

# THE GREEN BE HIND THE

# GOLD

LOOK BEYOND THE GLITZY HIGH RISES OF QUEENSLAND'S MOST CHARISMATIC CITY AND DISCOVER GOLDEN SANDY BEACHES AND A WILDLIFE-RICH SUBTROPICAL HINTERLAND...

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Keep your eyes peeled for pademelons. They're a bit like small wallabies,” our guide tells us as we join a four-wheel drive tour in Lamington National Park.

The Gold Coast isn't all theme parks, glitzy shopping precincts and nightlight – peek behind the gold and you will find lush Gondwana Rainforests that provide a fascinating link with the evolution of Australia.

My husband Matt, eight-year-old twins Lincoln and Reuben and five-year-old Eva and I have just completed the adventurous drive up the mountain to the O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat.

The road to the resort laces tightly around bends and weaves past ancient, gnarly trees and persistent strangler figs. We feel as though we've arrived into a lost world and we can't wait to explore the National Park.

#### PERFECT WILDERNESS

“Up to 130 different birds call the rainforest home – including the rare Albert's lyrebird – and in the wider area there are 440 species,” our guide explains.

“Look at this stinging tree. These are common up here.” The large, dark green leaves look innocent but we can see tiny hairs glistening in the sunlight. We >>

Main image: Moran Falls in Lamington National Park

**Images right (from top to bottom):** A mountain villa at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat; the Birds of Prey Show at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat; hiking along The Stinson trail in Lamington National Park

learn how stinging trees appear in areas of regrowth to provide protection.

At scenic lookouts we take deep breaths of cool, clear mountain air and gaze at hazy views of the valley. The picture postcard scenes of the wilderness are almost too perfect to be believed.

We learn how the O'Reilly family moved from Ireland to the Blue Mountains before settling in the largely unexplored McPherson Ranges in Southern Queensland in 1911 to begin dairy farming. The tracks and farmland were cleared painstakingly by hand.

Four years later, the area was declared a National Park, isolating the family from the outside world. The pioneers of ecotourism began hosting guests from 1915 – back then it took two days via car, train and horseback to get here. It makes our winding drive feel a bit less adventurous.

### WILDLIFE OASIS

Next morning, after a breakfast that involves a fresh block of honeycomb on the buffet table (which the kids think is the best thing they've ever tasted), we sit eagerly awaiting our Wildlife Encounter tour.

Mark, our guide, introduces us to a magpie that shows off its problem solving skills by picking up litter and popping it into the bin. We learn that Australian magpies were only called magpies as they were black and white like magpies around the world.

Next, we meet a sooty owl and learn that not all owls hoot...

"Our magpies aren't really magpies, and our owls don't hoot!" Mark laughs.

"What's a marsupial?" he asks the audience. A few people shout that they are animals that carry their young in a pouch.

Apparently, that isn't the case. Marsupials are animals that are born while still an undeveloped foetus and complete their development after they are born.

Mark returns for the Birds of Prey Show later, where we see a barking owl doing a dramatic mid-air catch of food, a black kite with its distinctive V-shaped tail and, the highlight of the show, an enormous wedge tailed eagle named Stella who spreads her wings and soars over our heads.

### MAGICAL GLOW WORMS

As the sun goes down, the kids get more excited. Darkness means it's time for the Glow Worm Tour.

We meet our group and jump aboard a four-wheel drive bus to travel the short distance to the start of the forest walk. As we tramp single file by torch light into the forest, we observe the glimmering eyes of a sugar glider overhead.

As we arrive at the creek bed, we sit on benches and switch off our lights. Our eyes quickly adjust, revealing what looks like a blanket of stars.

Lincoln and Reuben snuggle up to me to keep warm and squeeze my hands in excitement. As we marvel at the view, our tour guide Rob talks us through the life



“As the sun goes down, the kids get more excited. Darkness means it's time for the Glow Worm Tour”

cycle of a glow worm and how they use their lights and their sticky silk threads to trap their prey. Technically, they are not worms at all – the glow worms are the larvae of a small fly.

The kids are in fits laughing at Rob's wonderful descriptions of what life is like for glow worms. "When a mosquito flies in to their sticky trap, it is carnage!"

The only time glow worms glow, we learn, is at the larvae stage – it is also the only time they eat as when they emerge as adult flies, they don't have working mouth parts and they need the energy gained during their time as larvae to mate and lay eggs during their two or three-day lifespan.

"Female glow worms have about around 130 babies but only 20-30 survive. They live close to one another and they eat their neighbours which means they could eat their brothers and sisters!"

"Mum, I want to run this tour when I grow up," Lincoln whispers to me. I warn Rob later that his job might be in jeopardy in 10 years' time. >>>

**Top:** A family on the beach with the Gold Coast skyline behind; and **(left)** views of the valley and waterfalls on O'Reilly's four-wheel drive tour



## USEFUL CONTACTS

If you plan to explore the bright lights of the Gold Coast, make sure you check out these must-visit attractions...

### O'REILLY'S RAINFOREST RETREAT

Accommodation as well as experiences are on offer, including guided walks and fun animal shows.

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

### TROPICAL FRUIT WORLD

Get to see, taste and learn about tropical fruit from around the world.

[www.tropicalfruitworld.com.au](http://www.tropicalfruitworld.com.au)

### CURRUMBIN WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Enjoy a close encounter with Australia's native animals at this popular tourist attraction.

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

### SUPERBEE HONEYWORLD

The home of live bee shows and a large range of honey and bee hive products.

[www.superbee.com.au](http://www.superbee.com.au)

After our late night, we spend the next day pottering around the resort and exploring the tree top walk. All too soon it is time to descend the mountain to leave behind the postcard scenery and the cooler temperatures.

## SURFERS PARADISE

As we make our way through the busy Gold Coast traffic, we feel a little shell shocked after the serenity of the last two days. We peel off our jumpers and let the Gold Coast's warmth soak into our skin.

We check into the Vibe Hotel in the heart of Surfers Paradise and have just enough time to be wowed at the spectacular river views before walking into the city to explore on our way to dinner.

Surfers is an entertainment playground, with bustling boutiques and vibrant bars, not to mention its golden strip of sand backed by shimmering high rise towers.

We head to the neon lights of the Hard Rock Café for dinner, where we spend most of our meal trying to explain to the kids who the famous rock stars are whose jackets and signed guitars deck the walls around our booth.

We spend the rest of the evening on our hotel balcony, enjoying the twinkling lights of Surfers Paradise reflecting in the water.

Next morning, we take a short drive across the state line into New South Wales to Tropical Fruit World.

We join the fruit tasting presentation and learn that there are more than 1000 different types of banana in the world. I am surprised to hear the world's most eaten fruit isn't apple or banana – it is mango.

**Images above (clockwise from left):** The golden sands and clear blue ocean of the Gold Coast; fruit tasting at Tropical Fruit World; a beekeeper at Superbee Honeyworld

During the tasting, we try fruits including papaya, carambola (star fruit), babaco (champagne fruit) and custard apple (which is like a soft, gooey cooked pear).

Next, we hop onboard a tractor tour around the fields. We pass rows and rows of manicured trees growing fruit of all shapes, sizes and colours. We pause to taste bananas and crack open macadamia nuts with large, levered nut crackers.

In-between visiting farm animals, a boat ride where we are followed by a family of ducks all the way, a miniature train ride and a great playground with a flying fox, our day is done.

We end in the café where we eat delicious ice cream blended with our favourite fruits.

## A HIVE OF ACTIVITY

The first stop the next morning is Superbee Honeyworld at Currumbin, where our enthusiastic tour guide, Adam, leads us from a shop that sells all kinds of honey and bee-related products into a room with bee hives backing onto clear glass.

After jokes about how girl bees do all the work, we learn that worker bees only live for six to eight weeks.

We find out that male bees don't have stings, and Adam tells us: "They don't do any work – they eat all day long and their only job is making more babies.

There is only one queen per hive. She is a normal female bee fed exclusively on royal jelly and it is this diet that creates a queen. Unlike worker bees, she can live up to five years and can lay up to 2,000 eggs in one day. Adam's love for bees is infectious, and he is a natural at presenting to small kids.

We leave with three excited children who think bees are "totally amazing!" and honey is the "best food ever!" It is a testament to Adam's engaging tour.

It's still only late morning, so we cross the road to Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary and bump straight into Blinky Bill, a famous Aussie children's book character.

Our five-year-old daughter Eva has no fear of people dressed in six-foot koala costumes, so she wraps her arms around him. We hop onboard the train to the other side of the park and begin exploring.

**Above:** Feeding the lorikeets at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary; and (above left) up-close with the koalas

“ We handfeed kangaroos, watch koalas munching eucalyptus leaves and feed the lorikeets ”

We handfeed kangaroos, watch koalas lazily munching eucalyptus leaves, stop for the free bird show – where we meet some of Australia's most beautiful birds – and feed the lorikeets.

In the Lost Valley we are taken on a journey through the ancient supercontinent, Gondwana, where we learn about the planet's evolution. We see some of the animals that lived together on this giant landmass, such as Momo the red panda (snoozing in a tree), and Frank the capybara – the world's largest rodent.

## SURF BEACHES

As we check out of our hotel next morning, we are sad it is our last day but excited to be spending it exploring.

With our beach gear packed and our sunglasses on, we decide to take a scenic drive south past Burleigh Beach, taking in the views of dramatic pine trees that fringe the coast.

We park up at Coolangatta, or 'Cooly' as it is known by the locals. The dazzling white sand and crashing ocean make a stunning destination for our picnic breakfast as we gaze out over Rainbow Bay.

We surf some waves on our body boards before getting back in the car wrapped in towels.

The Gold Coast's surf beaches are breath-taking, but with little kids we prefer calmer water, so we head to the mouth of Currumbin Creek.

On one side you have the option of crashing waves, but on the other is the calmest water – perfect for paddle boarding and floating on a lilo. We spend the afternoon lazing around, building sandcastles.

As the sunshine fades, we drive a little way inland and explore Currumbin Rock Pools. The kids think it is magical as they clamber over rocks and wade through the running stream.

Our final stop before the day ends is Tallebudgera Creek. Similar to Currumbin Creek, the mouth of the creek offers soft, golden sand and calm water. The beach is deserted, so we play red rover as the lifeguard laughs at our attempts to outrun the kids.

"This has been the best holiday, EVER!" yawns Eva as we strap her into her car seat. She twirls her salty hair with her sandy fingers sleepily.

"When can we come back?" she manages to whisper before her eyes close and she drifts off to dream of her Gold Coast adventures. 🇺🇸 >>>




# Need to know... **GOLD COAST**

## GETTING THERE


 Prices start from £690 return in August 2018 with Qatar Airways ([www.qatarairways.com](http://www.qatarairways.com)) involving two stops. Singapore Airlines ([www.singaporeair.com](http://www.singaporeair.com)) flies London to Gold Coast via Singapore with prices from £1,070 return in December 2018. British Airways offers a two-stop journey via Singapore and Sydney/Melbourne from £935 in December 2018. Alternatively, fly into Brisbane and get a Connexions transfer ([www.con-x-ion.com](http://www.con-x-ion.com)) from A\$41 (£22) per person each way.

## GETTING AROUND


 A Go Card allows visitors to travel on all Translink ([translink.com.au/gold-coast](http://translink.com.au/gold-coast))

bus, train, ferry and tram services. The Mountain Coach Company ([mountaincoach.com.au](http://mountaincoach.com.au)) offers transfers to O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat.

## CLIMATE

 The Gold Coast averages 245 days of sunshine a year. During summer, temperatures get up to 28 degrees. Winter is sunny and dry, but be prepared for cooler temperatures and wetter weather in the hinterland.

## FURTHER INFO

 For more information visit [www.destinationgoldcoast.com](http://www.destinationgoldcoast.com).



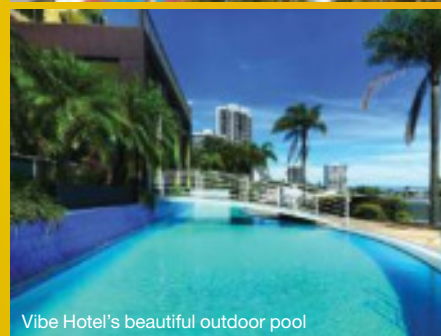
Tuck into a burger at Hard Rock Cafe



The Tail Spin ride at Dreamworld



A luxurious Mountain Villa suite at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat



Vibe Hotel's beautiful outdoor pool

25°C 25°C 24°C 22°C 19°C 17°C 15°C 16°C 18°C 21°C 23°C 25°C

JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUNE JULY AUG SEPT OCT NOV DEC

## globetrotter

**SLEEP** Vibe Hotel Gold Coast ([vibehotels.com](http://vibehotels.com)) occupies a waterfront position and is close to all the entertainment, shops and attractions. Its ultra-smart rooms have balconies and you can cool off in the beautiful outdoor pool. Rooms start from A\$109 (£61).

**EAT** Enjoy dinner at the Hard Rock Café ([www.hardrock.com](http://www.hardrock.com)). Try a burger from the 2018 World Burger Tour. The juicy Tennessee BBQ Burger and the Whiskey Bacon Burger for A\$22 (£12) are delicious washed down with a Rockin' Fresh Rita for A\$25 (£14).

**DO** If you love fast-paced rides, visit one of the Gold Coast's famous theme parks ([www.themeparks.com.au](http://www.themeparks.com.au)). A day pass costs A\$79 (£44).

## family

**SLEEP** The O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat ([oreillys.com.au](http://oreillys.com.au)) offers hotel-style rooms starting from A\$149 (£83) and one-bedroom self-contained villas starting from A\$280 (£156) per night. Villas with spas on the deck overlooking the rainforest are also available, and highly recommended!

**EAT** Eat in The Dining Room at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat ([oreillys.com.au](http://oreillys.com.au)). Try the delicious hand-stretched pizzas from A\$28 (£15) or treat yourself to the eye fillet for A\$40 (£22) served with sweet potato mash. Wash it down with a bottle of something from the Canungra Valley Vineyard.

**DO** Fit in as many activities as you can at O'Reilly's ([oreillys.com.au](http://oreillys.com.au)). In addition to the activities listed on page 21, take a Segway tour or ride the flying fox.

## indulgence

**SLEEP** Stay at Peppers Broadbeach ([www.peppers.com.au](http://www.peppers.com.au)), a family-friendly, luxury hotel in a prime position. Stylish suites come with all of the facilities you need plus there's an outdoor heated pool, private cinema and Zen garden perfect for that morning meditation session. One-bedroom suites start from A\$300 (£168) a night.

**EAT** Four Winds Restaurant 360° ([www.fourwindsrestaurant.com.au](http://www.fourwindsrestaurant.com.au)), Queensland's only revolving restaurant, offers high tea with unrivalled Gold Coast views. Prices start at A\$35 (£19) per person.

**DO** Sneak off for some alone time in the SpaQ ([www.qthotelsandresorts.com](http://www.qthotelsandresorts.com)) for an organic coco cream wrap for A\$205 (£114) or, if you are short on time, a 'Fast Eddy' facial for A\$80 (£44).