

ESCAPE



(From left) Aloft with Floating Images; the heritage building that is home to The Pumpyard Bar and Brewery; coffee at Rafter & Rose. Picture (above): Paul Castle



Sky's no limit in Ipswich

See the historic former coal-mining town from the air and on the ground

MICHELLE COLLINS

Tourism in the City of Ipswich, Brisbane's next-door neighbour, is on the up and up. Day-trippers can cram in a visit to the Workshops Rail Museum, the Ipswich Art Gallery, a free-to-inspect, Australian-animal inner-city zoo, and sample down-home, country-style eating in stunning, heritage-quality eateries – just for starters.

CBD to CBD, the historic former coal-mining city of Ipswich is only a 30-minute drive by motorway, and by rail or bus the trip's not much longer. The reward for effort is Ipswich's low-rise, inner-city/country town crossover vibe, with row on row of glorious 19th century shopfronts, without the traffic congestion that makes fossicking more difficult in downtown Brisbane. The old-fashioned thrill of exploring an unfamiliar cityscape – on foot – is a distinct plus for Ipswich.

The city is also the closest you'll get to taking a hot-air balloon flight. The family-

run Floating Images, under the careful piloting of host Graeme Day, is a one-hour flight over the rolling plains west of the city. Day, who learnt to fly balloons in France, the birthplace of ballooning, has been piloting commercial balloon flights since 1991, not only in Australia but throughout Europe and Canada.

On the morning I joined him, assorted souped-up V8s and other vehicles were hurling themselves around the Ipswich Motorsport Park – looking like a Hot Wheels toy set from aloft.

As the dawn mist began clearing the foothills of the Marburg Range, about 300m below our basket the farmsteads situated beside Laidley-Rosewood Rd and the Warrego Highway could be heard starting to stir.

On the eastern horizon, the Royal Australian Air Force's Amberley Base could be glimpsed as an almost imperceptible breeze wafted us gradually to the southeast from our starting point near Minden, not far from the former seminary that is Woodlands of Marburg.

Alighting gently in the back yard of a nearby farm, we learnt that the experience of ballooning provides the hands-on thrill of guiding the huge envelope as it fills with fan-forced air and acquiring the equally unusual knack of deflating it at journey's

end. Day's snapshot of the entire crew in mid-flight became an instant keepsake with inbuilt bragging rights after all of us returned to the Metro Hotel for a hearty, hot breakfast.

Afterwards it was well worth seeking out a brunch-time coffee. It was a tough choice between nearby Rafter & Rose or Fourthchild Cafe & Restaurant, which is licensed for a lunchtime tipple.

Pick-up and drop-off point for flights is the Metro Hotel. If you're not an early riser, stay overnight and enjoy a meal at the Harvest Restaurant & Bar, whose menus boast seasonal produce from Ipswich, the Scenic Rim, the Lockyer Valley and Somerset regions.

If you want to make a weekend of it, it's easy to lose an afternoon at The Pumpyard Bar and Brewery. Set in a century-old, heritage-listed building, this family-friendly "pub" looks every bit the modern hangout with its long, wooden bar and stainless steel brewing tanks lining the walls.

But the real drawcard is the house brews produced free of the usual chemicals and preservatives that some unnamed breweries, in other locales, expect drinkers to cop on the chin.

But remember, hot-air ballooning is an early wake-up call and not an activity you want to take on with a foggy head.

TRAVEL MATE

STAYING THERE

Metro Hotel Ipswich International
43 South St, Ipswich
metrohotels.com.au

EATING THERE

The Pumpyard Bar and Brewery
88 Limestone St, Ipswich
4heartsbrewing.com

Rafter & Rose
1/17 Ellenborough St, Ipswich

Fourthchild Cafe & Restaurant,
6/126 Brisbane St, Ipswich
fourthchildcafe.com.au

DOING THERE

Floating Images Hot Air Balloon Flight,
\$330 per person (\$280 children 6-12)
floatingimages.com.au/packages/

The writer was a guest of Metro Hotel Ipswich International, Floating Images and The Pumpyard Bar & Brewery