

TLM

TRAVELLIFESTYLEMONTHLY

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Drift away

Flying high over the Ipswich region

A NIGHT IN

Escape the cold in style

SEASONAL SURVIVAL

How to beat the winter

CONTENTS

THE bitter cold of winter can leave you feeling trapped and alone as the cold makes outdoor activity less appealing and the need for heavy clothing weighs us down.

In our July edition, TLM is out to beat the winter blues with some great homewares to help you enjoy the perfect night in.

Relax in your plush robe, with the aroma of coffee wafting from your new coffee machine, as the home entertainment system kicks in.

A comfy lounge is the best place to snuggle up and watch your favourite DVD.

Or you can relax with a glass of wine as you light the candles and empty the bath salts into a steaming tub. It seems there is plenty to look forward to, if you're keen to make the most of the misty days.

Amanda Fitz-Gibbon delves into the psyche to discover just what makes winter so depressing. Read more about what you can do to overcome the winter blues in her feature article on page 14.

Heidi Davoren
Editor

QT
THE QUEENSLAND TIMES



Cover story



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Up, up and away



Rising high above the landscape in a beautiful balloon is one very good reason to get out of bed. Kate Gasteen discovers another use for hot air.

THE world is divided into two types of people – those who are morning people and those who aren't.

Come winter, a third category emerges – those who would be morning people if not for the dark and the cold.

But if ever there was an incentive to hop out of bed at 4.30am and head to a rendezvous at Limestone Park, the promise of a flight in a hot air balloon and a champagne breakfast is the perfect reason.

Any residual grogginess from the early start fades into obscurity when you meet with Graeme Day, the chief pilot with Floating Images.

He has the energetic step of someone used to a brisk start and the sense of humour typical of a person used to firing up his sleepy passengers and infecting them with his get up and go.

Day prides himself on giving his passengers a hands-on ballooning experience.

From helping to follow the

weather balloon that tracks the wind direction, to unloading the six tonne basket and unfurling the balloon canopy, everyone is encouraged to have a hand in setting up the balloon.

For anyone who is flighty about heights, the chance to see how the balloon is readied for take-off is reassuring. The equipment is fastidiously maintained and the preparation for the journey meticulous and professional.

All the while, Day keeps up a

banter that keeps passengers informed of safety but entertains and eases the nerves.

As he starts the burners and positions the fans to inflate the canopy, Day encourages the women to have a closer look.

"Ladies, if you didn't have a chance to blow-dry your hair this morning, here's your chance!"

Once the canopy is inflated, it's time to hop in.

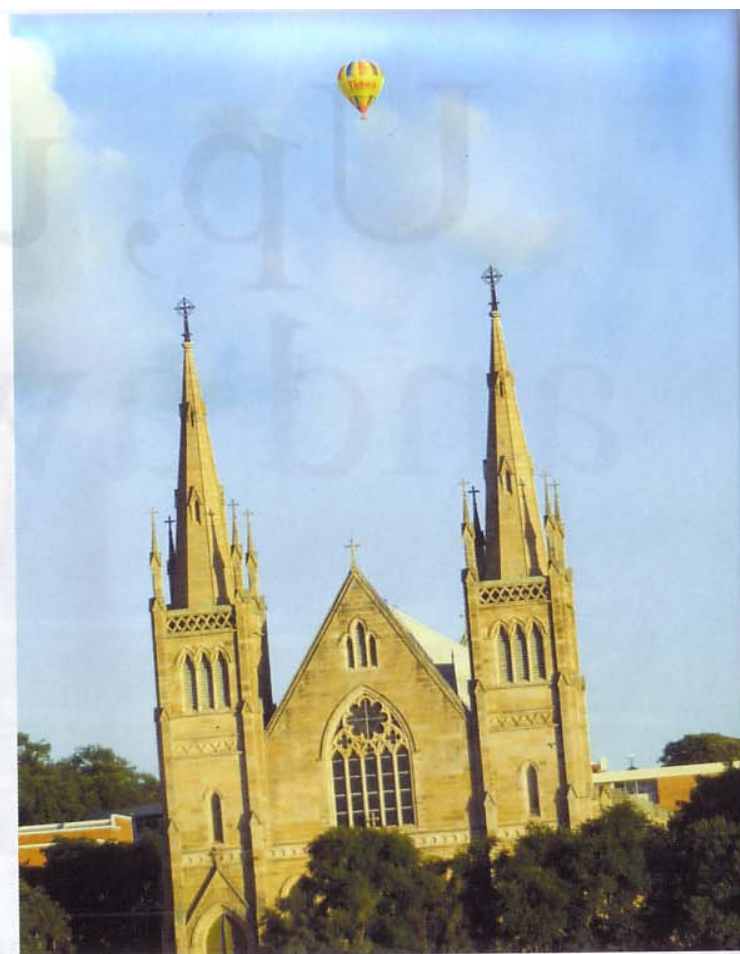
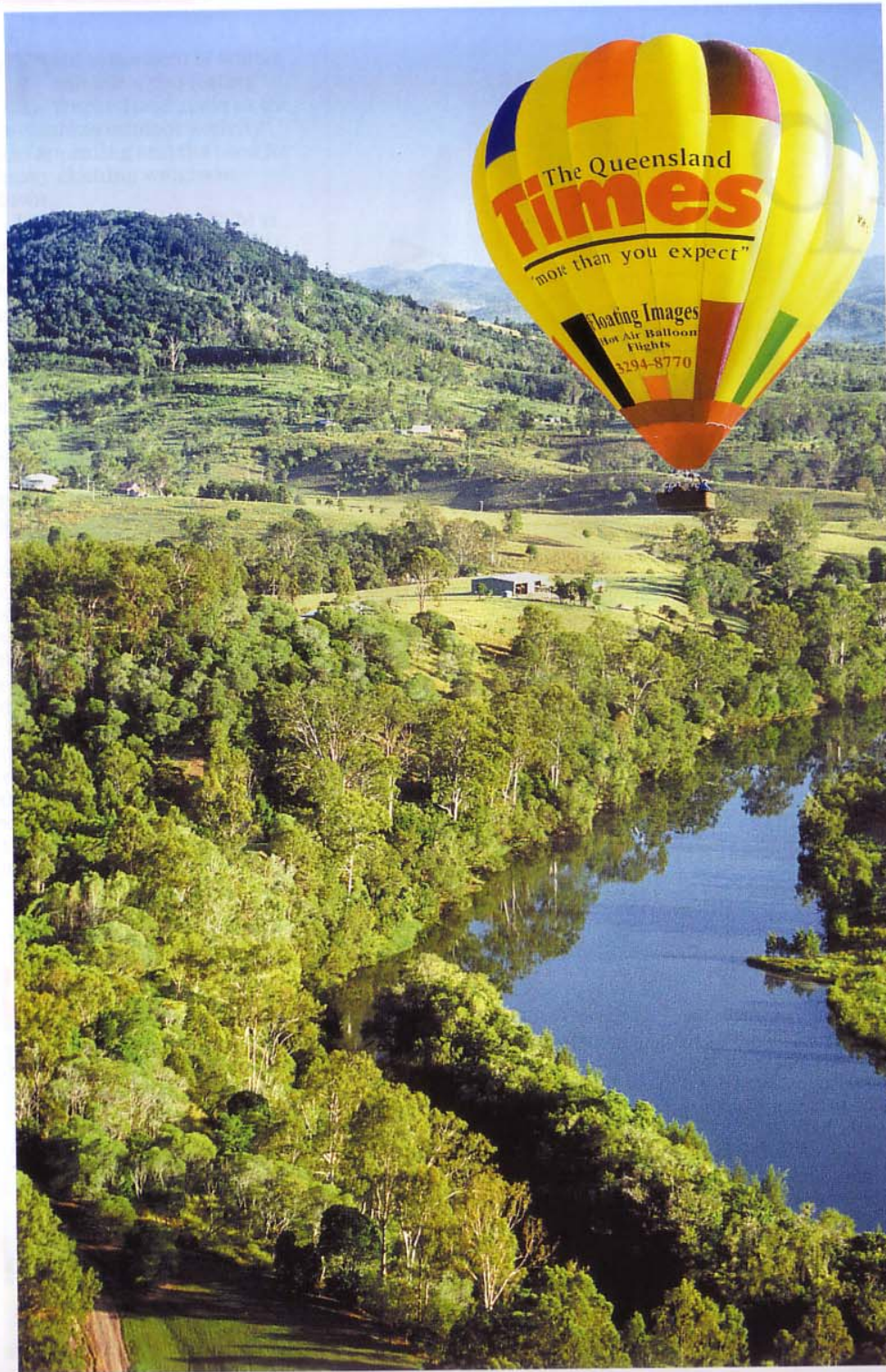
In fact it turns out that clambering into a hot air balloon is not the easiest thing to do but

there are plenty of offers of help from fellow passengers as you negotiate the toe holes.

Once in the basket, the chatter of fellow travellers becomes quiet and sporadic. The reality of taking to the skies in a giant wicker basket hits home.

Day checks and re-checks radio equipment and treats his charges to several blasts from the burners. "We'll just get things nice and warm."

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The Floating Images balloon takes to the skies over Ipswich (above) and the surrounding region. Photos: supplied

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And warm it is. The basket itself feels secure and sturdy and the heat from the burners thaws any pre-flight tension.

After an explanation and several practises of the landing position, the balloon gently takes off.

It is so smooth, the group of eight balloon flight virgins are taken by surprise.

The canopy steadily climbs with the sunrise over Limestone Park towards the city centre and Bremer River.

Morning walkers pause in their tracks to wave and bemused dogs follow the flight path before continuing on their way.

As the passengers acclimatise to flight, Day points out the features of the skyline.

Long shadows linger throughout the city centre while the stacks of the Swanbank Power Station bask in the pink glow of morning rays.

The perspective from the basket is unlike any expectations.

Despite the height at which the balloon travels, the view of Ipswich is very personal.



You can hear the rumble of the early commuter trains, see the first deliveries to city businesses.

As the balloon pulls towards the Riverlink development at North Ipswich, you get a rare appreciation for the changes Ipswich is in the midst of.

Development sites punctuate the city's floor plan while the clock tower and St Mary's stand as strong reminders of the region's proud heritage.

The balloon begins to gain momentum as the wind carries it past Pine Mountain.

The cluster of high-rise that is Brisbane contrasts with the mountains surrounding Lake Manchester and the glimpse of Wivenhoe Dam. In the distance, the Great Dividing Range dominates the horizon.

The yellow smear of air pollution is a blight on the otherwise perfect conditions.

All the while Day keeps an eagle eye out for other users of the early morning skyway.

He spies another balloonist on the horizon and listens carefully to the airways as a light aircraft makes its way towards

Archerfield.

The course is clear, and the passengers can safely enjoy the forbidden thrill of sticky beaking from on high.

It is surprising how many hobby racehorse trainers there are in the Ipswich area – backyard tracks litter the landscape as the balloon travels towards Fernvale and Esk.

The truth of the water crisis is brought home as the shadow of the basket and canopy glides over thirsty, cracked paddocks.

Lines of cattle walk purposely towards hay stacks while their calves playfully disrupt the order.

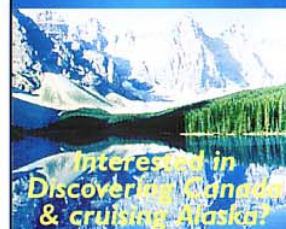
The scent of the air becomes clean and country, and as Day lowers the balloon to change course for Glamorganvale, the atmosphere drops in temperature.

For the first time, passengers feel the invigorating chill of morning on their cheeks.

Day begins to prepare for landing and

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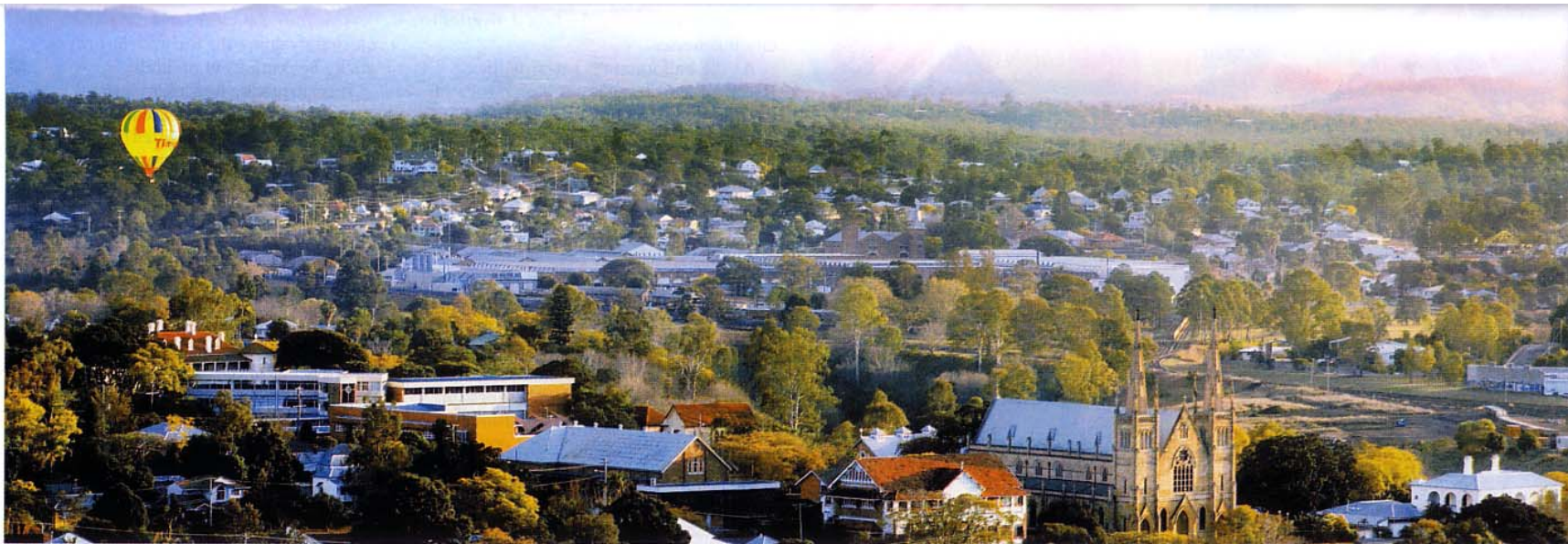
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scouts out suitable sites. The balloon hovers between the hills over a flat paddock free of livestock and quietly lands.

His partner, who has followed the flight path from the ground, contacts the property owner to ask permission to "de-basket".

For just the third time in three years, permission is denied and the passengers are treated to the joy of another take off.

Day sets course for a nearby property where he has landed previously.

The landowners hear the bursts of the burners and run outside to wave welcome.

He sets down at the base of a scrubby gully with the skill of a pilot who learnt his craft in the French Alps.

Once more the passengers are stirred into action, helping roll and stuff the canopy into its canvas bag and push the basket on to the trailer for transportation.

Over croissants and champers at the Sundowner Motor Inn, the travellers relive the flight and explain why they pulled back the doona so early to gather in the chilly morning air.

Wedding anniversaries and landmark birthdays are the reason's de jour.

But the sense of freedom and achievement of sharing a balloon flight should be enough reason alone to seize the day, face the wintry morning and take to the skies.

After all, morning is the best part of the day.



CHECKLIST

Program includes:

- Sunrise start and one-hour hot air balloon scenic flight.
- Participation in inflation and deflation of balloon and flight commentary.
- Hot and/or cold champagne breakfast and commemorative flight certificate plus insurance.

Rack rates:

- Weekdays – Adults \$255pp/Children \$220pp.

- Weekend/public holidays – Adults \$285pp/Children \$230pp.

Ballooning Accommodation and Dinner package:

- Standard package for two adults – \$700. Includes one night at the Sundowner Motor Inn, dinner at the Cameron Lodge restaurant, plus balloon experience and champagne breakfast.
- Deluxe package for two adults – \$835.00. Includes one night spa suite accommodation at the Ipswich International Hotel, dinner at the Platform 9 restaurant, plus balloon experience and champagne breakfast.