



Brisbane is happening

The last time I was in Brisbane I remember going to a cattle sale, memorable for the fact that the sale was held on the 10th floor of one of the posh hotels and the cattle were taken up in the service lift. Well, life has changed for me and I no longer attend posh cattle sales, but I do still enjoy the travel.

I usually steer clear of cities, preferring the countryside, but the few days I spent in Brisbane recently were an extremely pleasant surprise.

The Mercure Hotel, our home while we were there, could not have been more conveniently located. It is only a short walk across the Victoria Bridge to the South Bank, a landmark real estate, dining, entertainment and business precinct on the Brisbane River. We strolled beside the gardens, under the fragrant frangipani and tropical coconut trees, stopping to admire the many mosaic artworks laid into the pavement. Had there been more time, we would have been lounging about on the man-made beach and swimming in the crystal-clear pool, or making use of the barbeque facilities on the quaint wee picnic island. As it was, it was extremely difficult to keep walking with the glorious smells of

delicious food wafting out from the many cafes and eating places. We did relent one night and stopped for dinner beside the Energex Arbor framed by a multitude of bougainvillea plants, and fully intended to return to take advantage of the dinner, cinema, and free parking for \$15 offer which was advertised on a sandwich board.

The far side of the South Bank ends in a boardwalk, an area many locals make use of for cycling, roller blading, running, walking, or just strolling and taking in the sights as we were. The adventurous can even take part in a night-time abseil down the cliff under the spotlight - unfortunately not operating while we were there.

It is not surprising that a leading international award has confirmed Brisbane's growing reputation as one of Australia's most desirable destinations. >



South Bank won top honours at the prestigious International Real Estate Federation awards earlier this year, taking out the 2004 FIABCI Prix d'Excellence in the Public Sector Category. The award recognises South Bank's world-class leisure, business and residential facilities, its superior architecture and construction and its role as a hub of arts, education, culture and entertainment in Brisbane.

Two of the highlights for me were the Maritime Museum and the Expo 88 Nepalese Peace Pagoda on the river, an amazing carved pagoda set in beautiful surroundings and flanked by two smaller pagodas, no less beautiful. It was these interruptions that kept us out late, allowing us little time to fully appreciate the many guest facilities of the Mercure Hotel.

Another short stroll from the hotel took us to the Roma Street Parkland. Part of the greater Brisbane plan, the Parkland is the first in a series of projects transforming the western edge of Brisbane's Central Business District. Officially opened in 2001, Roma Street Parkland is a popular area for both the people of Brisbane and for visitors to the city.

With sixteen hectares it can boast to be the world's largest urban subtropical garden. The stunning Parkland includes areas of rainforests, palm groves and open forests, gardens, boardwalks and even a lake. It is only when you walk across the Fern Gully Bridge to the Lookout which provides views over the Forest to the rest of the Parkland and the city skyline that you are reminded that you are still in the centre of a bustling metropolis.

To top off what is already a spectacular area, numerous artworks created by local artists are to be found scattered throughout the Parkland.

A walkway around the lake - full of the blooms of hundreds of water-lilies - winds its way around Pandanus Headland, featuring pandanus, banksia and other Australian coastal species, then on past the Paper Bark Forest. The wetlands and the celebration lawn are the focal point for many outdoor events and entertainment.

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Visitors to Roma Street Parkland are welcome to use the barbecues throughout the area which are available free of charge or, if that seems like too much work, the

Melange Café is very conveniently situated.

If strolling about city parks and soaking up the atmosphere of this bustling metropolis gets a bit much for you there are a number of things to do within an hour's drive of the centre of Brisbane.

Hot air ballooning - located just out of Brisbane in Ipswich - is an adventure for all to enjoy but my experiences up in the air will have to wait for another story. >





Rail fanatics should visit the Rail Museum, also in Ipswich. It is situated on the land of the Yuggera people who moved to the Deebing Creek Aboriginal Mission when it was established in 1892 and contains the oldest continually operating railway workshop in Australia, busy with heritage restoration. Also featured is the largest model railway of Queensland. This interactive model graphically depicts rail through city, outback, coastal plains and tropical rainforest. And, for those particularly interested in history, there is an excellent section on rare trades; shoemaking, tinsmithing, horse collar making, bookbinding, stonewalling, and coach building are just a few that kept us engrossed for some time. Children are especially well catered for with excellent school holiday programmes. To top it off, there is a very good café, nothing like those we remember at railway stations in days gone by.

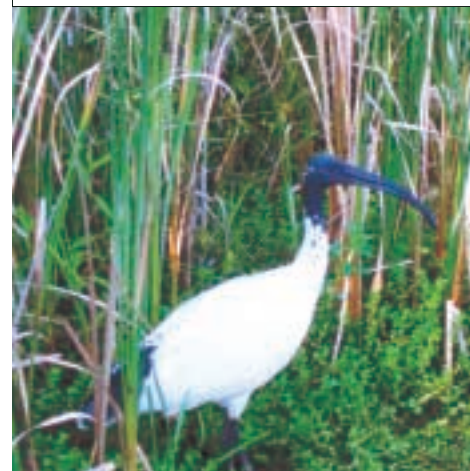
Back in Brisbane, those who enjoy their beer will not be able to resist a visit to XXXX brewery. I always believed the story that the name XXXX came about because Aussies could not spell. Now I know better. It is entirely due to the quality ranking - the more crosses the better the quality. We were shown around by a tour leader who obviously enjoyed the product, treating us to a running commentary on all aspects of the beer brewing and history.

*Clockwise from above left:
One of the beautifully restored trains at the
Rail Museum in Ipswich, green spaces in the city
the art of coffee, waterlilies are plentiful at Roma Street
Parklands, South Bank - a little sanctuary in the city,
boardwalk alongside the lake at Roma Street Parklands,
Ibis enjoy the tranquillity of the park in the central city.*

Apparently many old sayings came from breweries. "Mind your p's and q's" came from an instruction to barmaids to mind their pints and quarters. "Getting off scott free" was a reference to the Scott Tax for beer in the cities; in the country there was no tax, hence 'scott free'. And it is more than just a brewery: the XXXX Ale House which provides an insight into the 125 year history of this Australian icon also sports a unique bar and fabulous food.

So, no longer will I treat Brisbane as only a place to fly into on the way to less busy destinations. No, I am looking forward to spending more time in this - dare this country girl say it - wonderful city.

*For facts and more information on Brisbane
go to our website: www.sojourney.co.nz*



Our itinerary said something about a ‘funky town’ but the description, or maybe it was the name, brought back memories. I questioned everyone I came across. "Do you know of Boonah?" Blank stares were all I got in return.

So it was with some trepidation we ventured into Boonah and, had we not arranged to stay with old friends Skippy and Christine who live nearby, we may never had the pleasure of this...funky town.

First port of call was for coffee at Flavours Café, a quaint old building on one of the main streets where we had arranged to meet Julie, our host for the day. Then came a whirlwind tour of sights and activities which left us wanting more.

For those who are addicted to ‘smellies’, there are a couple of lavender farms to visit. Eungai Lavender Farm is a great place to potter around and have lunch; of interest, it is also a working cattle farm. Lavender is grown, too, at Kooroomba Winery, the largest vineyard in the area. You can enjoy contemporary Australian cuisine from their bistro - sitting beside the log fire in the winter or outside on the terrace on sunnier days - overlooking the vineyards and lavender fields. I’m told their wines are good too.

Had Skippy and Christine not insisted on hosting us, we would have been tempted to book in at Brook Cottage. A visit to this charming self-contained colonial cottage is like stepping back in time, the furnishings are delightfully appropriate. Fortunately the cottage boasts all the necessary mod cons so the long drop in the back yard has been banished.

For art and craft addicts, a large display of very high quality artwork by resident artisans can be viewed at the Art and Soul Gallery. Many of these exceptional artists find their work in demand throughout Australia.

It might have been a whirlwind visit but the area has definitely earned a place on my list of places to return to. As it is so accessible - only an hour from Brisbane, or an hour inland from Surfers Paradise - we were even tempted by the real estate in town.

In time, my memories did come back. I had passed through the town some ten years ago on the way to our annual cattle-mustering holiday on a friend’s station. Back then it was the fabulously rich black soils that implanted Boonah into my subconscious. Now, for the second time in my life, I have thought, "Yes, I could live here".

For facts and more information on Boonah go to our website: www.sojourney.co.nz



*Clockwise from above:
Flavours Café is another beautifully restored building, at nearby Kalbar, Wiss House has been restored and operates as a bed and breakfast, beautiful old buildings like the Commercial Hotel are well cared for, inside Kooroomba Winery, lavender fields, Art and Soul Gallery, Brook Cottage is self contained accommodation.*



Up up and away

Hot air ballooning is something that had been on my "To Do" list for some time. I had been looking forward to it until some bright spark said, "You're game, hot air ballooning is up there with bungy-jumping in adventure."

That's something you wouldn't catch me doing, not in a million years! This comment started me thinking, and it was with some trepidation that I dragged myself out of bed that morning. "5.30am start," Graeme, pilot and owner of Floating Images, had informed us. Yikes! I thought. I am not a great morning person, so it has to be something really worthwhile.

Graeme, although a bit of a character, quickly instilled us with confidence, and the momentary panic of bungy-jumping type thrills quickly disappeared. We were subjected to a thorough explanation of the process and the safety procedures before we set off. It was pleasing to know that the pilot has complete control of the up-and-down movements by controlling the heat in the balloon. This was why there was a huge burner positioned above our heads - and it was now obvious as to why Graeme had advised us to wear a hat! But I still felt a bit like a picnic lunch being packed up as we climbed into the lightweight wicker basket.

The lift-off was a non-event, typically I was talking too much to realise we had even moved off. >



It seemed for a while that we were suspended motionless in space with the earth moving below, the merest hint of a breeze on our faces the only sign that the balloon was changing direction and moving through the clear blue sky. As the air in the balloon cooled we dipped, to, it seemed, almost skim the treetops. For a while we hung motionless over the city, but then we gradually wafted higher and higher and floated out away from the noise and into the countryside. We drifted quietly along, experiencing little sensation of speed or height.

Once airborne, balloons do just float in the breeze, and it is true that the pilot doesn't know where the balloon will land - but that doesn't mean he can't control the landing! Graeme had a novel method of testing the wind direction, a quick spit over the side was all that was needed. He had his eye on a freshly cut hayfield in the distance, and that was his target.

Touchdown was almost the non-event that lift-off was. We were instructed to bend our knees, brace our backs against the padded basket, hang on tight to the straps

provided - AND DON'T LOOK BACKWARDS! If landings are sometimes a bit hairy, then this was not one of them - a gentle bump and we were down.

The chase crew, who all this time had been following along the thin ribbons of road that stretched out below us, were in regular radio contact with Graeme. It was their job to be near the landing site and get permission from the landowner to retrieve the balloon. The seemingly impossible task of packing the balloon back into its bag was completed fairly quickly and a champagne breakfast near the launch site was a fitting end to a fabulous morning.

And was the bright spark right about it being up there with bungy jumping? Not a bit. Exhilarating, exciting, spectacular it was - but not one bit scary. And at no stage were we hanging upside down!

For facts and more information on hot air ballooning go to our website: www.sojourney.co.nz





From left: Visitors are invited to feed the dolphins, quad tours are an option on the island, the "Desert" inland where you can go tobogganing.

Tangalooma

Tell people in the Bay of Islands that you are going to Tangalooma to see dolphins and they are likely to look at you as though you are mad. Yes, I know! It is like taking coals to Newcastle - travelling from the Bay of Islands to Moreton Island to watch dolphins feed - but our 75 minute cruise from Brisbane across Moreton Bay to the Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort was well worth while.

Bounded on three sides by Moreton Island National Park, the resort was previously a whaling station. At its peak operation, 120 seasonal staff were employed processing eleven whales a day. The whaling station closed in 1962 and one year later opened as a resort.

Tangalooma means 'a place where fish gather' so it was not surprising that the highlight of our visit was the opportunity to observe native wild life. Each evening inshore bottlenose dolphins gather beside the well-lit jetty and near the beach where they are hand-fed fresh fish by Dolphin Care staff and guests.

It seems extraordinary that these dolphins are totally wild. For many years they visited the water beneath the jetty to feed on the small fish attracted by the jetty lights. In 1992 a dolphin, later named Beauty, began to eat fish that were thrown to her. Over time other dolphins in her pod joined the nightly feeding and now between six and eight dolphins show up each night. They choose to come into the shallows to meet humans each evening and take a small amount fish from bare hands.

While the thrill of actually having a dolphin feed from your hand was difficult to resist, we chose to watch from the jetty. This provided us with a much better position to view the dolphins as they swam around at great speed,

twisting and turning, catching their own fish before the hand-fed fish were dished out. Five of them visited that night, staying so long that we actually left before they did. In the past six years only three nights have been recorded when no dolphins came in to feed. It is thought this was due to extreme weather conditions and very low tides, which meant the dolphins could not see the beach through the broken water.

Fortunately, the Tangalooma Dolphin Care Program has been developed to ensure that it does not harm them in any way, and to minimise disturbance to the dolphins' natural behaviour patterns. Tangalooma Resort co-operates with researchers from the University of Queensland and other universities to study wild dolphin behaviour and biology in Moreton Bay, including the dolphins which visit Tangalooma.

But dolphins are not the only wildlife here. Each morning, pelicans and cormorants are treated to fish hand-fed to them on the beach, and regular whale-watching cruises are on offer during the whale migration season between July and October.

If you should ever tire of wild-life, Tangalooma offers a wide range of activities such as tennis, snorkelling, fishing, and diving. You can take an escorted four wheel drive tour to visit highlights of the National Park such as Queensland's oldest lighthouse at Cape Moreton, the Ocean Beach and the 'Blue Lagoon' or the 'Desert' for the exhilarating sport of sand tobogganing. Now, that's another story...

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