



The region from the air.



Platform 9 Dessert.

Making 'the Switch'

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **CHRISTINE RETSCHLAG**

Twenty-seven years ago, travel writer Christine Retschlag went to high school in the old mining and railway working class town of Ipswich, 30 minutes west of Brisbane. She returns to find 'the Switch', as locals love to call it, on the brink of a tourism revolution with first-class products on offer. Boasting a population of 180,000 within 1000sq.km, that figure is projected to grow to 420,000 by 2031. Here are eight ace reasons you should put Ipswich and surrounds on your next holiday itinerary.

1 Sleep On It

One of the newest tourism offerings comes in the shape of the Metro Hotel Ipswich International. Perched next to one of the city's 500 parks and the Ipswich Civic Centre, and within walking distance of all the action, this bright and breezy establishment has 97 guest rooms as well as seven conference areas catering for up to 400 guests.

[@] www.metrohotels.com.au



Pterodactyl Helicopters.

2 Feast Your Eyes

Platform 9, the restaurant within the Metro Hotel Ipswich International, is so good it deserves its own special mention. Former Savoy London Chef Guy Farrow has brought more than a touch of class to the menu here. And deliciously, he uses local produce in his cooking. Try the Darling Downs eye fillet with onion puree, Paris mash, wild mushrooms, water chestnut and snails and the orange jelly with vodka cream, strawberries and twenty-year-old balsamic vinegar.

[@] www.metrohotels.com.au

3 Fly Like a Bird

Join Captain Mike Jarvis on one of his Pterodactyl Helicopter tours, where you can soar above Ipswich and surrounds and enjoy a range of experiences including a country pub crawl by chopper. Those who appreciate a fruitier drop might like to try a helicopter wine tour. Nothing quite beats flying over the lush green countryside before landing on the doorstep of destinations such as Ironbark Ridge Winery, Normanby Wines, The Royal Hotel Harrisville and The Sundowner Saloon.

[@] www.pterodactylhelicopters.com.au

4 Float Like a Butterfly

For wings of a different kind, Graeme Day from Floating Images Hot Air Balloon Flights will transport you on a tranquil one-hour journey, 1800 feet above the ground. From a lofty perch, you'll flutter over the city of Ipswich, and its classic Queensland heritage buildings and homes. The journey offers spectacular views of Flinders Peak, Mt Walker, the



Four Hearts
Brewery.



Almost 'up and away'.

Great Dividing and McPherson ranges, Mount Coot-tha, D'Aguilar Range, Wivenhoe Dam, the Brisbane, Fassifern and Lockyer valleys and the Brisbane and Bremer rivers.

[@] www.floatingimages.com.au

5 Catch Up On New Brews

Former Ipswich boy Wade Curtis has returned home and combined his love of the city with his passion for beer in one of the hippest and hoppiest places in town at Four Hearts Brewery and Pump House. Set in the heritage-listed former technical trades institution, its beers are brewed on site and pay homage to the city with offerings such as the Ipswich Challenger and the Coal Miner's Stout on tap. Do try Indian Pale Ale ice cream and stout doughnuts.

[@] <https://www.facebook.com/fourheartsbrewing>

6 Peruse Smart Art

One of the most visited regional art galleries in Queensland, the Ipswich Art Gallery is housed in the old town hall. It's the first gallery in Australia to offer a dedicated children's gallery and it pays special attention to courting future art aficionados with an exciting program and exhibition for kids. It's also affordable, with normal entry free, and just \$3 per person when exhibitions are being staged, or \$10 for a family pass. Worthy of a mention: celebrity chef Jamie Oliver has a spot adjacent to the art gallery for his Ministry of Food, in which chefs teach patrons great cooking skills at a reasonable price.

[@] www.ipswichartgallery.qld.gov.au and [@] www.jamieoliver.com/jamies-ministry-of-food-australia/ipswich.php

7 Enjoy a History Lesson

Ipswich is Queensland's oldest provincial city, which makes it home to plenty of firsts. Queens Park was the first gazetted park in Queensland and St Paul's Church is the oldest Anglican Church in the state. There are many old building facades in the CBD – such as Rawlings, which dates back to 1898, and each May and September, the National Trust

of Australia arranges for three heritage homes to be opened to the public. This year also marks the 150th anniversary since Queensland's first train journey, linking Ipswich to Granchester in July 1865. Make sure you also check out The Workshops Rail Museum.

[@] www.nationaltrust.org.au and [@] www.theworkshops.qm.qld.gov.au

8 Roll Along the River

Ipswich was once considered for the site of Queensland's capital, but some say the Bremer River, which runs through its heart, was too narrow. These days, it is a picture perfect spot along which to amble with the River Heart Parklands river walk, snaking from Ellenborough Street in the west to Blackall Street in the east. This pleasant boardwalk journey tells the story of Ipswich, including its former bustling inland port, with tales of paddle steamers, barges, sail boats and market boats transporting lime, coal and merchant goods to and from Brisbane.

[@] www.ipswich.qld.gov.au •

The writer travelled as a guest of Metro Hotel Ipswich International.

[@] www.metrohotels.com.au



Normanby Wines.