

WALKING

ON  
SUNSHINE

WITH ITS GOLDEN BEACHES, LUSH  
NATIONAL PARKS AND FAMILY ATTRACTIONS,  
QUEENSLAND'S SUNSHINE COAST HAS  
SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE...

WORDS: Karen Bleakley

“

want to eat ALL THE FOOD,” squeals Lincoln, one of our eight-year-old twins as we amble through the crowds at the Eumundi Markets.

“Did you see the size of those cakes?” exclaims Reuben, grabbing his brother’s arm and pointing in excitement.

These world-famous artisan markets take place twice a week, selling handcrafted goods, art and collectables. For us, the highlight is the mouth-watering food. We begin by devouring trays of satay chicken drenched in rich peanut sauce, >>

Main image: This sunny region boasts plenty of family-friendly beaches



trying not to dribble juice down our chins as we sit people-watching in the sun.

Next, we spend half an hour making the important decision about which flavour of doughnuts to order. We end up with Nutella and salted caramel. They are the best sugary treats we've tasted and I can see the kids agree as our five-year-old daughter, Eva, looks up with a chocolate-smeared grin.

### GINGER GEM

The Sunshine Coast offers everything you could want from a holiday destination. With lush national parks, breath-taking countryside vistas, pristine beaches, shimmering lakes and tranquil waterways, there are ample opportunities to explore the great outdoors.

The locally produced food and drink, independent boutiques, bustling markets, quaint villages and family attractions mean it has something for everyone.

A short drive takes us to The Ginger Factory in the heritage town of Yandina. The attraction mixes educational tours with tropical gardens and some gentle rides for the kids.

We begin by hopping aboard the Ginger Train – a 116 year-old train that was used in the Moreton Sugar Mill – for a relaxing ride around nine hectares of sub-tropical gardens.

Next, we join the Overboard Boat Ride, which takes us on a loop around the world where we spot the gingerbread man hidden amongst over 200 animated puppets. The kids love it so much we go around twice.

We can't resist stopping in the café to sample some ginger-infused specialties. The Thai chilli and ginger chicken salad is divine, washed down with an icy-cold ginger beer.

With our bellies bursting, we join the bee tour with bee keeper, Vicki. "Native Australian bees are sting-less, and they are tiny. Most people don't even



Top left: Colourful stall at Eumundi Markets; and (above) a street performer entertains shoppers

“We begin by hopping aboard the Ginger Train – a train used in the Moreton Sugar Mill”



Above (left and right): A ride on the Ginger Train offers a fun way to explore the Ginger Factory's surroundings



Clockwise from above left: Al fresco dining at Alex Heads Surf Club; Sunshine Castle in Bli Bli; waterslide fun at BreakFree Alexandra Beach resort; a seal show at Sea Life Sunshine Coast

realise that they are bees when they see them,” she explains. Vicki highlights how important bees are to the world: “If we didn't have bees, we wouldn't have chocolate or coffee!”

The idea of a life without chocolate gives our kids a new appreciation for bees.

As we leave via the shop we can't resist buying a basket of ginger and honey-related produce.

### TO THE CASTLE

Our final stop of the day is at Sunshine Castle. This elaborate Norman castle with medieval additions was built in 1972 by a Scottish couple as a way to display a doll collection. Over time, it has changed owners and shifted focus to being a medieval museum.

Our kids are excited to do the self-guided treasure hunt. We begin in the courtyard where they try on medieval helmets and lock one another in the stocks.

We venture into the great hall where we imagine grand feasts, then head up the spiral stairs to enjoy the views from the 24-metre look-out tower, collecting clues as we go.

Worn out, we arrive at the BreakFree Alexandra Beach resort where we drop our bags in our apartment and walk across the road to the Alexandra Headlands Surf Lifesaving Club for a hearty dinner.

“You can always rely on a surf club to give you a good feed,” a dad on the table next to us tells us.

Next morning, we awake to glorious sunshine on our balcony inviting us to come out to play. The kids

are already in their swimwear begging to go in the resort's pools that run the length of the complex.

We let them enjoy a couple of hours in the pools and on the water slides as we sit in the sun enjoying the peace and quiet.

As the morning drifts on, we decide to head across to the beach at Alexandra Headland for a run around the sand.

Known locally as ‘Alex’, this laid-back little town hugs the curve of the beach and sits snugly in the centre of the Sunshine Strip between Maroochydore and Mooloolaba.

### MARINE WONDERERS

Sea Life Sunshine Coast is the perfect hangout for our wildlife-mad kids after a morning of water play.

“Roll up your sleeves and explore the touch pool,” a staff member suggests as we arrive. We get up close with sea cucumbers, sea urchins and star fish in the tank.

At Seal Island, we watch the seal show and are introduced to Sly, Groucho and Nelson as they demonstrate their strength and agility.

“Can I get a volunteer to come and help me with the show?” asks the keeper. Our kids fling their hands in the air along with the rest of the audience.

Amazingly, Lincoln is chosen. He disappears backstage to get ready and reappears a few minutes later to join the show. He is asked to stroke the seal's fur and describe how it feels to the audience.

Afterwards, he comes back to his seat grinning from ear to ear.

After the show we explore the themed displays where we meet lionfish, octopus, seahorses and the colourful characters from *Finding Dory* in exhibits designed to walk us through the marine life in Australia's reefs, billabongs and freshwater streams.

Jellyfish Kingdom, with its cylindrical tanks filled with ghostlike neon jellyfish has us mesmerised.

The attraction's biggest highlight is the Ocean Tunnel. This 80-metre glass tunnel lets you walk beneath sharks, rays and sawfish.

We end the day feeling inspired but exhausted after another day of non-stop fun.

### HORSE RIDING

While my husband Matt takes our youngest to explore the banks of the lake, Lincoln, Reuben and I pull up at Noosa Horse Riding for our one-hour beginner trek.

We're welcomed by Dave who matches us to our horses. We mount and set off in a line towards Lake Weyba at a gentle walk. It's a bright and sunny



winter's day and it feels like we are riding into the wilderness.

As we emerge through the bush onto the banks of Lake Weyba, we are amazed at the beauty of the clear salt water lake. Dave explains that they are the only tour operator running trips here and they mostly have the lake to themselves other than the odd kite surfer or canoeist.

"Noosa is just over there," Dave points past the greenery.

I hadn't realised we were so close to the boutiques of Noosa's famous Hastings Street. I suspect most people visiting Noosa don't know this postcard perfect lake is so close either, otherwise it wouldn't be this serene.

Our horses plod into the shallow water. It's so relaxing – the sun, the slow pace, the silence. As we turn to walk out onto the bank again, a shovelhead shark splashes out of the water a few metres away. Lincoln can't take his eyes off the water after that – eager to see any more marine life through the crystal water.

We're sad when the time comes to turn around and retrace our steps under the shady trees and go back through the lake to the stables. After a few days of busy activities, this has recharged us.

## HINTERLAND ADVENTURES

After we've settled in to our self-catering cabin at the leafy Lilyponds Holiday Park at Mapleton, we set off to explore the adjacent park beyond the large lily pond where there is a zip line and other fun playground toys.

It's cooler in the hinterland, so the kids pull up their hoodies. As the sun goes down and we start to feel the chill, we lure them away with promises of pizza from the local Italian.

Next morning, our first stop is the village of Montville. We explore the quaint boutiques and stop for coffee at Mayfield Patisseries and Chocolates so we can admire the panoramic view across the valley from the terrace.

A short drive takes us to Maleny Botanic Gardens and Birdworld. Set in 18 hectares, it's hard to imagine



**Above (top to bottom):** Fun learning for kids in the Discovery Centre at the Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve; Reuben meets some tropical birds at Birdworld; horse riding through Lake Weyba

waves us over to meet the colourful birds lined on perches. "Hold out your arms," she tells the kids.

A few minutes later our excited kids have lots of tropical birds lining their outstretched arms and standing on their heads.

It's time for the aviary tour. "Make sure you remove any earrings before you go in," the staff member warns us before we enter. "Macaws love sparkly things!"

The aviaries house over 600 birds through three separate enclosures. From the tiny finches to the cheeky small and large parrots, the colourful birds are a joy to watch.

The kids love meeting the little characters that hop around the floor pecking at their shoelaces.

Time is ticking on, so we jump back in the car to go to Maleny Dairies. This family owned business produces a range of creamy, delicious dairy products from their herds of Guernsey cows.

The cows are milked twice daily and their milk is processed and bottled or made into creamy yoghurts, deliciously thick cream, custard and flavoured milks. All of the products are processed on site and it is fascinating to see this little dairy running as a self-sustaining operation where they make their own bottles and lids too.



Our guide leads us behind a gate to meet one of the farm's cows: "Who wants to try some milk straight from the cow?"

We hold our cupped hands beneath the udder so we can taste fresh, warm milk.

The tour culminates in the part we are looking forward to the most: the tasting. We gather around a table and sample cups of all of the products made by the dairy. The tasting seals the deal – we head to the shop and buy some of everything.

"If you enjoyed this, then you should stop by Maleny Cheese next," another customer on the tour tells us.

We jump in the car and head the short distance to the Maleny Cheese Café. Matt orders a cheese platter to share and more cheese is added to our already-bursting cool bag.

## BACK TO NATURE

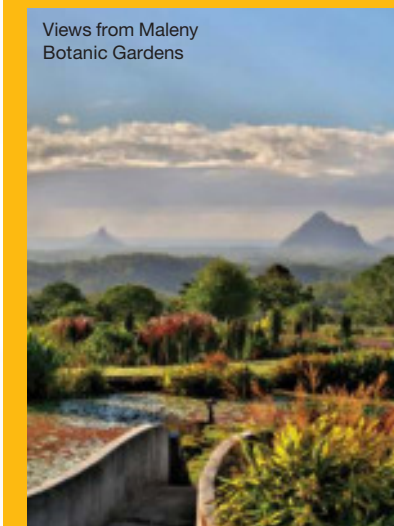
It is mid-afternoon already and we are starting to flag but we have one more stop – the Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve.

We begin by visiting the new Discovery Centre. This is the perfect place for little scientists and wildlife enthusiasts to learn about life in the rainforest. With microscopes, creepy crawly displays, and instruments

# 8 TOP FAMILY EXPERIENCES

## 1 GO HORSE RIDING

Noosa Horse Riding ([www.noosahorseriding.com.au](http://www.noosahorseriding.com.au)) offers one-hour trail rides for A\$80 (£44) at Lake Weyba, where you can enjoy the wildlife and serenity of this unspoilt spot.



Views from Maleny Botanic Gardens

## 2 HAVE A PICNIC

Maleny Botanic Gardens and Birdworld ([www.malenybotanicgardens.com.au](http://www.malenybotanicgardens.com.au)) is a lovely place for a picnic.

## 3 TOUR A DAIRY FARM

Maleny Dairies ([malenydairies.com](http://malenydairies.com)) offer a fascinating behind-the-scenes tour of a family-run dairy farm. Take a cool bag so you can stock up in the shop afterwards.

## 4 VISIT THE MARKETS

The Eumundi Markets ([www.eumundimarkets.com.au](http://www.eumundimarkets.com.au)) take place every Wednesday and Saturday mornings. Go hungry.

## 5 GO ON A TREASURE HUNT

The Sunshine Castle ([sunshinecastle.com](http://sunshinecastle.com)) treasure hunt is a fun way to learn about life in a medieval castle.

## 6 TAKE A SCENIC WALK

The Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve Discovery Centre ([www.mary-cairncross.com.au](http://www.mary-cairncross.com.au)) is an amazing learning resource with plenty of walking tracks.



A gingerbread man at The Ginger Factory

## 7 DISCOVER MARINE LIFE

Sea Life Sunshine Coast ([www.underwaterworld.com.au](http://www.underwaterworld.com.au)) offers plenty of marine fun for all the family. .

## 8 GO CRAZY FOR GINGER

The shop, gardens and playground at The Ginger Factory ([www.gingerfactory.com.au](http://www.gingerfactory.com.au)) are free to visit. Buy tickets for tours and rides separately.

**Top left:** Exploring the quaint village of Montville; and (above) learning about dairy farming at Maleny Dairies

so you can recreate the sounds of the rainforest – our three kids are off in their own little world. We only leave when the centre is getting ready to close. Outside, the towering trees in this 55-hectare sub-tropical rainforest feel ancient and mysterious.

We don't have time to explore the forest tracks as the light is fading, so we let the kids run wild and burn off their final bit of energy in the wooden outdoor playground that blends into the setting perfectly.

On this trip we've blended learning, relaxation, outdoor play and nature. We've peeked behind the tourist towns and discovered tranquil lakes, thick ancient rainforests, dramatic mountains and peaceful landscapes.

It has revealed a destination where kids can be kids, attractions are authentic and where we can enjoy some quality family time. And, more importantly, we've left with a car full of delicious local produce to enjoy when we get home. >>

“Our horses plod into the water. It's so relaxing – the sun, the slow pace, the silence...”

a more stunning setting with the surrounding rainforest and the views that roll on for as far as the eye can see.

We follow paths around the lakes, past pretty waterfalls and stone sculptures, while enjoying the fragrance of the colourful plants. After we've completed the loop of the gardens, a staff member





# Need to know... SUNSHINE COAST

Climb the inspiring Mount Coolum



The inviting resort pool at BreakFree Alexandra Beach



## GETTING THERE



The Sunshine Coast Airport connects Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Auckland.

If travelling from the UK, it is best to fly into Brisbane. Many airlines including Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines, Emirates and Etihad offer one-stop flights to Brisbane. Prices start from £600, with the cheapest time to travel being in Australia's autumn and winter.

## GETTING AROUND



The Sunshine Coast is an hour's drive from Brisbane, so you can hire a car, or book an airport shuttle through **Con-x-ion.com**. Bus services are provided by Sunbus ([www.sunbus.com.au](http://www.sunbus.com.au)) and Glasshouse Country Coaches ([www.glasshousecoaches.com.au](http://www.glasshousecoaches.com.au)).

## CLIMATE



Temperatures are comfortable year-round,

although it does get cooler in the hinterland. Average beach temperatures range from 20 degrees Celsius in July to 28 degrees Celsius in January. Being a lush, green location, you can expect plenty of downpours in the hinterland throughout the year.

## FURTHER INFO



For more information about what there is to see and do on the Sunshine Coast visit [www.visitsunshinecoast.com](http://www.visitsunshinecoast.com).



Australia Zoo's Terri Irwin leading the Crocodile Show

24°C	24°C	23°C	21°C	18°C	15°C	15°C	15°C	18°C	20°C	21°C	23°C
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC

## globetrotter

**SLEEP:** Explore the hinterland while staying in a comfortable cabin at Lilyponds Holiday Park, Mapleton ([lilyponds.com.au](http://lilyponds.com.au)). Cabins start from A\$120 (£66) for two people. Enjoy a stroll around the pretty lilypond and, if you are visiting with kids, be sure to visit the adjacent park.

**EAT:** Enjoy the ambiance in Bella Vista – the Italian restaurant around the corner from Lilyponds Holiday Park. Be sure to sample their gelato and tiramisu.

**DO:** Climb the awe-inspiring Mount Coolum. The popular hike up the 208 metre, 24 million-year-old volcanic dome is best tackled early morning or late afternoon to avoid the heat and to make the most of the 360-degree views.

## family

**SLEEP:** BreakFree Alexandra Beach ([www.mantrahotels.com/breakfree-alexandra-beach](http://www.mantrahotels.com/breakfree-alexandra-beach)) is across the road from the beach and offers a range of self-catering options, from studios to three-bedroom penthouses. The kids will love the sprawling resort pools, water slides and playground so much they may not want to leave the complex!

**EAT:** Cross the road to the Alexandra Headland Surf Lifesaving Club where the kids can get a Nipper's meal, such as cheese burger and chips with ice cream and an activity pack for A\$13 (£7).

**DO:** Get your photos taken with a seal after the seal show at Sea Life Sunshine Coast ([www.underwaterworld.com.au](http://www.underwaterworld.com.au)) as a perfect memento of your day.

## indulgence

**SLEEP:** Stay in a luxury treehouse at Secrets on the Lake ([www.secretsonthelake.com.au](http://www.secretsonthelake.com.au)), from A\$355 (£196) per couple. These opulent retreats offer panoramic views of the mountains, rainforest and lake.

**EAT:** Be spoilt for choice at Mayfield Patisserie and Chocolates Café at Montville. The elegant pastries and handcrafted chocolates taste even better when enjoyed from the balcony overlooking the valley.

**DO:** If time is at a premium, take a full guided day tour of Queensland's most popular family attraction – Australia Zoo ([www.australiazoo.com.au](http://www.australiazoo.com.au)). A staff member will take you to all the best places. Price: A\$400 (£221) for a group.