

A LOST WORLD

THE BEATING GREEN HEART OF THE GOLD COAST HINTERLAND OFFERS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE – WHETHER YOU WANT TO EXPLORE ITS BREATHTAKING RAINFORESTS OR BROWSE AROUND THE LOCAL ARTS AND CRAFTS...

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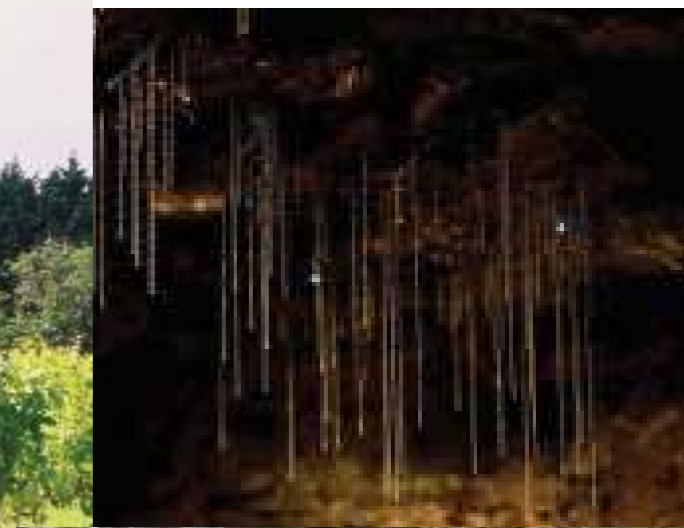
The pace drops as we swap the high rises of the Gold Coast for the intense green hinterland. Mount Tamborine is a volcanic plateau that lies 500 metres above sea level, and as we creep along the winding country roads it feels like we've entered a lost world.

The kids are getting restless as we pull into Thunderbird Park. The park is packed with adrenaline activities like zip lines and tree top challenges, but with six-year-old twins and a three-year-old, we've chosen the more relaxed activity of thunderegg fossicking.

After learning what a thunderegg is (a lumpy sphere of volcanic lava filled with layers of ash), and looking at some examples so we know what we're looking for, we equip ourselves with buckets and picks and climb the slope to the mines.

After a morning digging and scrambling over the rocky ground in intense heat, we've filled three buckets with rocks – some grey and knobbly and others that shimmer as they catch the light. We take them to the office and tip them onto the counter to be examined.

"You haven't got any whole thundereggs," says the lady, carefully checking each rock, "but you've got a partial one here. Would you like me to cut it so you can see inside?" >>



She cuts it open on the machine so the boys can see the pretty rings of colour inside the ancient grey rock. They're blown away with excitement: "We found a thunderegg, Mummy! Can we take it to 'Show and Tell' at school?"

We leave with a bag of rocks and our opened thunderegg that the boys say they're going to sleep with tonight.

Clockwise from above: The vineyard at Cedar Creek Estate Winery, glow worm threads at Cedar Creek Estate Glow Worm Caves; Cedar Creek Falls

GLOW WORM MAGIC

Next up is the Cedar Creek Estate Glow Worm Caves and Winery. Before our glow worm tour we have time to visit 'Frog Hollow'. A boardwalk through the trees leads us to a cabin filled with frogs in glass cases. Our frog-obsessed kids carry a stool around so they can look each frog in the eye.

might have seen elsewhere in the world." We learn that the glows come from the larvae – this cycle in their lives lasts up to a year and it's the only time they can glow. They only survive a few days as adults as they don't have mouthparts.

The boys think it's cool when the guide tells them "the glow worms glow to attract their prey and they catch them using a sticky silk snare that acts like a spider's web."

Suitably impressed, the boys run out to feed the ducks on the lake with their grandparents while my husband Matt and I sneak off to sample the wine cellar.

A A\$4 fee allows us five tasters, so we work our way through the wines made from grapes grown on the estate. In the Pink, an easy-drinking rosé, is a winner, so we buy a couple of bottles for our next barbeque. They also sell a delicious, rich chocolate port – something I could imagine sipping in front of a log fire on a cold winter's night. Not that Queensland has many of those.

With the first part of our Tamborine Mountain tour over, it's time to head home to Brisbane. A few days later, Matt and I return without the kids for some grown-up exploration.

“We found a thunderegg, Mummy! Can we take it to 'Show and Tell' at school?”

An upbeat guide leads us through the forest to the man-made caves – complete with realistic stalagmites and stalactites – where we watch a film about glow worms. We make our way into the main cave and our eyes slowly adjust as we hold hands in the darkness. The boys look at the specks of light all around.

The guide explains: "The glow worm's natural environment has been recreated here and we maintain perfect conditions for them year-round". The boys squeal as water drips on them from above, making them jump.

"Our glow worm species are native to Queensland," explains the guide, "so they're different from any you

Left hand page: Thunderegg fossicking at Thunderbird Park

CEDAR CREEK FALLS

"Would you like a glass of Champagne," asks Carolynne from Escarpment Retreat as we check in. >>



TOP 5

gastronomic experiences

BELVEDERE ON MAIN

43 Main Street
Serving incredible juicy steaks and delicious wood-fired pizzas, this Italian wins hands down as my favourite eatery in Tamborine Mountain.
www.belvedereonmain.com

CAFÉ BRAVO

137 Long Road
A lovely little café on the Gallery Walk. Perfect for a slice of cake and a glass of Champagne after a busy morning shopping.

OLD CHURCH RESTAURANT

Corner Long Road and Curtis Road
The most recommended restaurant in the area. Unfortunately when we visited it was closed, but as everyone we met told us, we have to go, so we will definitely be back to sample it.
www.theoldchurch.net

COFFEE PLANTATION

64 Alpine Terrace
Delicious cake and home-grown, hand-picked, bio-organic coffee. The Mount Tamborine Coffee Plantation coffee is rich and delicious, or hard-core caffeine lovers can try a cup of intense Black Magic – made with the highest caffeine rated coffee beans in the world.
www.mtcp.com.au

TEA AND NICETIES

32 Eagle Heights Road
Top of the list for an elaborate cream tea, this place is a great stopping off point before or after the Gallery Walk to refuel with tasty treats.
www.teaandniceties.com.au



This is exactly how all short breaks should all begin. She shows us to our luxurious rainforest villa, with its polished wooden floors, gigantic four-posted bed and huge spa bath. Outside we can hear the chorus of the rainforest, which gets louder as the sun goes down.

The next morning, we walk off a hearty breakfast with a stroll along the resort's private stretch of creek, complete with waterfalls. Calmness surrounds me and I'm very tempted to spend the day taking in the panoramic scene from the sofa on the viewing deck, but it's time for more activities.

The sun is shining as we arrive at Cedar Creek Falls. A path leads us to a lookout where we get our first view of the cascading waterfall as it tumbles into the rock pool below. We follow the path down to the string of lagoons where we take off our sandals and plunge our feet in the icy water. We sit on a boulder and let the time drift by. I can imagine it's the perfect spot for a family picnic on a hot day.

Next to the rock pools is the Tamborine Rainforest Skywalk – a family-run eco-attraction sprawling over 130 acres. The location has a unique biodiversity where fertile rainforest meets eucalypt forest – both of which are home to different sorts of wildlife.

The 1.5 kilometre walk is made up of 300 metres of high-tech steel bridges and a 40-metre long cantilever bridge that stretches into the forest. A boardwalk takes

Above (left to right): The rainforest villas at Escarpment Retreat offer an idyllic sanctuary; and stunning cliff views from the Retreat

us up into the canopy, giving us a new vantage point over the forest.

Brandon, the owners' son and one of the park managers, explains one of the reasons for the attraction's popularity: "The walk is accessible and circular, so you can't get lost, yet you are still surrounded by the pristine rainforest. It's a safe introduction for tourists and visitors who might be nervous about going out into the rainforest."

“It's relaxing hanging out with the birds in the treetops, and the views are breathtaking”

Left hand page: Enjoying bird's-eye views from the Rainforest Skywalk

Before he waves us off for our walk he points out the plant which has been introduced to create a habitat for the rare Richmond birdwing butterfly. They've been working hard to conserve the rare species and on our walk we see many of them fluttering around.

It's really relaxing hanging out with the birds in the treetops, and the views from the suspended cantilever bridge are breathtaking.

After our busy day, we get to unwind in the private cinema at our resort. Comfy leather cinema chairs, a



Above: The Tudor-style entrance to Tamborine Mountain Distillery

Left: Michael Ward, co-owner of Tamborine Mountain Distillery, offers a cheery welcome

USEFUL CONTACTS

TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN DISTILLERY

Five tastings for A\$5 (£3). Open from 10am to 3pm.
www.tamborinemountaindistillery.com

RAINFOREST SKYWALK

Allow 45 minutes for the walk and more time to explore the information boards, shop and café. Admission costs A\$19.50 (£11.50) per adult and A\$9.50 (£5.60) per child.
www.rainforestskywalk.com.au

THUNDERBIRD PARK

For the thunderegg fossicking you need to wear closed shoes. Take water, hats and sunscreen. Admission costs A\$24 (£14) per adult and A\$15 (£8) per child.
www.thunderbirdpark.com

CEDAR CREEK WINERY

Open from 10am to 4pm. Five tastings for A\$4 (£2).
www.cedarcreekestate.com.au

GLOW WORM CAVES AND FROG HOLLOW

Open from 10am to 4pm. Glow Worm Cave prices for A\$12 (£7) per adult and A\$6 (£3) per child. Frog Hollow prices are A\$4 (£2) per adult and A\$2 (£1) per child.
www.glowwormcavetamborinemountain.com.au

CEDAR CREEK FALLS

There is free parking, a picnic area and toilets. The pools are a 15 minute walk from the car park.
www.discovertamborine.com.au/tamborine-waterfalls-waterholes

ESCARPMENT RETREAT

Couples can stay in the luxury bed and breakfast villas scattered in the rainforest or larger groups can stay in the three-bed Edge House which has incredible views of the valley and rainforest. Prices from A\$295 (£173) per night.
www.escarpment.com.au

bottle of something sparkling and a romantic movie are just what we need to unwind on our final night away without the kids.

MOUNTAIN DISTILLERY

The next morning begins with a trip to the Tamborine Mountain Distillery. We step out of the car into an old English Tudor-style courtyard.

We're welcomed with a chirpy "good morning," from the lady behind the counter as we step into the shop. "Our bottles are hand painted on-site. And the owner's wife is Russian so our flavours are serious, not sickly – and it's all organic."

The Aladdin's cave of ornate bottles promise enticing flavours ranging from lemon myrtle liqueur to eucalyptus gum leaf vodka.

The family brand is still very much a family business, and it has won over 300 awards. We make a mental note to come on an organised tasting tour next time so neither of us has to drive.

After a final potter around the Gallery Walk – where I lose my husband in the impressive cuckoo clock shop – it's time to head home to reality.

Tamborine Mountain has the perfect blend to keep everyone happy – whether that's young families looking for adventure or couples on a romantic retreat. This is one lost world we'll be returning to. 🇺🇸