Show after our river cruise was a standout with camp over dinner and a great show by Drew Blundell.



The region is beautiful, even when there is nothing to see, it is a wonderful region and a way to get back to Australia.

There were fourteen in our group and all got on, helped out, encouraged, chatted and laughed together which made the trip such a success. Travellers from Stanthorpe, Brisbane, Toowoomba and Canberra made up the team, all young in spirit and there for a good time.

## Rosebank Station

We were spoilt from the beginning with our first day enjoying a bus trip out to the one-hundred-year-old Rosebank Station set on 17,000 acres.

We were given a warm welcome by Sue Smith who with husband Alan are custodians of the property and after much time, hard work and determination have brought the homestead back to its former glory.

Sue introduced us to her Jack Russells Teddy and Tilly and shared the history of the property which had included a visit from Princess Alexandra and Princess Alice in 1959 who stayed at the homestead.

Alan and Sue along with their four children took on the project in 2016 which is of such historical significance to the region, and we enjoyed a home-made morning tea in the dining room.

The bus dropped us at the train station, and we boarded the heritage 2000 Rail Motor to the one pub town of Ilfracombe.

The highlight this day really were our hosts with Bob, David and Robbie who made sure we all had a great day and got involved in the entertainment at the iconic Wellshot Hotel.

Even before we arrived, our Savannah Guide David Totenhofer shared so much history and knowledge about the hotel, the land it sits on, the gold rush, the history of train line, the wool industry and pointed out the sadly closed Longreach Pastoral College and Hall of Fame as we went.

The guides provided the energy, fun and great humour watching our group and other tourists try to throw money on the roof in a \$1 coin with a tack which all went to support of the Royal Flying Doctor Service which we gladly donated to.

We walked the Lynn Cameron Machinery Mile, showcasing a range of machinery, from vintage engines to earthmoving equipment, a wonderful tourist attraction with again, a great history told so well.

## Iconic museum

After a quick change we visited the outstanding Qantas Founders Museum with the Luminescent Longreach Sound and Light Show which 'brings the one-hundred-year story of Qantas to life' and this was possibly my one of my favourite tours.

Marketed as 'Australia's most iconic aviation museums, preserving the incredible history of Qantas and inspiring generations of visitors' it again lived up to its reputation.

It would be impossible to share all we learnt at this iconic stop, but it is truly one not to miss and is widely reported on but from a personal perspective, it was extraordinary and one not to skimp on.

Take the day to explore, take the tours, do the shopping, eat the meal and take advantage of everything this remarkable place has to offer.

We were treated to drinks and canapes on the tower overlooking the tarmac as the sun set before enjoying an exclusive dinner inside the Qantas museum surrounded by



Outback Aussie Tours group of fourteen guests with guide Bob Stephen at the Longreach Train Station.



The writer with Savannah Guide, Bob Stephen with one of the Aussie Outback Tours buses - nothing was too much trouble for the whole team, and they made the Longreach adventure such a success.

aviation history.

The next morning, we all enjoyed the tour of the Longreach School of Distance Education which was a real surprise as we learned the reach and vast role the school plays in educating students across an area 'twice the size of Victoria' which was explained to us by Fiona Owens.

The Stockmans Hall of Fame Longreach was as expected, sensational and worthy of a visit on its own.

The museum is full of 'inspiring stories of the lives behind our rugged outback through the spectacular \$15 million artistic and inter-

active transformation featuring the stories of the stockmen and women, the First Nations people, the pioneers and settlers, and the jackaroos and jillaroos.'

## Lucky country

Australia really is the lucky country, and the Stockman's Hall of Fame teaches us that everyone is equal under the Australian Sky.

The museum is a great example of the way vision, hard work, dedication, a common goal and working together for the betterment of the majority and working for the region and the community rather than for oneself, brings a great outcome. Everyone should visit this



The Queensland Rail Spirit of the Outback train out to Longreach was an exceptional travel option with first class service and comfort.

venue and learn this.

The Hall of Fame has morphed into a world class tourist attraction, educating and providing guests with great Australian humour at every opportunity mixed with a pride in the journey.

Steve Bryant with his stock horse Rio taught us that since the land was settled by the old timers, and while the land has seen massive changes from driving old vehicles to round up livestock to helicopters and RV's the mighty horse still plays a vital part in country life.

Continued page 7

# No shortage of adventure

### From page 6

From stories on how whips are made and cracked to wife Kelly on quarter-horse Goose who spoke about the role women played on the land and how they needed to be multi skilled to keep the home fires burning while also working outside and raising the next generation of farmers.

The show was just a perfect mix of dry country humour, a love of their animals, and talent with a few dry dad jokes thrown in, and a very confused cattle dog.

Steve finished with a poem written by Guy McQueen called Our Outback, which honours the men, women and children on the land and a new song they created for the show.

Drovers Place was a surprise not just because it is run by Cody Cook who with twin brother Luke won the final of 2016 House Rules, but because again the love of the region shines through in his presentation during lunch and the pride he and his wife Rachael have for the region.

Cody took us through the history of Drovers Place and the role visionaries Randall Chandler, Reginald Murray Williams (aka RM Williams), Hugh Sawrey and Sir James Walker Mayor played in highlighting and honouring the legends of the outback for the rest of the world to learn from and enjoy.

The sandstone cottage on site is filled with memories and stories on the early days and Cody delivers it very well. (ask him about the elephant)

That afternoon it was time for the Silver-Tails Rail Sunset Adventure to watch the sun set in the west while enjoying onboard canapes and drinks.

We are again travelling on Outback Aussie Tours beautiful rail motor which is made up of two 52-year-old Queensland-built, 2000 class 'Silver Bullet' railmotors (lightweight railcars)



Steve and Rio at the Stockmans Hall of Fame put on a fabulous show with a full house enjoying the antics and the great Australian humour.

relocated from Ipswich which had previously serviced the Corinda-Yeerongpilly shuttle and North Coast line.

Again, Alan and Sue Smith were the force behind the idea and after a huge amount of work and determination they launched the tours in June 2023. In time the vision is to link guests with a rail journey from Longreach and Winton, Longreach and Barcaldine, and Emerald through to Winton.

On our last full day in Longreach, we took our third silver bullet ride out to the Darr

River where we took the short mulga walk with David who again displayed his extensive knowledge pointing out the desert loving grasses, bush and trees which provided native Australians with all the treatments and products needed to survive before 'Chemist Warehouse' (that's Daves line)

### Worth the tour

Take the chance to do this tour even if you don't feel like it. It's an easy walk, followed by a sumptuous morning tea and even with mobility problems it's an easy and enjoyable

wander.

It takes a lot of behind-the-scenes hard work for any event or tour to appear effortless and that's the secret behind our whole trip to Longreach.

We saw none of the stress and preparation required to host large numbers in the outback like our trip on the heritage Rail Motor for the Great Darr River Rail Run.

After a walk through we were treated to a delicious morning tea by the banks of the Darr River.

*The Place To Be For*  
**GREAT FOOD, DRINKS & ENTERTAINMENT!**

**FIND OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS MONTH**

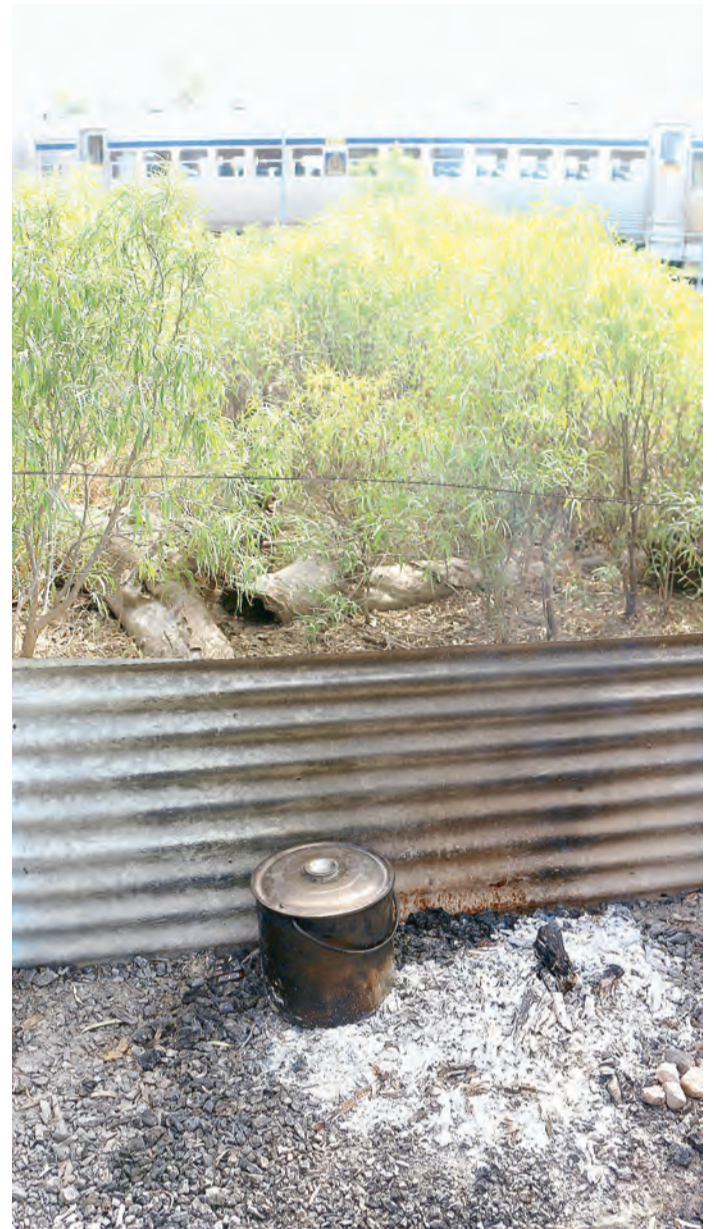
**LONGREACH TAVERN**

LONGREACHTAVERN.COM.AU

## Exploring Longreach



Grant Burnham from Bonnie Doone Beef in Monto enjoying the Outdoor Bath Terrace at Saltbush Retreat in Longreach.



Billy tea, damper, a campfire and whip cracking for morning tea beside the river for the Great Darr River Rail Run.

Staff who now seem like good friends arrive early to light the fire for the billy tea while Dave's wife Merle has brought the freshly baked damper, jam drops and fruit cake, packed the coffee pots and tablecloths for a seamless morning feast by the banks of the river.

Seats carved out of logs held tired travellers as they enjoyed watching and trying their hand at whip cracking with a hot drink in a take home metal camping cup.

While David again shared his knowledge Rob sold his souvenirs and made us laugh with his good humour and Bob mingled with the guests before also showing his whip cracking style.

We enjoyed lunch at the courtyard at The Vault, and all enjoyed the street and a tasty burger and chips before we had time off to explore and rest before our next adventure.

That afternoon, right there, in the middle of the outback we were ushered on to a splendid two-story vessel, taking a cruise along the magnificent Thomson River at sunset being served drinks and cheese platters, and didn't have to lift a finger; you would think you were dreamin'!

This Drivers Sunset Cruise and Smithy's Outback Dinner and Show afterwards is arguably the pièce de résistance among the many exceptional highlights of our week in Longreach but then it's subjective, isn't it and timing is everything.

When everything comes together, weather, staff, company, comfort, it's hard to beat a river cruise and the Drivers Sunset Cruise had it all in spades.

It was a relaxing activity not to be missed at the end of a busy day touring this wonderful region. The Thomson is truly a majestic waterway and with the detailed and knowledgeable commentary from David again (that boy is busy!), we were enlightened on the history and many uses of this important waterway.

On our return after being looked after by the delightful Joyce we were greeted at the dock by several genuinely welcoming staff from Smithy's and after a very short stroll arrived at our venue.

What can only be described as a perfect

outback oasis, with every hospitality essential box ticked highlighting the work that goes on behind the scenes to produce the show with apparent ease.

Our host is Sue Smith with Alan out of town, and we are given everything a guest could ever want in the outback with alternate drops of camp oven lamb and barramundi, served with vegetables, followed by the world's finest chocolate brownie or passion fruit cheesecake and then damper with golden syrup and billy tea served in aluminium cups.

The lanterns hanging from trees, fire pits, the drovers hut, beautifully dressed tables and entertainer Drew Blundell all ensured a magical night under the stars.

It was a faultless adventure for the one hundred guests from all walks of life and states of Australia, leaning into the adventure of the outback with true gusto and joy.

It was a night to remember and after being driven to our new accommodation at Saltbush Retreat, we hit the crispy white cotton pillows in our warm stable room with pleasure.

### Wonderful accommodation

Last but not least is our accommodation. The town offers a variety of options, and we stayed for two nights at the Longreach Tourist Park which not only has well priced cabins and villas but is a favourite for those towing a caravan or camper and there are hundreds of vans enjoying the hospitality of the park.

On location is the wonderful The Woolshed and if you are looking for a great venue this is it. We were treated to marvellous outback smoked meat platters, salads and flame roasted vegetables on our first visit and on our last night we dined on huge dishes of lamb shanks, again meat and chicken wing platters in a unique outback environment.

We enjoyed a continental breakfast each morning in the dining room on site near our cabin with a fresh selection of fruit, cereals, juice, toast and coffee which set us up for the day.

We spent our final two nights at the Saltbush Retreat and even as you are greeted on arrival by Ron and Wendy you know this is going to be a wonderful stay.

After a huge few days travelling between the remarkable places on offer in Longreach, walking into the office at Saltbush is like having your feet soaked in warm scented water after walking the Camino.

Looking bedraggled, Ron took pity on us and drove us to Stable 5, a new 45 square metre stable accommodation option and the minute we walked in we wanted to flop on the soft beds with crisp white linen, make a cup of pod coffee with the fresh milk, or eat the continental brekkie items put out for our enjoyment!

According to their brochure, "This luxurious room recreates the outback stable-boy's accommodation but with deluxe 4.5-star comfort. Inside you'll discover some wonderful outback touches which help tell the outback story from the old gate bedhead to custom-made trough basins."

"All rooms have ensuite bathroom, air-conditioning, TV/DVD, kitchen facilities including microwave and fridge."

For many the highlight of the stay is an indulgent soak in a traditional claw-foot bath on the exclusive outdoor bath terrace shared with guests staying in the Slab Huts.

The materials and finish used to build the stables is top of the range with timber and metal, faux kerosene lighting, the sturdy rustic fittings and furniture all compliment the style perfectly.

From the towel holders to the big beautiful doorless shower and toilet in a recess at either end of the graciously sized bathroom with two sinks and beautiful complimentary skin care.

Concrete walls, aged polished concrete floors, mini orb ceiling, leather couch, excellent lighting, stable doors and power outlets stylishly hidden yet practically placed fill the room.

Saltbush Retreat is comfort, class, style, and in keeping with everything we have experienced in Longreach so far on this truly exceptional tour as guests of Outback Aussie Tours.

Those who like to find flaws in their accommodation or travel plans will be sorely disappointed in their tour of Longreach with Outback Aussie Tours.

With an ironing board, iron, hair dryer, lots of solid unbeatable coat hangers and plenty of room to rest and relax privately before our next organised event on our itinerary we love this accommodation and were very spoilt.

### Memories forever

Travelling changes you and few places more than the Queensland Outback. We happily embraced our hosts, the region and our week in the west and would highly recommend this tour to anyone and everyone.

Gaining education, understanding and appreciation of the outback and the influence and reach the people of the west have shared has formed the backbone of this country.

Whether its shearing sheep, breaking in horses, starting the flight industry in Australia or even the beginning of the unions and the Australia Labor Party there is a lot of history here.

Thanks to Alan and Sue Smith, Kristy Brooker, Bob and Sharon Stephen, Rob Peacock, David and Merle Totenofor, Mick Clark and the rest of our hosts on this wondrous adventure!

The writer is sixty years old, unfit with a genetic lung condition and bursitis and felt completely comfortable and able to enjoy all the activities on the trip without any trouble and would highly recommend the tour to everyone and says, 'take the chance and do the trip.'

### Aussie Outback Tours Five-day Whistle Stop Tour of Longreach

#### Your 5-day adventure includes:

- All ensuite accommodation (4 nights Longreach)
- Touring with our Savannah Guides Operator driver-guide
- All meals as per itinerary
- All entries/activities as per itinerary
- Longreach accommodation arrival/departure transfers



Cow Pat Discuss one of the True Blue Aussie Sports.



The Donniker Team in action in the Dunny Derby.

# Meanwhile just down the road

Whip out to Winton this September for Australia's quirkiest event, the Outback Festival.

Five days of quintessential outback fun will take over the Outback Queensland town of Winton from 23 - 27 September 2025, during the Queensland school holidays. Perfect for families and anyone who loves the Australian outback.

The festival's signature event, the Quilton Australian Dunny Derby, draws intrigued competitors to race in this 'Only in Australia' event for prize money and trophies, including the golden throne.

Held every second year this true celebration of all things outback, has a program that features action-packed days with warm country hospitality and nightly live entertainment. Sports fans can test their skills in the True Blue Aussie Sports, Outback Ironman and Ironwoman, Century Cycle Challenge and the Western River Road Run. There's a swag of novelty events including whip-cracking championships, wool bale rolling, bushman's egg throwing and strongman challenges. Combine this with bush poets breakfasts, live bands, roving artists and kids outback fun, this is an event to put on the bucket list.

What began as a small-town celebration in 1972 now sees the historic town of Winton swell from less than 900 locals to over 20,000 visitors from across the country (and the world) to embrace this truly iconic celebration of Australian outback fun.

Few towns embody the true spirit of Australia quite like Winton, which celebrates 150 years in 2025. Nestled in the heart of Queensland's outback, Winton is the birthplace of Waltzing Matilda and Qantas and proudly holds the title of Australia's Dinosaur Capital. It's no wonder this iconic outback town has been crowned Queensland's Top



Lawn Bowls anyone?

Tiny Tourism Town for the past three years. Bring a swag or sleep under the stars of the Milky Way at the festival's Club Paterson

Tent City, in spacious cabin-style tents with bedding set up for your arrival. Caravan camping is available with all-day free festival

shuttle transfers. Book tickets and camping now to Whip Out to Winton 23 - 27 September 2025.



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The Big Pineapple Festival.



The Coolum Surf School on beautiful Coolum Beach.



Enjoy the Dark Sky at Starry Nights Luxury Camping.

# Pursue your sunshine moments

## Six reasons for a rejuvenating Sunshine Coast holiday this Spring

Spring is traditionally the time for rejuvenation, and with a tough winter behind us and growing stresses from work and everyday life, the Sunshine Coast is the ultimate destination to recharge the batteries and gear up for a dynamic end to the year.

### Wellness on land and sea

One of the most inspirational ways to connect with nature is to swim with whales. The Sunshine Coast is one of the best places in Australia to be able to get up close to appreciate these remarkable giants of the sea. The season lasts till October and swimming with whales tours are offered by Sunreef and the Pressure Project. For those looking for fancy water-based wellness, but want to stay on terra firma, Tank Bathhouse and Spa ([www.tankspa.com.au](http://www.tankspa.com.au)) is a day club, waterfront restaurant and bar, bathhouse and day spa all wrapped into one.

For a more intensive experience, Hinterland Health Retreat combines luxe accommodation and dining with advanced neuro-technology and leading holistic therapies to create a tailored, comprehensive experience.

### Reach for the stars

The Sunshine Coast is the ultimate Dark Sky Reserve because its convenience allows visitors and residents to be surfing the waves and then surfing the celestial skies within half an hour of each other. Thanks to the volcanic Blackall Ranges, the Hinterland region is sheltered from the lights of the coast, which has enabled small observatories to establish in Maleny and Mapleton, with regular open days. It is ever easier to find a personal nirvana with Mystic Mountain Tours astronomy tours. They are held monthly and include transport, hospitality and expert equipment and guides.

### New luxe caravan/RV farmstay

After redefining the farmstay experience with luxe villa-style accommodation, Sixty6 Acres has unveiled a new on-site restaurant, seven mineral plunge pools and a range of activities to support 93 powered sites for caravans and camping.

Situated in Woombye, the vast grounds of Sixty6 Acres means that the sites offer visitors an unrivalled level of space and privacy, complemented by high quality dining and onsite activities, including farm animal interactions, a BMX track and play area. Sixty6 Acres is an ideal venue for family reunions, group get-togethers, staycations and special occasions.

### Surf's Up

There's no age limit to learning to surf, and there is nowhere better to hone skills than on the Sunshine Coast. Coolum Surf School has been inspiring everyone from beginners to skilled surfers for more than two decades, and offers group and individual lessons throughout the year. For those aiming to follow in the footsteps of Sunny Coast surfing legends Gary Elkerton or Julian Wilson, then they might want to Hang Ten with Australian Surf Bus, who are offering intensive Surf Camps over the summer.



Sunreef swim with whales. (Tourism Australia)

### Music and cultural festivals

The hills and valleys of the Sunshine Coast will be alive with music and culture over Spring, with festivals to suit all interests and tastes. The Rangebow Festival - from 9-12 October - prides itself on showcasing "the weird, the wonderful, and the downright unforgettable" and is true to its brief with everything from classical concerts performed against a backdrop of the Glasshouse Mountains to drag workshops. The Strummingbird Festival on 25 October celebrates the best of country music and a stellar lineup of rock and pop artists are booked in for the iconic Big Pineapple Festival on 1 November.

### 200 years of steam

Two hundred years ago on 27 September, the world changed as a steam train made its debut on Stockton and Darlington Railway line in Yorkshire. The 'iron horse' changed the way people travelled and opened up new areas around the world, including the Mary Valley in Gympie. Fortunately, while steam trains have been superseded by diesel and electric trains, dedicated volunteers at the Mary Valley Rattler have kept the rich steam heritage puffing. Jump on board to celebrate a triumphant double century!

■ For more holiday ideas: [www.visitsunshinecoast.com.au](http://www.visitsunshinecoast.com.au)



The Farmhouse and pools of Sixty6 Acre, Woombye.



The Tank Bathhouse, Mooloolaba.

This is the moment  
Gabi completely  
forgot her office  
password.



# Trips to the country await

Spring into some of Queensland favourite festivals.

**Rotary Gourmet in Gundy, Goondiwindi Region 5 - 7 September**

Set on the lawns of the Goondiwindi Cultural Centre beside the Macintyre River, Rotary Gourmet in Gundy is a springtime favourite. Enjoy local produce, fine wines, boutique beers, and live music in a relaxed country setting. Celebrity chef Clarissa Feiddel will host cooking classes on Saturday and join Sunday's main event, while Mondello the Magician keeps the little ones entertained. With great food, music, and warm hospitality, it's a day not to be missed.

**Laidley Spring Festival, Lockyer Valley 12 - 14 September**

Each year, the Lockyer Valley bursts into bloom for the Laidley Spring Festival - a three-day celebration of colour, creativity, and community spirit. Enjoy the much-loved Street Parade, Twilight Feast and Fest, Spring Garden Fair, Orchid Show, Quilt and Craft Expo, and Bee Happy Day. With more than 60 years of history, this vibrant festival captures the charm of spring in the country!

**Miles Back to the Bush Festival, Western Downs 11 - 14 September**

This festival is Miles from ordinary! Step back in time and celebrate country life with a vintage twist at the Miles Historical Village. This much-loved September festival is packed with bush fun. From the street parade, tractor pull, and markets, to quirky challenges like billy boiling and obstacle races. You will find live entertainment, hearty hospitality, and the charm of the Historical Village as its backdrop. It's a weekend that captures the true spirit of the bush!

**Blackbutt Avocado Festival, South Burnett 13 September**

Celebrate the cream of the crop at the Blackbutt Avocado Festival, a family-friendly event bursting with quirky fun, delicious food, and country charm. Enjoy avocado-themed games and



Gourmet in Gundy.



Laidley Spring Fest Twilight Feast and Fest.



The Gathering are returning to Warwick for Celticfest.

activities, and sample local treats. With live music, homemade goodies, and a chance to explore historic Blackbutt, it's a festive way to support local farmers and savour the best of country life.

**Murphy's Creek Chilli and Craft Carnival, Toowoomba Region 21 September**

Spice up your spring with the Murphys Creek Chilli, Craft & Cake Carnival. Sample over 350

chilli sauces, local jerky, cakes, crafts, and international street food, all while enjoying live music and family-friendly fun. With quirky competitions, chilli challenges, and a festive country atmosphere, it's a flavoursome day out supporting local producers and charities in the scenic Lockyer Valley.

**CelticFest, Southern Downs and Granite Belt 3 - 5 October**

Celebrate Scottish and Irish heritage in the heart

of the Southern Downs at CelticFest in Warwick. Held over the King's Birthday weekend in October, at the Warwick Showgrounds. The festival features Highland Games, pipe bands, Celtic markets, traditional food and drink, and even Highland cows. With live music, medieval encampments, and community-run CelticFringe events across Warwick, it's a weekend of culture, fun, and heritage not to be missed.

## ADVERTORIAL

# The specialists in reversing safely

After running a successful Queensland RV solar business for more than three decades, Ian and Judy Hall were happily retired and tending their garden when a chance observation back in 2022 changed their lives and potentially that of many grey nomads.

The couple who are now 85 and 79 respectively were on a trip to Winton in northern central Queensland and when they noticed how many caravans were out and about which didn't have reversing cameras.

We were concerned because many of these couples had just purchased the new four-wheel drive, and a new van to do the "big lap". Ian said.

"Many of these folks had never towed anything before let alone reverse an attachment to their 4WD".

So, they referred to their 32 years of RV solar experience and thought that they could find a type of safety improvement, because towing is quite dangerous, and the less experienced a person has, the greater the risk.

**Ian and Judy identified the criteria that they MUST have as:**

1. A really wide view of 170 degrees.
2. Low cost (for pensioners).
3. An easy, quick, DIY, installation for elderly less dextrous people.
4. Ability to see if some looney has sneaked up

behind, whilst driving forwards.

"Now that is almost like seeing around corners," Ian explained.

After 20 months tinkering around with prototypes the rearview 170 was born.

The driver can see out the back at any time he chooses whether he's driving forwards or backwards or just sitting in the RV.

The most comments rearview170 received from their customers is on the quality of the picture received on the Monitor which is so crystal clear.

The couple have brought with them their 32 years' experience in the RV solar industry, design and fitting and their personal service.



Ian and Judy Hall.



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# Exceptional style, class

By Lee McCarthy

Designed and built near Gympie in South East Queensland, Getaway Teardrop Campers owned by longtime camping enthusiasts Wes and Kayleen Farnham, are offering a luxurious alternative to camping, swagging and hauling a heavy van away for a holiday.

The 'squaredrop' model of the teardrop camper is a huge leap up from a camper trailer with literally no set up time, extremely easy to tow so you don't know it's behind you, security screened for safety and confidence and also to keep those pesky mozzies at bay.

Within three minutes of arriving owners are enjoying a chilled beer or wine from the ample sized 30 litre Engel drawer fridge or have the gas cooker fired up ready for a nice pot of tea or a steak for dinner.

Powered completely by 175-watt solar panel and battery, the power supply is replenished daily to provide power for running the fridge, lights, phone chargers, Sirocco fan and ensuring comfort and practicality.

The flow through engineering offers access to the bed from either side and also allows the breeze to flow through and hatch vent for air circulation

There is a fan fitted but no heating or cooling is required unless travelling in extreme temperatures. The van's insulation is next level and in the middle of winter a doona and a blanket, or sleeping bag is plenty to keep warm.

This is the perfect van for a single woman or couple. It is set up with a super comfortable king-sized mattress and high enough off the ground to swing your legs over the side in the morning to seize the day!

There is lipped shelf above the pillows for essential's next to the double phone charger



Easy to tow and with a three-minute set up, the Getaway Teardrop Campers are the perfect easy getaway!

ports, plus a shelf and cupboards at the foot of the bed for clothes and personal essentials.

The kitchen at the back of the van has much room for all your cooking, pantry and serving needs along with a sink with loads of fresh water easily refilled when empty and a good size server to prepare on.

If hiring the van, Wes and Kaylen have everything you could possibly need already on board with utensils, plates and cups, non-breakable wine glasses, oil spray, paper towel,

washing up liquid and cloths, tea towels, matches and lighter for the supplied gas stove, pots, pans, tea, coffee and a kettle,

On the tow bar there are recesses for two poles which fit a shower/toilet cubicle frame which unzips and drops down to offer privacy for your solar shower and Portaloos or even to get changed in.

There are comfy camping chairs, a portable shower and the table which can be used on either side of the van depending on the sun

or weather conditions. Both sides of the van have an awning so you can enjoy the van in any weather.

This van is an absolute game changer and is available for rent or purchase so campers can take it out for a weekend to test drive before purchase or just enjoy a weekend away.

Get in touch with Wes and Kaylene Farnham on 0439 388 015 or visit [www.getaway-teardropcampers.com.au](http://www.getaway-teardropcampers.com.au) for further information on this little beauty.



The camper is perfect for beach holidays with a brilliant kitchen with running water, cooking facilities and lots of bench space - and easy tow over the sand!



With awnings and doors on both sides, an easy and quick set up shower and change cubicle you can be enjoying your first drink in three minutes.

## An expo with a difference awaits

Heading to Sydney for the long weekend in October (4-6 October)?

Here's an event you may have never even heard of - the 2025 Transport Heritage Expo.

This is definitely one for the train lover, three days of trains, buses and trams.

The event will include a race between two historic steam trains through the suburbs of Sydney, as part of the 2025 Transport Heritage Expo this October long weekend (4-6 October 2025).

The Great Train Race will see 124-year-old steam locomotive 3001 go head-to-head against the 108-year-old heritage express locomotive 3526, departing from Central Station on Saturday 4 October.

The two trains will then compete along the T4 Illawarra Line, with the victor to be declared at Hurstville, before the trains return passengers back to Central Station.

"There are not many places in the world you can operate and experience two historic steam trains race through the heart of a major city," said THNSW CEO, Andrew Moritz.

"We're grateful for the ongoing support of the NSW Government in working with us to once again showcase our state's rich transport history through this award-winning annual event!"

**The race forms one of many attractions set to appear at this year's Transport Heritage Expo, including:**

- **Heritage Train Rides:** Enjoy a one-hour steam train ride to Hurstville and back, climb aboard a charming 1960s vintage railcar, tour the Botany freight line, or ride through the underground and across the Harbour Bridge on a 1970s silver electric train to Lavender Bay.
- **Vintage Bus Rides:** Take a 30-minute round trip around Sydney's CBD aboard a beautifully restored double-decker bus from the Sydney Bus Museum.
- **Harbour Steam Cruises:** Set sail on a 45-minute harbour cruise aboard the Waratah or Lady Hopetoun, two 120-year-old



Displays and exhibitions on the main concourse.

Sydney Harbour veterans.

- **Central Clock Tower and Mortuary Station Tours:** Climb the iconic Central Station Clock Tower or explore beautiful Mortuary Station—but act fast, tickets for these experiences are extremely limited.
- **1960s Dining Car Experience:** Enjoy a one-hour tea sitting aboard the Southern Aurora, featuring high tea service by the Hydro Majestic Hotel.
- **Driver's Cab Visits and Heritage Displays:** Explore a collection of heritage carriages and locomotives on display, or relax and enjoy the live atmosphere as heritage trains arrive and depart Central Station throughout the weekend.

Tickets for this year's Transport Heritage Expo are on sale now at [www.transportheritageexpo.com](http://www.transportheritageexpo.com)



Check out the train heritage display.



Great Train Race Locomotive 3526.



Join the Vintage double decker bus rides.

# Lady Elliot Island celebrates

Few accolades resonate so powerfully and personally for the custodians of Lady Elliot Island, as the Steve Irwin Award for Ecotourism, the pinnacle of the Gash family's strenuous commitment to the ecological safety of the island celebrating their twenty-year custodianship in 2025.

By Lee McCarthy

Managing Director and Custodian of Lady Elliot Island, Peter Gash OAM his wife Julie along with their daughters Amy and Chloe are passionate environmentalists and custodians of Lady Elliot Island, dedicated to reef conservation and sustainable tourism.

Their combined goal and main mission are to ensure they leave the island better than they found it which has been achieved many times over.

The family's stewardship of best sustainability practices on the island is evident as is their passion and the honour in which they protect and enhance this stunning coral cay within the highly protected 'green zone'.

This year as they celebrate the twenty-year anniversary holding the lease to Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort, their dedication and commitment to sustainable eco-tourism and their passion for sharing this beautiful location with their guests, they are proud of all they have achieved.

A sanctuary for over 1,200 species of marine life and boasting an abundance of manta rays, turtles and marine life living on this unspoilt coral reef this island is unique.

Lady Elliot Island has a magnetism for lovers of true beauty searching for unspoilt beaches, infrastructure blending into and with the natural surrounds and a love of sea and land life.

Peter and Julie Gash started their dedicated life in aviation Seair Pacific with a four-seater sea plane flying guests from the island for day trips to enjoy a seafood lunch, glass bottom boat tours and a chance to snorkel and explore the island.

Their daughter, Amy Gash, has been working for the family company for ten years and is now Executive General Manager of Lady Elliot Island and a board member of Ecotourism Australia. She holds a bachelor's in international hotel and tourism management and also holds a private pilot license and is now driving eco-tourism, education, and environmental awareness initiatives on the island.

We transitioned from sea planes to wheeled aircraft allowing aircraft to land at the island with the family servicing day and night guests for many years before they became custodian of Lady Elliot.

In 2005 the resort came up for an opportunity to tender and Amy said, "With the help of two silent partners we applied and were the successful applicants and twenty years later it has come so far, and we have lived a legacy on the Southern Great Barrier Reef."

The family are all involved in the resort and projects, but it is Amy and Peter who are focused and actively involved in the marketing and business side of the business and operations.

While the company reservations and engineering headquarters are based at the Gold Coast airport there is also an office in Hervey Bay for the administration team and a total of 120 people on the team across South East Queensland.

Amy proudly says, "We love everything that connects people to the reef and outback. Twenty years and it's been a huge journey."

"My fondest memories are a morning snorkel with the family before the sunrise or the Christmas buffet lunches snorkelling with the turtles."

"From the very beginning having seen videos from 2004/2005 and seeing dad deliver the same message is so humbling and respectful.

"He has never wavered. We are here to make the place better than we found it. Part of what we do here is the commitment to restore the island with our key revegetation program and really bringing the island back to life."

The road to the current oasis hasn't been easy with sea birds depositing massive amounts of guano which brought the guano miners to the island in 1863 which resulted in the removal of all the vegetation



Day trippers fly onto the island and are back home by sunset after a day enjoying the stunning southern Great Barrier Reef. (Ben Andryc)

Roughly three feet of surface soil was removed from Lady Elliot during this period and then in an attempt to help stranded sailors, the Queensland Government placed goats on each of the islands on the Great Barrier Reef.

Unfortunately, this prevented any new growth to properly establish resulting in a barren island until the late 1960's.

In 1969 Mr Don Adams began a revegetation program using shrubs and seedlings which started the Lady Elliot restoration process helping to make it the beautiful wildlife sanctuary it is today and provide the nesting areas for the second highest diversity of seabirds on the Great Barrier Reef.

"In 2017 the Gash family partnered with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation with philanthropic support so now with 10,000 trees the turtles, and the birdlife is all returning because the vegetation is now thriving and life is back on the island providing a perfect habitat."

Amy said the other major change/improvement to the island over the past twenty years is the soil.

"Because two metres of top soil was taken it made planting difficult in the early days. All the food waste from the buffet went into compost but we were not really utilising it so in 2015 we installed onsite composting apparatus compost food waste, so all the mulch now comes from our food waste."

"It's a nice circle economy out here. Food waste that wasn't being used now became part of the islands story."

"Part of the family mission was to keep the island fully self-sufficient, so we made the transition to renewable energy in 2005. Previously the resort would run solely on two diesel generators and used 500 litres of diesel fuel a day, so a huge amount each year and huge carbon emissions."

"Our first initiative was a hybrid power station in 2008 from diesel to solar and over last seventeen years we have established 1000 solar panels and 240 batteries, so the island now runs fully runs off renewable energy."

"Sometimes there is a larger draw on our resources in cloudy days and it's a continual improvement so we are always reviewing our solar output and input so we can fully run this resort on solar power."

"Our behind-the-scenes tour give people a glimpse into how we can run this island off the grid in a sustainable manner"

"An element our guests want to see is the resort in action, others come to see the Barrier Reef and snorkel and travel for the great barrier reef experience to see the turtles and wildlife and have a unique experience."

"Lady Elliot is the closest South East Queensland island, and as we fly every day, it makes it really easy for our guests."

"The flight only takes an hour and a half to fly from the Gold Coast so our guests can eas-



Executive General Manager of Lady Elliot Island Amy Gash said the vegetation is now thriving and life is back on the island providing a perfect habitat for birdlife.



Custodian Peter Gash snorkelling on Lady Elliot Island. (Tourism & Events Queensland)

ily tick it off their bucket list."

"Another group who visit the island are people who want the 'tread lightly' low impact holiday to disconnect so we have no Wi-Fi in rooms, no telephone services, it is a digital detox destination."

"In the early days our guests' numbers were a lot less than they are now especially in the winter months, and now we sit at ninety percent capacity, and our guests enjoy the marine encounters all year round."

Because of the manta ray experiences Amy said the winter numbers are now nearly on par with summer as guests seek out the rays and hump back whales and people follow the nature calendars.

"One of our snorkel and glass bottom boat tours recently saw had ten manta rays on their snorkel."

Each year twenty thousand people visit the beautiful southern great barrier reef at Lady Elliot Island either as day visitors or overnight guests and while Amy said the lease does have capacity numbers, they prefer the smaller intimate experiences and that's how we keep it."

"The evolution of how we deliver our Great Barrier Reef experience giving our guests the opportunity to see the reef and making sure our operations are as sustainable as possible while still enabling people to be in nature in a light manner with a low impact holiday really reduces our footprint as a whole."

One of the key milestones for the Gash family was the visit from Prince Charles in 2018 who visited the island as part of his commonwealth trip.

"The Prince had heard of our sustainable

initiatives, and he was blown away by what we were doing and very impressed by what we had achieved."

"We sit eight kilometres from the continental shelf which brings upwellings of nutrient rich food source making Lady Elliot Island a haven for mega fauna such as Manta Rays, Turtles and Reef Sharks."

"We fly most of our guests because we are part of a green zone and part of that means there is no anchoring or fishing so that protects the reef and applies to our recreational vessels, so our vessels sit on moorings to preserve the environment."

Amy finished by saying, "We wouldn't have got to where we are today without our team and supporters."

"This hasn't been just a family effort, it is a community that has made Lady Elliot island the success that it is and when everyone walks away Lady Elliot becomes a part of them and has a lasting impact"

"They help us share our story and we couldn't have done it alone. We have volunteers who help us with our tree planting, support from Great Barrier Reef Foundation and grants from state and federal government"

The island is in good hands as the love, care and knowledge of the island is being passed down from father and mother to daughters and very few environmental success stories could outdo this one.

For further information on this truly stunning island, please visit [www.ladyelliottisland.com.au](http://www.ladyelliottisland.com.au) or within Australia Free Call 1800 072 200 or phone 07 5536 3644.



Go beyond Bali and check out the Komodo Dragons in Indonesia.

# Not just the tourist spots

By Tania Phillips

Think outside the square when it comes to travelling – that’s the advice from Wendy Wu Tours Australian Managing Director Simon Bell.

Australians have long-loved Bali for its proximity, climate and affordability, but recent trends suggest travellers are starting to look further afield from those favourite locations including those in Japan and Europe.

According to Simon bookings to China, South Korea and countries in Southeast Asia are also on the rise – this shift reflects a broader change in what Aussie travellers are seeking, it’s no longer just about beach get-aways, but deeper adventures that go beyond the surface.

“Travelers from Australia over time are finding that some of the most popular destinations that they chose to go to are experiencing strain,” he said.

“I think that Australians have been very fortunate, as an advanced economy travel has been in reach for more of our population for a long time but the world over the past 20 years has changed so much that there has been a really significant growth in the global middle class, especially in the emerging markets and that has really expanded the traveller base – particularly out of China and India. Because of the growth in the Global Middle Class, some of the most popular destinations that Australians know and love are starting to struggle with overcrowding.

“Europe is probably the most common destination we find driving that trend. We hear about places like Barcelona, Santorini, Venice and Paris.

“Venice’ population is actually in decline now as residents are finding it harder and harder to live there and we’ve seen protests in some of the cities in Europe and then closer to home in Asia Bali is another big one. I’ve personally been going to Bali for a long time and when I compare it to 20 years ago the traffic and pollution is a real challenge they have to deal with.

“Japan is another place we hear about. It is one of our most booked destinations – it’s a favourite for our customers. Recently the city of Kyoto took measures to close off some street and alleyways to protect the residents from the impact of tourism.”

One of Wendy Wu’s most popular tours is during Cherry Blossom season but Japan has much more to offer than just the main cities and cherry blossoms.

“The world seems to converge on Japan during spring cherry blossom season so the country gets a really massive surge of tourism for what is a two-four week period but there’s actually equally stunning times of the year,” Simon explained.

“The Autumn leave season is wonderful .. The crimson leaves, reds and yellows are absolutely beautiful and it’s spread out over a longer period. It’s more like one to two months of beautiful display. It can be better for tourists,



Heaven Gate, Zhangjiajie, China.



Wendy Wu Tours Australian Managing Director Simon Bell.



The beautiful Mt Fuji Japan.



The beautiful Nine Villages Valley, Sichuan Province, China.



Zhangjiajie, China the inspiration for some of the scenery in James Cameron’s Avatar.

they get a better experience if they travel at a different time of year. It’s not just about cherry blossom when you go to Japan – it’s beautiful but there are other seasons to Japan.”

Travelling these days is really about thinking outside the square if you want to go to the very popular spots or combining them with other lesser-known destinations and while Wendy Wu Tours still have plenty of itineraries taking tourists to the major attractions they are increasingly offering more off the beaten track.

And these are becoming increasingly popular particularly with returning travellers.

“I’ve been with Wendy Wu Tours for nearly three years and I’ve even noticed the change in that time,” Simon said.

“We work with lots of tourism bodies around the world and there are fantastic two-way efforts being made from their part and our part to take travellers beyond the typical tourist hot spots.

“We’ve brought out several new itineraries in the past year that are designed to take people off the beaten path.

Wonders of Indonesia takes travellers through the heart of Indonesia, from the

bustling streets of Jakarta to the otherworldly landscapes of Mount Bromo, plus the legendary dragons of Komodo, the tour introduces travellers to the rich cultural tapestry and breath-taking natural beauty of the archipelago.

For the Japanese market there is the Hidden Japan: Spirit of Kyushu tour.

Ideal for curious travellers and second-time visitors to Japan, the lesser-visited island of Kyushu offers a blend of rich culture and natural beauty. Witness a soul-stirring drum performance, admire steaming volcanoes, and soak in bubbling onsen baths on this journey into Kyushu’s green and wild heart.

“Most people travel Japan and go to Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka and don’t know much about the rest of Japan – they just think of these three places but this itinerary sticks entirely to the Island of Kyushu, it’s right next door to the main island. This tour explores another part of Japan rather than just Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka.”

He said in China there was now the Natural Treasures of China Tour

“China is our second most booked destina-

tion – Wendy Wu started the business sending people off to China but over the years she expanded and expanded. Japan has been selling like hot cakes in more recent years but China is still our second biggest destination,” Simon explained.

The Natural Treasures tour includes the sapphire lakes of Nine Villages Valley, the dramatic yet serene valleys at Black Mountain and the mythical Zhangjiajie, whose soaring peaks were the inspiration for the blockbuster film ‘Avatar’. The tour takes visitors on a trip on the high-speed bullet train, a walk on the glass bridge suspended over Zhangjiajie Grand Canyon and gives them a chance to, wander through the streets of Fenghuang Ancient Town and be awed by the intricate beauty of the historic Dazu Rock Carvings.

“There are some amazing sites in China that are well beyond the big cities,” he said. “Visitors come to see the big cities first and then when they want to go back again they will take a trip like Natural Treasures of China to go deeper into the country.”



(Greg Smith)



# Exploring beautiful Malta

**By Kylie Mitchell-Smith**  
Pr/ Travel Writer/podcaster  
[www.travellingseniorita.com](http://www.travellingseniorita.com)

Malta is an Archipelago in the central Mediterranean between Sicily and the African Coast.

Made up of three islands, Malta-the largest, Comino-uninhabited for day trippers and Gozo-known for its rural landscape and secluded beaches.

We book an apartment and stay in the old town of Valletta, the 'Coffee Loft' is next to the Grand Master Palace and the Valletta Food Market- a vibrant international food court built in a 19th century building.

From the commanding Cathedrals that border the old town, to the steep cobble stone steps that have transformed into popular alfresco bars to the gigantic canyons and ships that line the majestic harbour-Malta is as breathtaking as it is intriguing.

At every cobble stone turn the locals burst with pride and are eager to tell you about their country.

We meander the streets through the day happening upon art galleries, local designers and stately churches. At night the old town transforms into a foodie's haven, the cuisine is fresh Mediterranean style with a Maltese twist.

We dine at one of the cities oldest eateries, built into a bakery, 'Nenu the Artisan Baker' is a traditional Maltese restaurant. Dishes like Ftajjar-a woodfired bread with all kinds of toppings-along with an array of sauteed meat, charred vegetables and freshly made pasta.

At midday the cities harbour canyons shoot off to great applaud, aptly called the 'Malta Noon Day Gun Firing' it takes place at the Saluting Battery in the Upper Barrakka Gardens.

The landscaped gardens are located on the highest point of the city and are a fusion of lush greenery and age-old relics.

As night is falling the place to be is the colourful laneways and harbourside steps that make up the fabric of the city. We sit for hours people watching as families and friends line up for freshly made Gelato and Pastizzi's- a traditional savoury pastry filled



with Ricotta, Peas and Beef-delicious.

We hire a car to tour the rest of the island-head to the Blue Grottos, with towering limestone cliffs and sparkling azure waters, jump on one of the many locals boats for \$10 cash and immerse in the most sublime and bluest grottos. Driving to the furthest point of the island, Anchor Bay we swim in pristine beaches and visit a Popeye Village. (A purpose built film set turned into a theme park)

Time to tour the other islands, with a full day planned on Gozo (the ferry also stops at Comino on the way) and takes just under an

hour. At Gozo Port we hire a car and drive to the main town Victoria, perched high on the hill.

We book a local's cooking class at 'Gastro Gozo' in one of the towns famed restaurants 'Maldonado Bistro' and immerse in a four-hour gastronomic journey. We learn from head chef and owner George how to master the Ftajjar (Bread) Pastizzi's (Pastry) and Qubbajt (Nougat). We enjoy a locally roasted coffee at the historic cafe 'Cafe Victoria, a spot of boutique shopping and trawl the food markets on our way out of town.



As the sun begins to set on Gozo Island, we stop for a swim in the bluest waters of Xlendi Beach and make our way to the top of the hill to 'Ta Sannat' Cliffs. The cliffs capturing the best vantage point of the island- as we sip on Campari Spritz we are in awe of the organic landscape and fluorescent colour of the water.

The islands of Malta are a 'must see' destination, book pre-season April or September for mild sunny days and cooler nights-to avoid the European holiday crowds and simmering heat.



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Mocktails to our seat.



On board Rocky Mountaineer.

# All the glory of Canada

By **Kylie Mitchell-Smith Pr/**  
**Travel Writer/podcaster**  
[www.travellingenorita.com](http://www.travellingenorita.com)

We begin in beautiful Banff, and check into the Fairmont ahead of a two-day journey on the Rocky Mountaineer to destination Vancouver. The charming castle on the hill oozes Harry Potter vibes and is just a short walk into the village.

The town is lively as it transcends from winter with snow-capped mountains and glacier lakes into verdant hills and fluorescent rivers in summer. Made up of independent boutiques and global eateries, there's also an array of late-night bars and clubs if you wish. Banff is the tourism epicentre of Canada's Rocky Mountains and is the gateway to the pristine National Park.

After an adventurous day spent playing golf and riding the gondola to the top of the mountains, we head back into town for a culinary adventure. Starting with a generous happy hour at Anejo Mexican, with fresh Fish Tacos and Chilli Margaritas, followed by Sashimi and Sake at Hello Sunshine and a traditional Tiramisu upstairs at Lupo Italian.

Next day, we jump onboard the Rocky Mountaineer for a two-day journey that takes in the picturesque Rocky Mountains to British Columbia—first stop is the breathtaking Lake Louise. The train offers two types of service, the Silver Leaf—single level dome carriages and the upper-level Gold Leaf— with roof to ceiling windows, outside viewing platform, with dining room and service to suit.

Slow travelling throughout the day we head towards our overnight destination of Kamloops, taking in the most breathtaking scenery and wildlife. We cross the Continental Divide—a distinct water passage— that separates the river into the Atlantic Sea. Cruising through man-made spiral tunnels, we pass by the snow towns of Kicking Horse Canyon and Revel Stoke.

Each day takes approximately 10-14 hours of travel time— pending on other trains and stoppages— we kick back in our comfortable leather recliners (complete with seat warmer) and enjoy the ride. Breakfast and lunch are served in fine dining style on the lower-level, a daily menu is peppered with local produce and a variety of Canadian wines.

After an epic 12-hour journey through the Rocky Mountains, we arrive in Kamloops as dusk is falling, to rest overnight in one of the towns many motels. Next day the early bird catches the train, destination Vancouver. On-Board, house-made snacks, local coffee and an endless cocktail bar are served by the friendliest of staff.

As we head toward the Pacific Ocean and coastal town of Vancouver, we notice the dramatic change in scenery from the jaw dropping Rocky Mountains to the expansiveness of British Columbia— passing by Fraser Valley, Thompson River and Hell's Gate, along the way.

We cross the historical bridges into Vancouver as the sun sets over the city, with a John Denver soundtrack in the background. As part of the journey, there are selected hotels to choose from, we stay at the iconic Pan Pacific Hotel, set high above the harbour with views



British Columbia . (Supplied)

across to the mountains beyond.

Vancouver has it all, from the big city lights of the Gastown district, to Granville Island, a neighbourhood and shopping precinct set on the Peninsula, to the many parks and foreshore areas. We book a virtual ride on 'Flyover Canada' that takes in the most picturesque landscapes across Canada. (Buckle in as it

twists and turns, spraying you with water along the way).

The Rocky Mountaineer offers an array of packages such as the 'Passage to the Peaks', 'Rainforest to Goldrush' or 'Journey through the Clouds'. Plans are afoot to launch 'Canyon Spirit' into the USA in 2026. ('Rockies to the Red Rocks' from Salt Lake City to Colorado

and Utah).

For over 35 years the Rocky Mountaineer has been exploring North America—it's a trusted and unique railway experience, all about the journey and the destinations.

For further information on these 'once in a lifetime' remarkable experiences, visit [www.rockymountaineer.com/](http://www.rockymountaineer.com/)

# Brisbane Festival ready

The 2025 Brisbane Festival is back and happening now. Running until September 27, this annual event features performances, installations, and various events lighting up the city.

Here are some highlights, with links for more information, that the festival organisers thought might make you want to head down to Brisbane for a look.

**The Platypus:**

**10 - 13 Sep | QPAC Cremorne Theatre**

Written and directed by well-known actor Francis Greenslade (Shaun Micallef's *Mad as Hell*, *Winners and Losers*) and performed by John Leary (*The Good Place*, *Glitch*, *The Letdown*, *Upper Middle Bogan*) and Rebecca Bower (*The Spooky Files*, *Offspring*, *Wentworth*), *The Platypus* is a genre-busting delight — an outrageously clever, wildly entertaining play about theatre, relationships, and the roles we all play. [www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/the-platypus](http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/the-platypus)

**100 Guitars:**

**14 Sep | Brisbane Powerhouse**

Experience music like never before at 100 Guitars, a breathtaking sonic and social event coming to Brisbane Festival 2025. This isn't just a concert — it's a powerful, site-specific performance featuring 100 electric guitarists from communities across the city, uniting to create an unforgettable surround-sound spectacle. Founded by renowned Canadian composer and guitarist Tim Brady in 2015. [Page link: www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/100-guitars](http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/100-guitars)

**The Chronicles:**

**10 - 13 Sep | Thomas Dixon Centre**

Created by Stephanie Lake - Twelve of the country's top contemporary dancers meet a masterful electro-acoustic score by Robin Fox, which blends driving rhythms with the stirring, ethereal sounds of a children's choir (the Voices of Birralee) and singer Oliver Mann performing live on stage. [Page link: www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/the-chronicles](http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/the-chronicles)

**Baleen Moondjan:**

**18 - 21 Sep | Queen's Wharf Brisbane**

In his first major commission since leaving Bangarra Dance Theatre, creative visionary Stephen Page brings his contemporary cer-



Craig and Karl's Public Art Trail.

emony to his hometown. Inspired by a story from Stephen's grandmother from the Ngugi/Nunukul/Moondjan people of Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island), Baleen Moondjan celebrates the First Nations' relationships between baleen whales and Communities' totemic systems. [Page link: www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/baleen-moondjan](http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/baleen-moondjan)

**Camerata - Your Eternal Memories**

**13 Sep | QPAC Concert Hall**

Camerata - Queensland's Chamber Orchestra will be joined by distinguished Australian actor and long-term Camerata collaborator, Barbara Lowing, to narrate the concert, and the remarkable Australian singer/songwriter Kate Miller-Heidke will provide her iconic vocals for a selection of songs at this unmissable event.

Exploring the theme eternal memory, inspired by John Tavener's *Eternal Memory* for

cello and strings, Camerata invited audiences to share their eternal or special memories to curate a concert of music inspired by personal recollections. [Page link: www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/camerata-your-eternal-memories](http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/camerata-your-eternal-memories)

**Skylore — Nieergoo: Spirit of the Whale**

**25 - 27 Sep | Queen's Wharf and South Bank**

Skylore is a larger-than-life highlight of Brisbane Festival and a bright and bold celebration of our city, celebrating Culture and place. Now in its third annual iteration, Skylore has become a staple of the Festival.

Back by popular demand, Nieergoo: Spirit of the Whale returns to illuminate Brisbane's skyline. Watch as hundreds of drones soar above the Brisbane River as Traditional Owner Yuggera and Toorabul man Shannon Ruska and Tribal Experiences retell this powerful story of Culture, Country, and connection



Experience music like never before at 100 Guitars, a breathtaking sonic and social event coming to Brisbane Festival 2025.



The Platypus. (Supplied Mark Gambino)

to place, with original composition by Guy Webster. [Page link: www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/skylore](http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/skylore)

**Craig and Karl: Public Art Trail**

**5 - 27 Sep**

Craig and Karl will be popping up all over Brisbane, activating iconic city sites with their signature colours and inflatables. Along with taking over the walking bridges in larger-than-life installations for ANZ's Walk This Way, locations across Brisbane will transform into a citywide Public Art Trail.

Join Brisbane Festival for a guided walking tour to discover all that the citywide Craig and Karl takeover has to offer. These free, small-group tours offer exclusive insights from the artists and plot their journey from burgeoning local artists to global design superstars. [Page link: www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/craig-and-karl-public-art-trail](http://www.brisbanefestival.com.au/events/craig-and-karl-public-art-trail)

## Feel the after glow at City Botanic Gardens

Brisbane's iconic City Botanic Gardens is set to come alive through the medium of fire — thanks to the new Afterglow magical world premier experience aimed at bringing the

From Thursday 5 September to Saturday 27 September ticket holders will have a chance to follow the fire trail and be captivated by a glowing dreamscape of dancing shadows, candlelit installations and fire sculptures in the world premiere of Afterglow.

The fire trail is an all-ages experience, perfect for family outings, date nights or solo moments of reflection and is presented by Sony Music Entertainment as part of Brisbane Festival 2025.

A nocturnal wonderland, the City Botanic Gardens beckons visitors to enter its gates as the sun goes down and immerse themselves in a multisensory experience.

Live performances and a carefully curated ambient soundtrack spark wonder and awe as visitors journey with purpose along a 1.4km trail brought to life by world-renowned fire artists and local creative talents.

Expect to be warmed by glowing embers, intrigued by light bending and bouncing through the tree canopy, dazzled by shimmering illusions and captivated by the pulse and rhythm of flickering flames.

Brisbane Festival Artistic Director Louise Bezzina said the world premiere season of Afterglow brings a blend of spectacle and solemnity to the 2025 Festival.

"Across time and cultures, people have always felt a connection to fire — as an element of nature, a force of renewal or a symbol of ceremony and ritual," Ms Bezzina said.

"Afterglow is a slow-burn experience, an invitation to deliberately and respectfully engage



with the artistry and power of fire."

Sony Music Australia and New Zealand Chair and CEO Vanessa Picken said the company was proud to partner again with Brisbane Festival to debut its new multisensory experience following the overwhelming success of Lightscape in 2023 and 2024.

"Afterglow is unlike anything Brisbane has witnessed before, a fusion of stillness and surprise where fire, sound and shadows combine with artistry, creativity and nature to create an unforgettable experience," Ms Picken said.

Culture Creative Managing Director Zoe Bottrell said the brand-new fire trail was created to complement the Gardens' natural beauty.

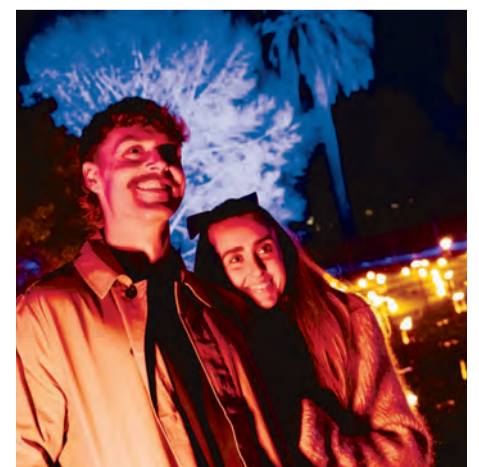
"Afterglow is unique. With consideration and care, we design and structure every ele-

ment to illuminate this beautiful location and offer moments of transcendence and wonder to all who step into this nocturnal dreamland," Ms Bottrell said.

Session times begin nightly at 5.45pm and run every 15 minutes until late.

Visitors can experience the glowing multisensory trail at their own pace with an average duration of 90 minutes. Afterglow is suitable for all ages and is wheelchair- and stroller-accessible. with Tickets are on sale at [afterglowau.com](http://afterglowau.com) and [brisbanefestival.com.au](http://brisbanefestival.com.au).

Saturday 27 September Session times: Every 15 mins from 5.45pm until late Duration: Allow 90 minutes for the experience Tickets: Child \$20 - \$26, Adult \$26 - \$32. New Flexi Pass and Super Flexi Pass \$38 - \$65 Book: via Ticketek.



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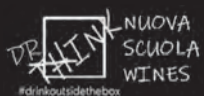
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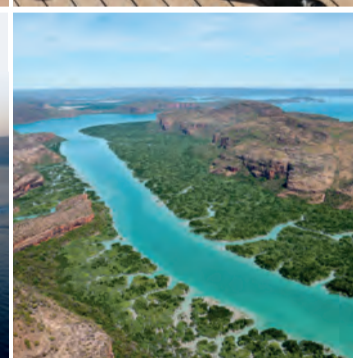
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