THE ROAD AHEAD

SUMMER 2026/27

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$10k

SUNSHINE COAST HOLIDAY

See Page 13

Coast meets Country

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COVER: The Sunshine Coast Hinterland with jacaranda trees in bloom.
PHOTO: Visit Sunshine Coast.



RAY'S NOTE

Electric vehicles and hybrids are becoming increasingly competitive on ownership costs, with RACQ's latest Vehicle Operating Costs Report highlighting how dramatically the economics of motoring are changing.

While purchase price remains an important consideration for new-car buyers, fuel and energy costs, servicing, registration, insurance and depreciation all contribute to the total cost of ownership.

As manufacturers continue to expand their electrified vehicle lineups and technology advances, the gap between traditional petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles and their electrified counterparts is narrowing across many segments.

The Australian market has also changed significantly in recent years. That shift is reflected in strong EV sales growth during 2026, as more Australians make the move to electrified motoring (see opposite page).

A growing range of battery-electric, plug-in hybrid and hybrid models from brands including BYD, Hyundai, MG, GWM, Tesla, Toyota and Kia means motorists now have more choice than ever.

The improved cost competitiveness of electrified vehicles is reflected in RACQ's latest Vehicle Operating Costs Report, which found battery-electric or plug-in hybrid vehicles claimed four of the six major categories assessed this year.

For the first time, a battery-electric vehicle, the BYD Atto 1, has taken the crown as the cheapest to own and operate in Queensland. The analysis looked at everything from purchase price, a five-year loan, registration, insurance, maintenance and fuel or electricity costs.

Increasingly, battery-electric and hybrid vehicles are proving they can be among the most economical options.

You can read more about the Vehicle Operating Costs Report from page 40.

Enjoy your summer edition!

RAY ANDERSEN
Managing Editor



Viewpoint

As another busy year draws to a close, I want to thank you for the trust you continue to place in RACQ and for the contribution you make as members of our Club.

Throughout 2026, we have focused on building a simpler, stronger RACQ – one that delivers greater value and has the services and capabilities needed to support our members well into the future.

A big part of that support is addressing the challenges that continue to affect Queenslanders. Foremost is the tragedy playing out on our roads.

For the third consecutive year, our state is on track to record more than 300 road deaths.

That is why road safety remains the number one priority under RACQ's Community Impact Strategy and central to our purpose of driving a better future for all Queenslanders. We will continue to combine advocacy, education and partnerships to effect change and ultimately reduce road fatalities and serious injury.

During Queensland Road Safety Week in August, we brought the human impact of this crisis into sharp focus through a powerful installation in Brisbane's King George Square, supported by our road safety partners.

It featured 107 life-sized silhouettes, each representing a person projected to be killed on Queensland roads between August and Christmas – a sobering reminder that behind every life lost is a family, workplace and community changed forever.

I urge every road user to take extra care: slow down, stay focused, drive to the conditions, and make good choices every time you get behind the wheel. We all have a role to play in making sure everyone arrives home safe.

Road safety was also among the priorities reinforced by members this year at our Annual General Meeting.

You told us clearly that safer and more resilient roads, stronger action to improve driver behaviour and fairer fuel prices matter most to you.

Your feedback continues to shape where we focus our advocacy efforts, and we will continue to use RACQ's voice to champion those priorities for you and your communities.

As I close my final Viewpoint for 2026, I also want to say thank you for being part of RACQ. Our Club is more than a brand, it's a community and legacy built on more than 120 years of trusted service. That trust we will never take for granted.

I wish you and your loved ones a safe and happy holiday season, and all the very best for the year ahead.

Stay safe.

LEONA MURPHY OAM
President



RACQ's impactful Queensland Road Safety Week installation in King George Square during August.

*Source: Electric Vehicle Council, State of Electric Vehicles 2026 (10th Anniversary Edition). All data as at 30 June 2026.

EVs move into the mainstream



Electric vehicles have reached a turning point in Australia.

A decade after electric motoring was considered a niche choice, EVs are now firmly in the mainstream, with Australians embracing the technology faster than at any point in the nation's history.

According to Electric Vehicle Council Chief Executive Julie Delvecchio, the shift is being driven by a combination of environmental, technological and economic factors.

"Australians are buying electric vehicles faster than at any point in our history," Ms Delvecchio said in the Electric Vehicle Council's *State of Electric Vehicles 2026* report.

"In 2017, when we released our first State of EVs, Australians bought just 2,284 EVs. Today, EVs account for one in every four new cars sold, and more than 600,000 are on Australian roads."

The trend in EV growth is no longer confined to inner-city early adopters.

Growth suburbs, regional communities and tradespeople are increasingly making the switch as running costs fall and model availability expands.

The second-hand EV market is also growing rapidly, making electric motoring accessible to even more Australians.

157,957
EVS SOLD IN AUSTRALIA BETWEEN JANUARY–JUNE 2026

117%
YEAR-ON-YEAR INCREASE IN EV SALES BETWEEN JANUARY–JUNE 2026

25.8%
OF ALL NEW CARS SOLD IN AUSTRALIA ARE EVS, UP 113% ON LAST YEAR

20,400
TESLA MODEL Y SUVS SOLD IN H1 2026, THE TOP-SELLING EV

150%
GROWTH IN USED EV SALES THROUGH PICKLES AUCTIONS IN FY26

612,000
EVS NOW ON AUSTRALIAN ROADS, WITH 196 MODELS AVAILABLE FOR SALE

Peace, love and Layla

This is the remarkable story of a rare 1967 Volkswagen Kombi 'split-screen' and the Queensland owner who uncovered its colourful past.

By **GED BULMER**



Photos: Supplied; Dave Pattinson.

One of the defining characteristics of RACQ MotorFest is the dizzying array of makes, models and eras of vehicles on display.

Representing a time-capsule of automotive history from every corner of the globe, these classics arrive in the hands of owners who are just as diverse; from casual collectors who use their cars as daily-drivers, to obsessive-compulsives who fuss over every detail of their burnished pride-and-joy.

Tony 'Tug' Wilson and wife Stephie (pictured) straddle the middle ground, happily driving their rare 1967 Volkswagen Kombi split-screen to the corner store for milk, but also going to great lengths to show the vehicle in its restored glory.

The Nundah couple look like they've stepped out of a time machine when we meet them at MotorFest 2026, dressed in outfits that scream late 1960s San Francisco and the Summer of Love.

The time-capsule analogy holds up as they show us around their yellow-and-white '67 split-screen Kombi, its retro-vibe complemented by old *Women's Weekly* magazines, antique cameras, a melamine picnic set, and even a slide View-Master.

A retired soldier who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, Tug purchased Layla the Kombi to keep himself busy after parting with an earlier hot rod.

"Before we got Layla, we had a '29 Ford Roadster and that was fabulous. But the wife wanted to get the bathrooms renovated, so the hot rod got sold," Tug joked.

"After a while, she got sick of me moping around the house and said, 'Go and buy a toy for God's sake, get out of my hair!'"

The decision to purchase the US-made left-hand drive Kombi rather than an Australian-built version was driven by Tug's desire to have something a bit special that you don't see every day.

"She's a one-of-a-kind in Australia, being a 1967 German-built for the American-market Road Runner Camper," he said.

Tug explained that by the late 1950s VW was shipping T2 Kombi bodies to the US and elsewhere to be outfitted by specialist coachbuilders with custom camping interiors and, in some cases, pop-up roofs.

"It arrived in San Francisco in March '67 as an 11-window shell, and went to the Road Runner Camper Company which was based in Concord, California," Tug said.

"It was outfitted by them and moved on to Carlsen Brothers, a big San Francisco Volkswagen dealership."

Neither the dealership nor Road Runner exist today but the latter's camper conversions are rare and highly prized by air-cooled Volkswagen enthusiasts in the United States, with Tug of the belief his is the only such conversion in Australia.

Among the Road Runner's unique features was a suite of Coleman camping gear offered by US dealers as a sales incentive to clear 'old' split-window stock ahead of the new bay-window model's release in late 1967.

"The original Camping Package included a Coleman dual-fuel stove and lantern, a Coleman cooler or esky and a Coleman four-gallon water cooler, but most of the items had disappeared over the years," Tug said.

This led to countless hours trawling the internet to replace the pieces with serial-number correct items, the quest awakening Tug's inner-sleuth and sparking a desire to learn more about the Kombi's colourful past.

"I call it research, but my wife calls it stalking," he laughs. "There was a lot of research through LinkedIn, Facebook, Google and everything else to track down the owners. It was almost like I had like a *Miami CSI* evidence board on the wall."

Tug learnt that the free-wheeling Layla passed through the hands of five different Californian owners between 1967 and 2000, before being exported to Japan where she spent a further 12 years, then finding her way to the Sunshine Coast where she caught Tony's eye in 2025.

His extensive research included making contact with past owners, including the now 75-year-old Californian surfer who purchased it in 1969 at age 17 for US$1,350.

The old surfer recalled iconic road trips from the US east coast to the west coast and back again, and of free-spirited surfing safaris to Mexico's Baja peninsula.

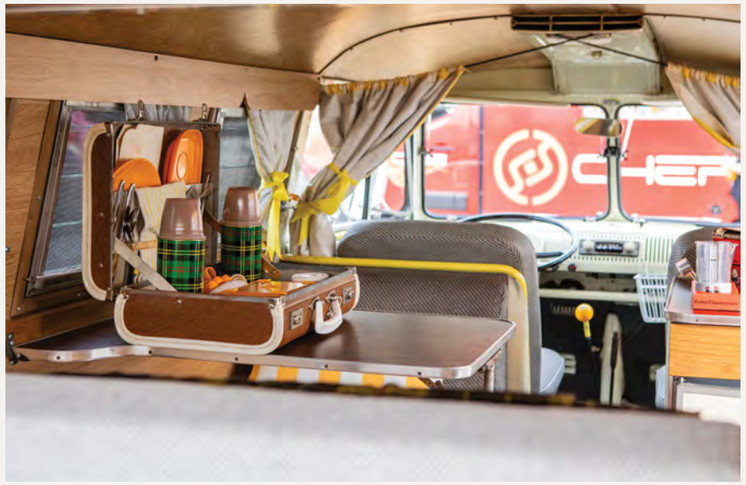
"He did all the work on the Kombi himself and threw the original logbooks in a cupboard and only rediscovered them five years ago," Tug said.

"You can imagine my surprise when he told me he had the original books and asked if I wanted them."

Though Layla wasn't in bad condition, Tug decided she would benefit from a freshen-up and set about replacing some rusted panels and rewiring the 12-volt electrical system.

"The interior hadn't been touched in 59 years, so we pulled that out and found all sorts of bits and pieces."

It included old NFL trading cards, US and Japanese coins, weathered Polaroid photos, and a battered 1972 pay cheque from the Golden Gate YMCA in San Franciso.



"The interior hadn't been touched in 59 years, so we pulled that out and found all sorts of bits and pieces."

The restoration included replacing the original Californian Oak interior with like-for-like paneling, with Tug keen to stay as true to the Kombi's factory fit-out as possible.

Other reminders of Layla's colourful past retained in the rebuild include a USA flag hand-painted on a drawer handle by the fourth owner's artsy girlfriend; the sixth owner's Japanese voice-activated ETAG; and the seventh owner's colour-coordinated number-one-cueball gear-stick knob.

The cueball provides a clue to the Kombi's nickname, which Tug explained was chosen by his predecessor after the 1970 hit song of the same name by rock band Derek and the Dominos.

The band's landmark double album *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs* came with distinctive yellow vinyl discs, similar to the Kombi's paint scheme.

Layla and Tug will share a special anniversary in 2027 when they each turn 60, with the Nundah couple contemplating a cruise along Victoria's Great Ocean Road in their Summer of Love split-screen to mark the occasion.

Tug's not sure if the handmade nine-foot Malibu surfboard strapped to the roof-racks will get a run, but with every road trip he's thankful for the disc-brake front-end and larger 1600c engine that improve Layla's road manners.

"Over the years, I've had Harleys and Falcon GTs of all varieties and things like that," Tug said.

"Now that I'm a bit older and a bit slower the '67 Kombi suits me just fine."







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"I've seen your ads for years. I honestly didn't believe it was possible to get this kind of result without a hearing clinic being involved. Received it in days. Now I'm a believer." – Stephen, VIC

"After trialling a hearing aid from a well known company, I was not prepared to pay from $6,000 upwards for something that I did not feel satisfied me. The app would not always work and there was a constant static sound coming through the hearing aid. I purchased the Diamond Stream 12 from PocketAid and it has not missed a beat. The remote is perfect for me and simple to set up and the hearing aid has been perfect. Such a difference in price, under $2000. Thank you." – Vicki, QLD

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SMART DIRECTIONAL AUDIO
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OPEN EAR
'Behind-the-ear' design. Your ear canal remains open for a very natural listening experience.

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Enter the New Diamond Stream 12 Hearing Aids: We built the Diamond Stream 12 to bring premium hearing to everyone, with crystal-clear sound and all major premium hearing aid features included, but at just a small fraction of the price of in-clinic hearing aids. This new hearing aid is based on the already well-known success of our direct-to-you and ready-to-use hearing aid range; the Jaspa 3, and now contains the major features found in expensive hearing-clinic-sold devices.

What's remarkable is that many customers who've paid as much as $12,000 for clinic fitted hearing aids are saying the Diamond Stream 12 performs even better overall in comparison. Many are now hearing clearly in restaurants, cafes, and family gatherings for the first time in years. No clinic appointments or digital programming via APPs are required. Users now have access to a large range of volume and clarity changes they wish to make, via a simple on-board button located on the hearing aid, or they can simply use the free wireless remote control (included).

At just **$960 for one** aid or **$1,850 for a pair** (charging system included) true premium and advanced hearing technology is finally affordable, and easy to use.

Like all PocketAid Hearing Aids, the Diamond Stream 12 comes with a **30-day money-back guarantee**, **3-year warranty and free express delivery Australia-wide**.

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Always read the label. Follow the directions for use.

*Check your own health fund cover to determine your eligibility and level of cover for hearing aids.



Reshaping our road culture

The choices we make behind the wheel can help ensure all road users arrive at their destination safely.

By **JOEL TUCKER**
Road Safety Policy and Projects Lead

At this time of year, Queensland roads carry more than cars.

Vehicles carry families heading away for holidays, people making long trips home for the festive season and loved ones we're looking forward to seeing.

We all want them to arrive safely.

Yet the choices we make along the way help shape the culture on our roads.

Whether we slow down, put the phone away, show patience when traffic builds, or recognise when we're too tired to keep driving, Queensland's road culture is created through millions of everyday decisions.

Tired driving is one area where there can be a real gap between what we know and what we do.

RACQ research found 96.1% of drivers recognise tired driving as dangerous, yet 42.5% reported driving tired.

Perhaps most tellingly, 83.7% said they would continue to their destination when fatigued if they had less than an hour to go.

That final stretch matters, particularly during the holidays, when many of us are travelling longer distances and eager to reach the people and places waiting for us.

The risk is that if you fall asleep for even a few seconds, you might not make it at all.

When home or the holiday destination feels close, it can be tempting to tell ourselves we're nearly there and push on. But being close doesn't make driving tired safer.

Recognising fatigue is only useful if we act on it.

This holiday season, one of the simplest ways we can look after each other is to make planned stops part of the journey.

BEFORE A LONGER DRIVE

- Get a good night's sleep and avoid starting a trip already tired.
- Avoid driving at times when you'd normally be asleep.
- Plan where you can safely stop along the way – allow for at least a 15-minute break for every two hours of driving.
- Avoid driving more than 8-10 hours in a day and share the driving where possible.
- If you notice yourself becoming tired, don't rely on being 'nearly there'. Stop somewhere safe and take the break you need. Sleep is the only cure for being tired.

Stopping for a rest or planning your trip in advance might seem like small individual decisions, but that is how road culture is shaped. The more people who put safety first each time they make a choice on the road, the better the outcome will be.

It isn't only about understanding the rules or recognising the risks. It is what we choose to do when we're tired, running late, frustrated or simply wanting to get home.

The holidays should be a time for reconnecting and making memories with the people who matter.

As Queenslanders take to the roads this Christmas-New Year period, let's set a simple standard for ourselves and each other: getting there safely matters more than getting there sooner.

Every safety-driven decision on the road helps protect someone we care about.

Together, those everyday decisions help shape the road culture we leave behind – and if enough Queenslanders choose to make small, everyday decisions that prioritise care, respect, and responsibility, we can help create the kind of road safety culture future generations deserve.

See page 66 for more tips on avoiding fatigue when driving.

From pristine waterways to its scenic hinterland, the Sunshine Coast is a region made for slowing down

ENTER TO WIN
$10k
SUNSHINE COAST HOLIDAY
See Page 13

Coastal calm

GLORIOUS GLASS HOUSE MOUNTAINS 12
MEMORABLE DAY TRIPS FROM NOOSA 14
FROM BEACH TOWELS TO BUSH TRAILS 18

The mountains that make you look twice

Rising unexpectedly from the coastal plain north of Brisbane, the Glass House Mountains are more than a striking landmark.



There's a moment on the drive north from Brisbane when the landscape suddenly changes.

Out beyond the roadside pines and paddocks, great rocky shapes begin rising from the coastal plain, some rounded, others sharp, one with a distinctly crooked neck.

That first glimpse of the Glass House Mountains never gets old. They're part compass, part welcome-home sign and, the more you learn about them, part history book.

The temptation is to see the mountains, pull over for a photograph and keep driving towards the coast. Don't. These ancient peaks deserve a closer look.

VOLCANOES, BUT NOT AS YOU MIGHT IMAGINE

The first surprise is that the Glass House Mountains aren't simply a collection of old volcanic cones.

Around 25 to 27 million years ago, molten rock pushed into vents and beneath the Earth's surface, cooling into extraordinarily hard trachyte and rhyolite. Over millions of years, the softer rock around it eroded away.

What remains are the volcanic cores standing above the plain today.

Once you know that, the landscape makes more sense.

These aren't mountains squeezed together into a range. They stand apart, domes, spires and crags separated by forest, farms and pineapple fields.

The tallest is Mount Beerwah at 556m. Nearby Coonowrin rises in a distinctive crooked profile, while Tibrogargan seems to hunker solidly over the surrounding country.

The entire landscape was added to the National Heritage List in 2006 for its natural, Indigenous and historic significance.

A LANDSCAPE WITH A MUCH OLDER STORY

Long before Europeans sailed past these peaks, the Glass House Mountains were, and remain, deeply significant to the Kabi Kabi and Jinibara peoples.

This was a landscape of pathways, gathering places, ceremony and trade.

Evidence of long Aboriginal occupation includes rock art, axe-grinding grooves, quarries, burial places and former campsites, while individual peaks hold continuing spiritual significance.

There are also ancient stories connecting the mountains as a family.

In Jinibara tradition, Tibrogargan is the ancestral father and Beerwah the mother.

A widely told story identifies the crooked Coonowrin as their eldest son.

Learning this changes the way you look at the mountains. They stop being a collection of summits to tick off and become a cultural landscape to spend time with.

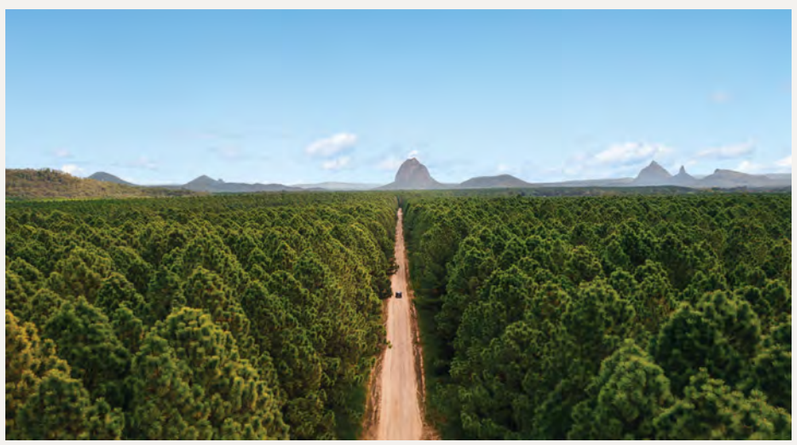
WHY ARE THEY CALLED THE GLASS HOUSE MOUNTAINS?

That part of the story came much later.

Sailing north aboard the *Endeavour* on 17 May 1770, Lieutenant James Cook spotted the unusual peaks from offshore.

Their shapes reminded him of the glass-making furnaces he knew from Yorkshire, England, so he recorded them as the 'Glass Houses'.

Almost three decades later, Matthew Flinders came exploring. In July 1799, travelling with Indigenous leader Bungaree and members of the *Norfolk* crew, he climbed Mount Beerburrum, the first recorded European ascent of one of the mountains. It's extraordinary to stand there today and realise how long these peaks have acted as landmarks.



THE BEST WAY TO MEET THE MOUNTAINS

If it's your first visit, start slowly.

The Glass House Mountains Lookout is an easy introduction, with signs helping you put names to the peaks and views stretching across the volcanic landscape towards the coast. The lookout day-use area is in Beerburrum West State Forest, reached from Glass House-Woodford Road.

For a walk, the 4.1km Tibrogargan Circuit takes about 90 minutes and winds through casuarina, eucalypt and melaleuca forest around the mountain's base.

The 2.8km Mount Ngungun walk is steeper and takes around two hours return, revealing broad views towards Tibrogargan, Coonowrin and Beerwah.

The Glass House Mountains are only about 70km north of Brisbane, but on each visit you realise they seem to operate on a different timescale altogether.

Stay long enough to notice the crooked profiles, the changing light on the rock and the improbable way these ancient volcanic remnants rise from the plain.

Once you know the stories behind them, you won't simply drive past the Glass House Mountains again.

13

Sunshine Coast

WIN A $10,000 ULTIMATE SUNSHINE COAST HOLIDAY*

RACQ AND Visit Sunshine Coast are giving members the chance to experience the beauty of this stunning Queensland coastal destination and its hinterland.

One lucky winner will receive a $10,000 RACQ Travel voucher to help bring their Sunshine Coast getaway to life.

The prize can be used toward accommodation, car or caravan hire, tours and experiences in the Sunshine Coast region.

Spend your days discovering local farm gates, sampling award-winning food and drink, exploring scenic walking trails or unwinding beside the ocean. Make lasting memories with outdoor adventures, family experiences, local flavours and relaxing coastal escapes.

Enter for your chance to win at racq.com/sunshine-coast-competition

The competition opens at 10:00am AEST on Tuesday 1 December 2026 and closes at 5:00pm AEST on Friday 29 January 2027. *See terms and conditions at racq.com/sunshine-coast-competition

Four memorable day trips from Noosa

Noosa's beaches make it tempting to stay close to the sand, but some of the region's best road trips begin just beyond the coastline. Here are four easy day trips worth adding to your Noosa itinerary.



1

SPEND A RELAXING DAY IN MOOLOOLABA

START YOUR DAY with a stroll along Mooloolaba's revitalised foreshore, where sweeping ocean views and one of the best beaches in the South Pacific set the scene.

Take a dip in the calm, sheltered waters or settle into a cafe along the bustling Esplanade. For lunch, head to The Wharf Mooloolaba, a vibrant waterfront precinct featuring dining options, boutique shopping and family-friendly attractions. Watch fishing boats come and go from the marina, sample fresh local seafood, or enjoy a drink overlooking the waterways.

In the afternoon, browse nearby shops, take a coastal walk, or simply soak up the laid-back atmosphere.



2

TASTE YOUR WAY THROUGH POMONA AND COOROY

MT COOROORA APPEARS on the horizon in the most spectacular fashion as you approach Pomona, a hinterland town made for an unhurried wander.

Drop into Pomona Distilling Co, tucked into the site of the town's historic bakery, for lunch and locally crafted spirits made with native and regional ingredients.

Continue to Cooroy and nearby Lake Macdonald, where the Noosa Botanic Gardens offer shady lakeside paths and plenty of picnic space. On the return drive, stop at Mt Tinbeerwah for a short walk to the lookout to take in the expansive 360-degree views across the hinterland towards the coast.



3

MARKETS, MAKERS AND EUMUNDI

TIME THIS DRIVE for a Wednesday or Saturday and make Eumundi Markets your first stop.

The village hums with live music while stalls overflow with handmade jewellery, clothing, art and locally made food.

Once you've filled the market bag, linger in town for coffee or lunch before taking the backroads through Doonan towards Lake Weyba.

The lake provides a quieter finish to the day, with calm water, birdlife and plenty of room for a waterside picnic.



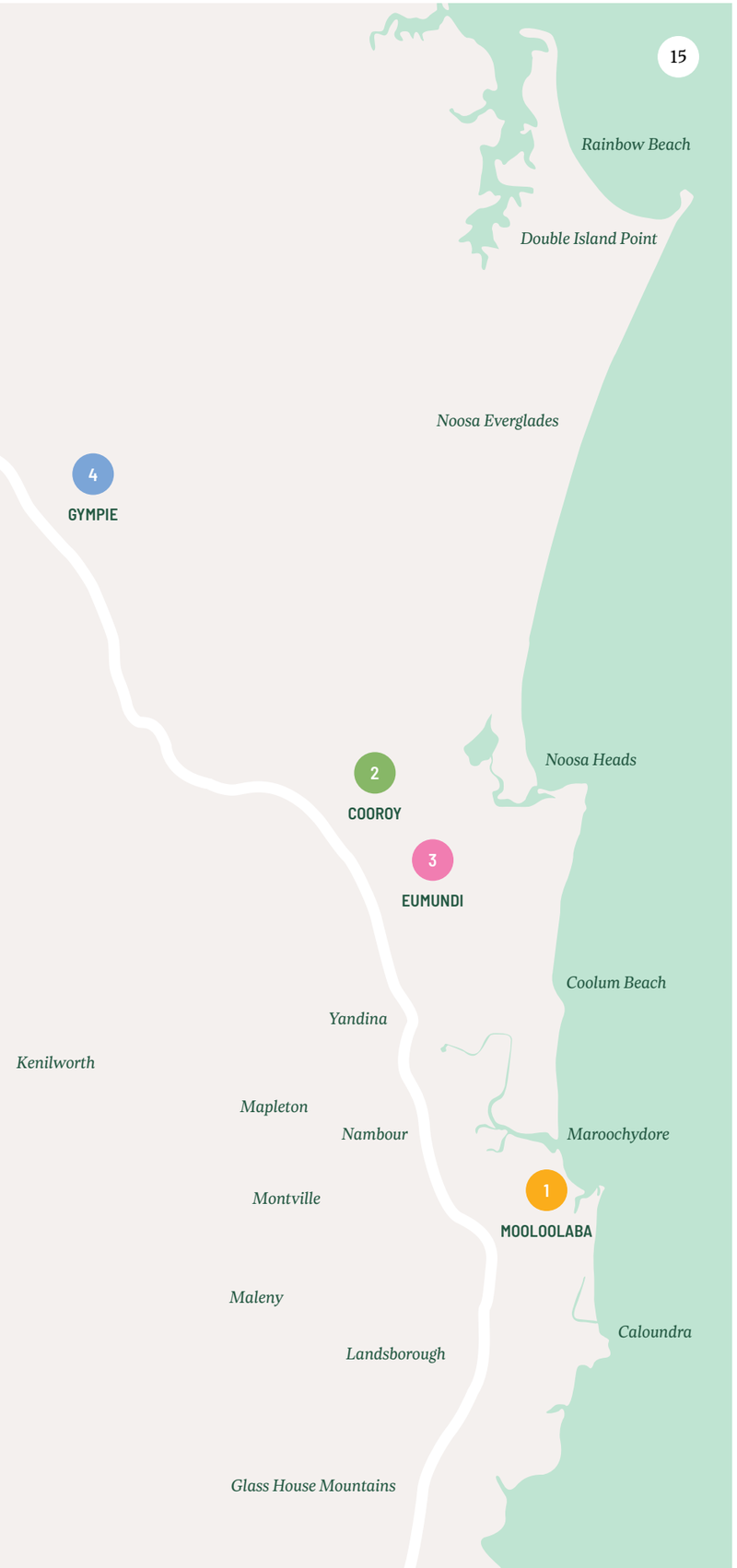
4

TAKE THE LONG WAY THROUGH THE MARY VALLEY

GIVE YOURSELF a full day for this one. The western route winds through Imbil, Kandanga, Amamoor, Gympie and Traveston, passing green paddocks, forest and small country towns.

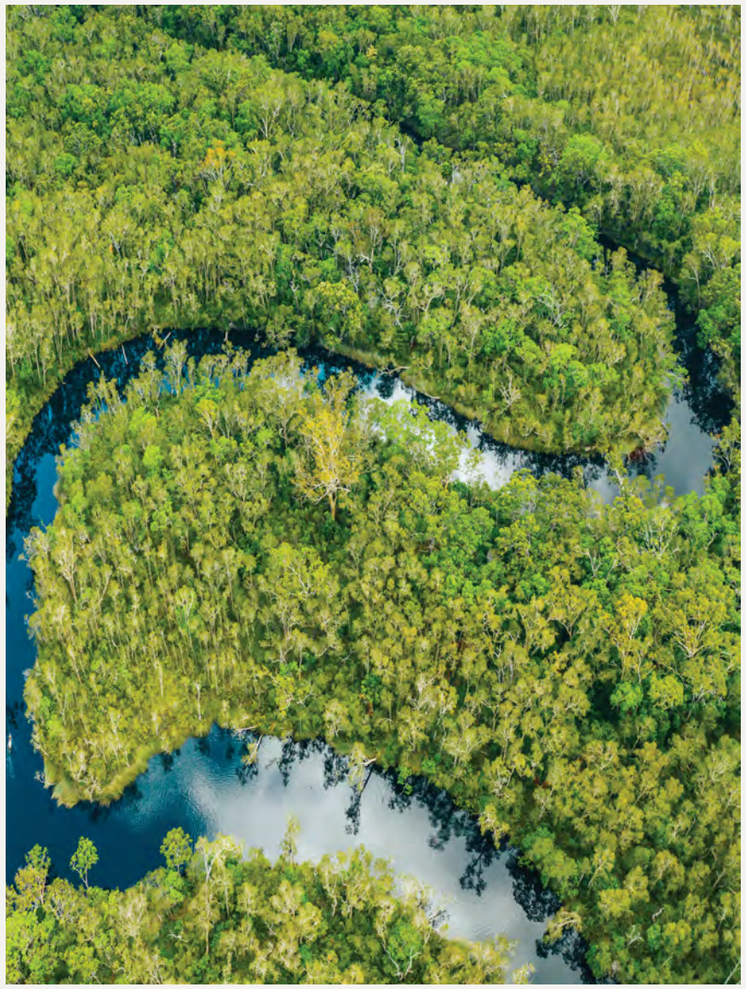
Stop at Kandanga Farm Store for coffee, homemade treats and shelves stacked with locally grown and organic produce.

Near Traveston, Dingo Creek Vineyard offers bookable tastings, grazing platters and picnics among the vines. Or make Gympie the centrepiece of the day and board the Mary Valley Rattler, which rolls through the countryside aboard beautifully restored heritage trains.



Experience the wild side

Swap the beach towel for a paddle, hiking boots or a mountain bike and discover the Sunshine Coast's adventurous side.



There are times on the Sunshine Coast when the thongs need to come off and the adventure gear goes on.

It might be when you're paddling a kayak through the Noosa Everglades, or climbing the last rocky steps of Mount Coolum as the first light reaches the coast.

From sea to summit, this is a place that makes it easy to spend more time outside. The hardest part is deciding where to start.

TAKE TO THE WATER

Winter and early spring bring one of the Sunshine Coast's great natural spectacles.

Humpback whales travel along the coastline during their annual migration, and between July and October there are plenty of opportunities to see them from Mooloolaba.

Join Sunshine Coast Afloat for a whale-watching cruise, where the first clue is often a distant puff of spray before a tail, fin or full breach follows.

For an entirely different perspective, Sunreef Mooloolaba and The Pressure Project offer the chance to swim with migrating humpbacks.

As with any wildlife encounter, the whales decide whether they'll come close, which is part of the thrill.

Further north, the pace slows considerably in the Noosa Everglades.

Paddle into narrow waterways edged by tea trees and paperbarks, where dark, tannin-rich water can become so still it perfectly reflects the forest above. There's a reason one section is known as the River of Mirrors.

Or take a more futuristic approach to the Noosa River with Fliteschool Noosa.

After a lesson from the riverbank, step onto an electric hydrofoil and learn to lift above the water, gliding almost silently across the surface.

No previous eFoil experience is required, and once the board rises and the river drops away beneath your feet, it's a very different way to see Noosa.

For saltwater rather than still water, grab a board for a surf lesson around Coolum, or point the car towards Noosa North Shore for one of the Coast's best adventure days.

LEAVE THE BITUMEN BEHIND

Once you've crossed the Noosa River at Tewantin, the road trip changes gear.

The Great Beach Drive replaces bitumen with sand, running north along Teewah Beach through the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park.

Photos: Tourism and Events Queensland; Visit Sunshine Coast.

Roll down the windows, watch the waves and make time for the coloured sand cliffs along the way.

The prize at the end is Double Island Point, a headland surrounded by clear water and regularly visited by dolphins, turtles and other marine life.

Epic Ocean Adventures combines the journey with ocean kayaking, giving you the chance to paddle around the headland and scan the water for fins.

If you're driving yourself, this isn't a spontaneous detour – you'll need a 4WD, a vehicle access permit and a plan built around the tides. Otherwise, leave the tyre pressures and tide charts to a guide, and join a tour.

WALKING ON SUNSHINE

The Sunshine Coast Hinterland is where you'll find some of the region's best walks, from short climbs with big views to multi-day journeys where phone reception gives way to birdsong.

Mount Ngungun in the Glass House Mountains delivers a satisfying summit adventure, while the steep Mount Coolum climb rewards an early alarm. Reach the top around sunrise and you can watch the coastline gradually appear below as the sky brightens over the Pacific.

Have a few days up your sleeve?

The Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk stretches for almost 59km through the Blackall Range, passing through forests, creek gullies and national parks.

Further north, the Cooloola Great Walk is a bigger undertaking.

It stretches for 102km through rainforest, coastal woodland, heath plains and enormous sand dunes between Noosa North Shore and Rainbow Beach.

These are walks to plan rather than simply turn up for.

Check park conditions, book campsites where required and carry sufficient water and navigation gear.

FIND YOUR ADVENTURE ON TWO WHEELS

Prefer two wheels to two feet?

The coast's mountain-bike trails range from gentle forest riding to rocky descents, berms and technical singletrack.

Around Tewantin National Park, trails disappear beneath palms and towering gums just minutes from Noosa, while the Hinterland offers the chance to ride deeper into the forest.

It's the sort of morning where your shoes finish dusty and your appetite considerably larger than when you started.

SEE IT ALL FROM ABOVE

And then there's the view you can't get from a walking track.

A flight with Oceanview Helicopters reveals just how quickly the landscape changes here – long beaches and river mouths on one side, the green folds of the Hinterland and distinctive Glass House Mountains on the other.

Whether your idea of adventure involves a paddle, hiking boots, handlebars or four-wheel drive, the best approach is to leave some room in the itinerary.

On the Sunshine Coast, one outdoor adventure has a habit of leading straight into another.

← An overhead view of the Noosa Everglades.
↓ Beach driving on Rainbow Beach.





From beach towels to bush trails

Three days on the Sunshine Coast can take your family from saltwater swims and theme-park thrills to rainforest gardens, bird encounters, coastal walks and country-town doughnuts.



Photos: Visit Sunshine Coast; Dr Ken Wishaw.



Swimmers or sneakers first? On a Sunshine Coast family long weekend, you'll want both.

This three-day road trip starts with salty hair and rollercoasters, winds into the green folds of the Hinterland, then finishes between Noosa's headlands and the clear creeks around Kenilworth.

The trick isn't trying to squeeze everything in. Pick a few family favourites, leave room for an ice-cream or spontaneous swim, and let the road take you from coast to country.

DAY ONE

CALOUNDRA, PALMVIEW AND TWIN WATERS

Start with a splash at Kings Beach Ocean Pool in Caloundra. Built into the rocks at the northern end of Kings Beach, the 25m saltwater pool puts you right beside the Pacific, without a grain of sand finding its way into the car afterwards.

There's also a wading area and children's water-play fountain.

Once everyone has dried off, swap the ocean for rollercoasters at Aussie World.

Its mix of gentler rides for little ones and bigger thrills means siblings with very different ideas of fun can both find something to tackle.

For something completely different, head towards Sunshine Coast Airport and the LifeFlight Jocelyn Walker Visitor Experience and Education Centre.

Families can work through an interactive rescue mission, plan a flight path and try flying a rescue in the simulator.

Entry is free, and the centre is open Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays, so check your dates before adding it to the itinerary.

When the energy finally runs out, check into Novotel Sunshine Coast Resort at Twin Waters which has just enjoyed a major glow up.

Set between the Maroochy River and Pacific Ocean, the resort has rooms and larger suites overlooking gardens or its lagoon, giving families space to slow things down after a big first day.

MORE FAMILY ADVENTURES TO CONSIDER

- Australia Zoo in Beerwah can easily fill a day with wildlife encounters, conservation stories and plenty of Crocoseum action.
- Big Kart Track in Landsborough is one for families who'd rather settle holiday arguments on the racetrack.
- ecoTekk Sunshine Coast offers an active way to explore on electric bikes if your crew prefers two wheels to four.
- Aquaduck leaves Mooloolaba on a family-friendly sightseeing trip that rolls along the road before taking to the water.
- SEA LIFE Sunshine Coast brings families face-to-fin with marine life, from sharks and rays to seals, penguins and colourful reef creatures.

DAY TWO

YANDINA AND THE SUNSHINE COAST HINTERLAND

Today, point the car towards the emerald-green hills of the hinterland.

Start your Saturday right by browsing Yandina Markets, where a country-market morning gives you a chance to fossick, snack and see another side of this historic hinterland town.

Then make tracks to Fairhill Adventure Gardens. Wander the native gardens before heading to the farmyard, where little hands can cuddle and help bottle-feed miniature pygmy goats, and meet the other farmyard residents.

Keep heading into the hills for Maleny Botanic Gardens & Bird World.

Its guided Bird World experience takes you into walk-through aviaries filled with hundreds of native and exotic birds.

Don't be surprised if one decides your shoulder looks like prime real estate.

At night, disappear into the rainforest at Kondalilla Eco Resort near Montville.

Set within 9ha of Sunshine Coast Hinterland rainforest beside Kondalilla National Park, the resort offers family-friendly accommodation in a rainforest setting with easy access to Kondalilla National Park.

MORE HINTERLAND FAMILY ADVENTURES

- The Ginger Factory in Yandina is a crowd-pleaser for younger kids. Be sure to leave enough time for the kids to decorate their own gingerbread man.
- For fresh air and big views, Mount Ninderry is an easy hike for most walkers. It's also one of the only mountain hikes where pooches are welcome on leads.
- Alsahwa Estate invites budding beekeepers to suit up and visit the hives with their beekeeper. Then swap the bee suit for morning tea by the lake.
- No family road trip is complete without a snap at The Big Pineapple, where you can climb inside the 16m icon and take a ride on the Pineapple Train.
- Right next door, Wildlife HQ is home to everything from koalas and Tassie devils to red pandas and meerkats, with bookable encounters for an even closer look.
- Got little climbers? TreeTop Challenge at The Big Pineapple precinct takes the adventure into the canopy with high ropes, ziplines and a dedicated course for younger kids.
- Spend a few hours wandering the Original Eumundi Markets (Wednesday and Saturday mornings), where local makers, street food and live entertainment fill the town with market-day buzz.
- After the markets, head across to The Imperial Hotel Eumundi, where the Jungle Kingdom playground is one of the best indoor kids playrooms you'll ever see.

DAY THREE

NOOSA, KENILWORTH AND BOOLOUMBA CREEK

Set the alarm a little earlier today – Noosa National Park is best explored before the day heats up.

From Noosa Headland, follow the 2.7km Coastal Walk to Hell's Gates. The track threads past pandanus, rocky bays and headlands with the Pacific flashing blue through the trees.

Then turn inland to Kenilworth, because road trips and ice-cream belong together.

Kenilworth Dairies is famous for their award-winning dairy products including ice-cream, yoghurt, cheese and mousse. This is one detour unlikely to receive complaints from the back seat!

For one last dose of green, continue towards Booloumba Creek in Conondale National Park. You'll need a high-clearance vehicle or 4WD, so check park alerts and road conditions before heading out.

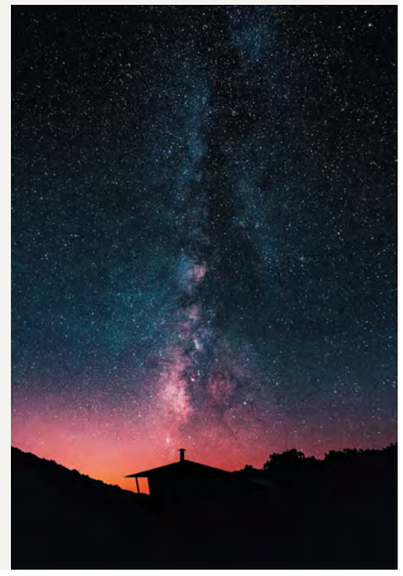
Finish the weekend at RACV Noosa Resort where the children can make a beeline for the pool or games room while the grown-ups contemplate doing considerably less.

GOT MORE TIME?

- The Sunshine Coast's Dark Sky Reserve offers a chance to escape the city lights and marvel at star-filled skies with guided stargazing experiences bringing the wonders of the night sky to life.
- Head north to Carlo Sandblow at Rainbow Beach, where a bush track opens onto an enormous sweep of wind-shaped sand and views across the coast.

Find out how RACQ members can save when visiting the Sunshine Coast.

← Family fun at Aussie World.
↑ An overhead view of the pool and coastline at Kings Beach, Caloundra
↓ A stunning star-filled Sunshine Coast night sky.



Sunshine Coast

Coast to country camping guide



From beachside holiday parks to hinterland campfires and Noosa glamping tents, Sunshine Coast camping makes it easy to turn a road trip into a proper summer escape.

There's a particular kind of Sunshine Coast morning that starts with sandy feet before breakfast.

Maybe you're unzipping the tent to the sound of waves at Dicky Beach, walking across the road for a sunrise swim at Coolum, or making coffee beside the caravan while the Maroochy River turns silver in the early light.

The beauty of camping and caravanning here is that you can choose your own pace – beach first, bakery first, bushwalk first, or absolutely nothing first.

The Sunshine Coast is made for road trips, with caravan parks and camping spots tucked along rivers, beside beaches, near hinterland villages and close to some of the region's best-known attractions.

WHERE CAN YOU CAMP BY THE BEACH?

For classic beachside camping, base yourself at one of the Sunshine Coast's holiday parks in Cotton Tree, Coolum, Maroochydore, Mudjimba or Dicky Beach.

Cotton Tree Holiday Park is a long-time favourite for good reason. Set where the Maroochy River meets the sea, it puts you within easy reach of calm-water swimming, flat paths for bike rides and sunset fish and chips by the river. It's the kind of place where kids can paddle for hours and grown-ups can linger over an extra coffee without needing to move the car.

Further along the coast, Coolum Beach Holiday Park is made for salty mornings. Roll out of bed, cross to the beach and you're straight into a swim or walk along the sand. The village is close enough for breakfast, groceries and a relaxed dinner.

Maroochydore Beach Holiday Park keeps you close to the action, with the beach, Cotton Tree, Sunshine Plaza and Ocean Street all nearby. If your camping style includes morning swims and evening restaurant options, this is a handy central base.

For something a little quieter, Mudjimba Beach Holiday Park has that easy local feel – shady streets, a broad beach, and views across to Mudjimba Island from the sand.

To the south, Dicky Beach Family Holiday Park puts you close to Caloundra's beaches, surf club meals and coastal walks. Wake up early and follow the path towards Moffat Beach, where the coffee tastes better with salt still on your skin.



Photos: Visit Sunshine Coast: Tourism and Evens Queensland.

BEST CAMPING SPOTS FOR FAMILIES

Families after built-in fun should look at holiday parks with splash zones, open space, wildlife encounters and easy access to beaches or creeks.

Big4 Caloundra is a crowd-pleaser for families who like their days full. Caravan and camping sites set the scene for a holiday of waterslides, a jumping pillow and beach-hopping around Caloundra. You can keep things simple with park days, or head out to Kings Beach, Bulcock Beach and the Pumicestone Passage when everyone's ready for a change of scenery.

In the Mary Valley, Borumba Deer Park brings a different kind of fun. Set beside Yabba Creek, it's the place for animal feeding, kayaking and that unmistakable country-camping feeling of waking to birdsong instead of traffic. It also gives you an excuse to slow down and explore Imbil, Kenilworth and the green folds of the valley.

At Ingenia Holidays Rivershore, near Maroochydore, camping comes with a few creature comforts. There are caravan and camping sites, plus family-friendly facilities including mini golf and an onsite licensed restaurant conveniently located right next to the pool.

CAMPING IN THE SUNSHINE COAST HINTERLAND

The hinterland is where the trip slows down – tall trees, cooler evenings, creek swims and campfire conversations that stretch a little longer.

Ocean View Caravan & Tourist Park sits within easy reach of the Glass House Mountains and Australia Zoo, making it a practical base if you want to combine camping with big-name Sunshine Coast stops.

At Kenilworth Homestead, the Mary River does most of the talking. This is the kind of place to bring the camp oven, a good book and a loose plan.

The village of Kenilworth is nearby for bakery runs, country pub meals and a wander through local shops.

GLAMPING ON THE SUNSHINE COAST

For a camping feel without giving up the bed, glamping around Noosa and the Everglades adds a little softness to the wild.

Habitat Noosa Everglades Eco Camp is one of the region's most distinctive stays, with glamping tents set near Lake Cootharaba at the gateway to the Noosa Everglades. It's a brilliant base for anyone who wants nature on the doorstep without having to wrestle with tent poles.

At Ingenia Holidays Noosa, safari tents offer a playful upgrade from the swag, while Ingenia Holidays Noosa North has pet-friendly cabin options for travellers bringing the dog along.

If you're heading further north, Tin Can Bay Tourist Park makes a relaxed base near the Great Sandy Strait. It's also close to the well-known dolphin feeding experience at Barnacles Dolphin Centre, making it a great add-on for travellers exploring beyond Noosa.

HOW TO PLAN YOUR CAMPING ROAD TRIP

The easiest way to plan a Sunshine Coast camping trip is to choose your holiday rhythm first.

If you want surf, cafes and coastal walks, stay close to the beach in Cotton Tree, Coolum, Maroochydore, Mudjimba or Caloundra.

If you want creeks, campfires and country roads, head for Kenilworth, the Mary Valley or the Glass House Mountains.

If you want comfort with a wild edge, look to Noosa, Lake Cootharaba and the Everglades.

For a longer road trip, try pairing two bases.

Start with a few nights by the beach, then roll inland for a hinterland stay.

Or begin in Caloundra, work your way through Maroochydore and Coolum, then finish with a glamping tent near Noosa.

The distances are friendly, but the landscapes shift quickly – surf one day, rainforest-edged roads the next.

↖ Campers and caravanners at Cotton Tree Holiday Park
← Stand-up paddleboarding at Noosa.

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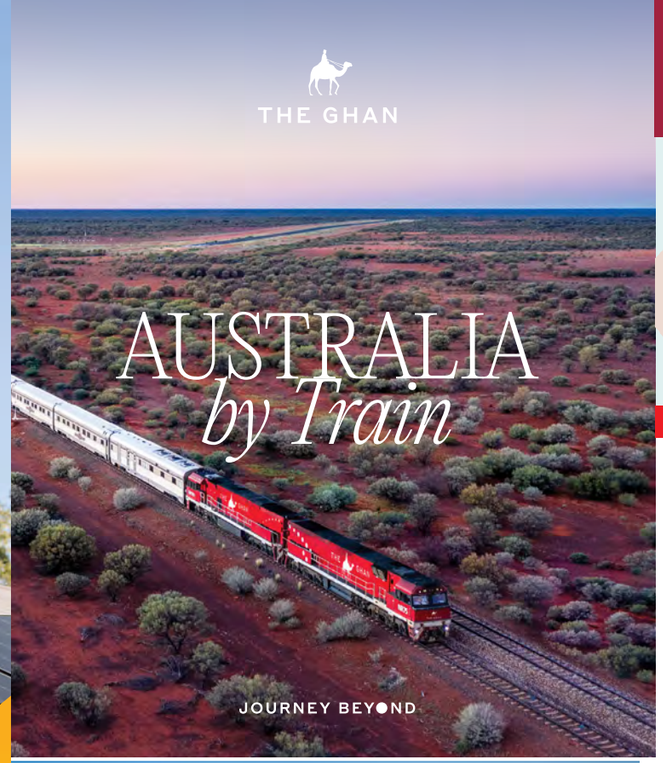

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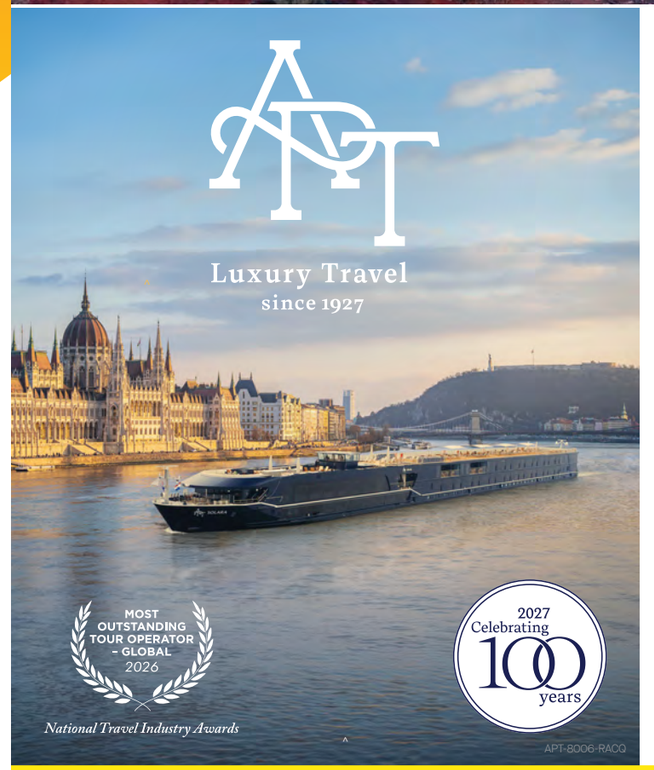

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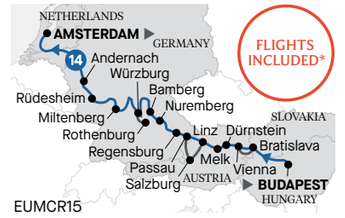

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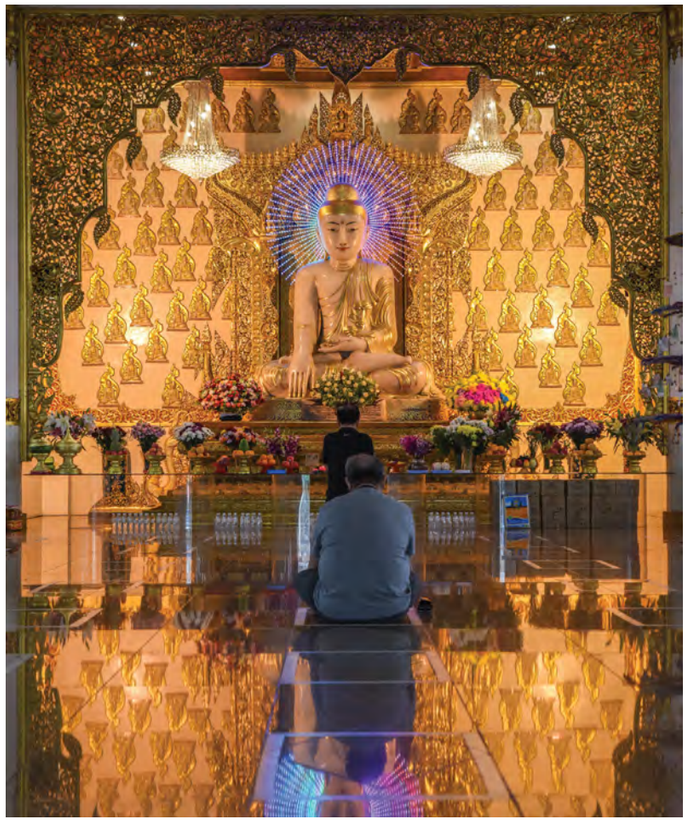
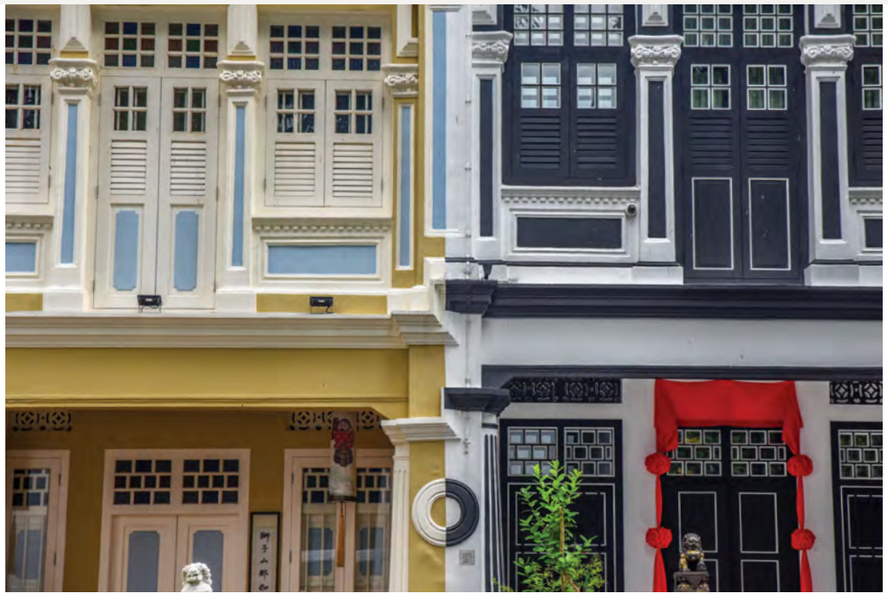
PIRATES, CREPES AND KINGS

Singapore's overlooked attractions

Singapore's tourist trail may be busy, but this city is so diverse it offers many fascinating, lesser-known attractions.

By **RONAN O'CONNELL**





Visitors who have navigated the crowds at Singapore's Gardens by the Bay or Chinatown, may appreciate the peace at this city-state's overlooked museums, parks, neighbourhoods and historic sites.

Such as the tranquil beach that reveals a surprising pirate history, the botanic garden dedicated to the city's national flower, or the colourful facility that explains its most unique community.

Not to mention the hilltop fort haunted by Islamic Kings, and the former convict settlement turned foodie haven.

Here's your guide to five of Singapore's most underrated attractions.

1

FORT CANNING PARK:
WANDER IN THE 'WILDERNESS'

Singapore's skyscrapers are only 2km away, yet Fort Canning Park has such dense vegetation and tree canopies that, at times, can feel like you're wandering in wilderness.

While Singapore is renowned for modern architecture, it's also aiming to become the world's greenest city, and so is laden with attractive parks.

Similar in size to Brisbane's City Botanic Gardens, Fort Canning Park occupies an elevated site in downtown Singapore, alongside tourist favourites like the National Museum of Singapore and Clarke Quay.

It is a fine place to escape the tropical heat due to its many shady lawns.

Visitors can also savour its meticulous gardens, 19th-century British fort, heritage museum, World War II bunker, and walking trails that pierce its serene expanse.

Look out for its time-worn wooden pavilion. The shrine is considered to be the resting place of Islamic Sultan Iskandar Shah, who ruled Singapore 600 years ago.

← Worshippers pray at a temple in the historic Balestier neighbourhood of Singapore.
↑ Colourful building facades in Balestier.
↓ A view of the upmarket holiday island Sentosa, which has a colourful past.
↴ View of a tree from a spiral staircase at Fort Canning Park.
The shrine which is believed to be the resting place of Islamic Sultan Iskandar Shah, who ruled Singapore 600 years ago.

2

PERANAKAN MUSEUM:
EXPLORE SINGAPORE'S UNIQUE HERITAGE

Tourists flood Singapore's vibrant Chinatown and Little India neighbourhoods, while overlooking a fascinating museum that explains this city's most unique community.

Peranakan people have distinctive fashion, architecture, food and rituals that blend cultural elements from China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Netherlands and Portugal.

Many Australians will be familiar with their most famous dish, laksa, an addictive curry noodle soup.

But they're unlikely to know the intriguing history of the Peranakans, which is summarised at this neat museum, via photos, videos, artefacts, and maps.

Peranakan culture evolved over centuries as Chinese settlers in South-East Asia intermarried with local communities, before flocking to Singapore after it was settled by the British in 1819.

Dressed in intricately-embroidered gowns and beaded shoes, they became renowned for their lavish weddings.

Nowadays, Singapore still has thousands of Peranakans but few have retained their historic customs, which makes this museum even more of an interesting stop for tourists.

3

NATIONAL ORCHID GARDEN:
A BLOOMING NATIONAL TREASURE

In Singapore, one blossom rules them all.

Orchids are not just Singapore's national flower, but also a key export and one of its national emblems.

It has dozens of orchid farms as well as its outstanding National Orchid Garden (NOG). More than 60,000 orchids are displayed at the NOG, inside the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Collectively, they are embellished by dozens of colours and boast countless intricate patterns. Amid this photogenic array are dozens of unique orchid hybrids found only in Singapore.

A separate orchid garden, alongside historic Burkill Hill inside the NOG, showcases one-off species specifically created by Singapore as gifts for national leaders like former US President Barack Obama.

4

EAST COAST PARK:
BEACHES, PIRATES AND MARITIME LEGENDS

Singapore's largest park stretches for 13km along its south-eastern coastline, from Changi Airport west to downtown.

Few tourists visit East Coast Park, but locals savour its many playgrounds, shady lawns, sporting facilities and beaches, the latter of which offer a glimpse of "Death Island".



Photos: Ronan O'Connell; Getty Images.

That is what Sentosa was called for centuries – before it became an upmarket holiday island – due to hosting many bloody pirate battles from the 1500s onwards.

Despite being a famously safe destination, piracy has played a recurring role in the history of the Singapore Strait for centuries.

The Singapore Strait ocean channel is now one of Asia's piracy hotspots, with more than 20 incidents in 2025 in which commercial vessels were robbed by armed pirates.

Visitors to East Coast Park's pretty Bedok Beach, meanwhile, can read signs that explain how this site is forever intertwined with Singapore's pirate legacy.

It was here, in 1603, that a bold act of piracy by Dutch sailors against a treasure-laden Portuguese ship sparked an international incident and changed maritime law forever. The legal battle that followed helped shape the modern concept of freedom of the seas, a cornerstone of international maritime law.

5

BALESTIER: HISTORIC FOOD AND CULTURE DISTRICT

Downtown Singapore is so rich with attractions that many tourists never venture into its quieter suburbs, like the charming, historic neighbourhood of Balestier.

Located 3km north of the city's main tourist district, it rewards inquisitive visitors with its serene parks, unique markets, array of temples, and photogenic, old-world appearance. Rainbow-hued shophouses embellish its main thoroughfare, Balestier Road. the area's fascinating history, meanwhile, is revealed to tourists who follow its marked walking trail, designed by the Singapore National Heritage Board.

Balestier developed around a sugar plantation established by American entrepreneur Joseph Balestier in the 1830s.

Visitors appreciate Balestier's array of temples – Maha Sasanaramsi, Lian Sin Sia, Goh Chor Tua Pek Kong, and Thong Teck Sian Tong – as well as the peace and shade of Zhongshan Park, and the myriad treats of Balestier Market.

The latter covered facility has more than a dozen small restaurants serving Singaporean favourites like Hainan chicken rice, char kway teow noodles, and laksa curry noodle soup.





SINGAPORE'S STAR ATTRACTIONS

AFTER EXPLORING Singapore's quieter corners, travellers can balance their itinerary with some of the city-state's best-known sights.

GARDENS BY THE BAY

Vast, beautiful and high-tech, this 101ha botanic facility is decorated by three sublime gardens, two huge conservatories, and 18 "Supertrees", which are metallic, glowing towers covered in thousands of plants.

SENTOSA

Arguably the best family destination in South-East Asia, Sentosa Island is laden with theme parks, beach resorts, jungle adventures, water parks, golf courses, luxury spas, and a massive aquarium.

CHINATOWN

Singapore's historic heart beats in Chinatown, a buzzing area defined by street markets, atmospheric temples, cheap Hawker food centres, and unique museums.

MARINA BAY SANDS

Looming above Gardens by the Bay is this iconic skyscraper, which hosts a hotel, shopping centre, and a famous, 150m-long rooftop infinity pool offering splendid views of Singapore's modern skyline.

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★ Flight to Melbourne & from Newcastle ex Brisbane ★ Luxury 'Diamond Class' coach travel ★ 'Ned Kelly's Last Stand' light & sound show ★ 3 nights Albury ★ Bright's Gala Day at the Autumn Festival ★ 2 nights Southern Highlands ★ Australian Wildlife Sanctuary ★ Lunch with wine at Centennial Vineyard ★ Bradman Museum ★ Nepean Belle Paddlewheeler cruise ★ 1 night Newcastle ★ 17 meals
Per person twin share FROM $4,575*

4 DAYS
EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO $100PP* Mar date; Book by 31 Dec 2026
Return airfares included**
DEPARTS > 18 MAR 2027
WORLD FLOWER SHOW SYDNEY
★ Flights from Brisbane to Sydney ★ 3 nights at Sydney Olympic Park ★ Welcome lunch at Botanic House & guided tour of the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney ★ 3-day pass to World Flower Show 2027 & Sydney Royal Easter Show ★ Sydney Harbour lunch cruise ★ Final Sydney sightseeing including Mrs Macquarie's Chair; Kings Cross; and Bondi Beach ★ 7 meals ★ Locally operated coach
Per person twin share FROM $2,820*

4 DAYS
EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO $100PP* Mar date; Book by 31 Dec 2026
DEPARTS > 21 MAR 2027
THE NEIL DIAMOND MUSICAL & O'REILLY'S
★ Luxury 'Gold Class' coach travel ★ O'Reilly's Canungra Valley Vineyards lunch & wine ★ 2 nights O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat ★ Lamington National Park ★ Tree Top Canopy Walk ★ Birds of Prey live show ★ 4WD Tour ★ Saltwater Dreaming Tour & Indigenous-inspired lunch ★ 1 night Brisbane ★ Premium ground-floor seating to 'A Beautiful Noise: The Neil Diamond Musical' ★ 9 meals
Per person twin share FROM $2,020*

4 DAYS
DEPARTS > 18 FEB 2027
CHINCHILLA MELON FESTIVAL
★ Luxury 'Gold Class' coach travel ★ Queensland Museum Cobb & Co ★ 3 nights Chinchilla ★ Chinchilla Folk Museum and melon farm tour ★ Cactoblastis Monument ★ Chinchilla Melon Festival day & night display ★ Entry to the Rodeo, a night of real outback rodeo entertainment ★ Kingaroy Heritage Museum ★ Peanut Van ★ Lunch at Moffatdale Ridge Winery ★ 8 meals
Per person twin share FROM $1,990*

6 DAYS
Return airfares included**
DEPARTS > 19 MAR 2027
MELBOURNE'S CULTURAL ODYSSEY
★ Flights from Brisbane to Melbourne ★ Luxury 'Diamond Class' coach travel ★ 5 nights Crowne Plaza Melbourne ★ Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show ★ Mornington Peninsula ★ Port Phillip Bay ★ Werribee Park Mansion and Rose Garden ★ Wine and dine on the Q Train ★ Off-road safari at Werribee Open Range Zoo ★ Free day in Melbourne ★ 12 meals
Per person twin share FROM $4,175*

5 DAYS
EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO $150PP* Jun date; Book by 31 Dec 2026
Return airfares included**
DEPARTS > 2 JUN 2027
HUNTER VALLEY, BLUE MOUNTAINS & VIVID SYDNEY FESTIVAL
★ Flights to Newcastle & from Sydney ex Brisbane ★ Luxury 'Diamond Class' coach travel ★ 1 night Hunter Valley including winery lunch ★ Nepean Belle Paddlewheeler lunch cruise ★ 1 night Blue Mountains ★ Scenic World Skyway ★ 2 nights Sydney ★ SkyFeast dinner ★ Sydney Opera House tour ★ Vivid Sydney Starlight Cruise ★ Bondi Beach ★ 11 meals
Per person twin share FROM $4,000*

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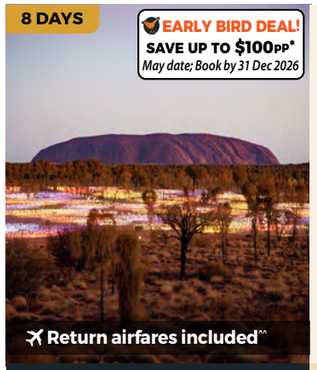

EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO $100PP* May date; Book by 31 Dec 2026

Return airfares included^^

★ Flights to Alice Springs & from Uluru ex Brisbane ★ 3 nights Alice Springs ★ West MacDonnell Ranges ★ Ormiston Gorge ★ Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience ★ 1 night Kings Canyon ★ 3 nights at Sails in the Desert, Yulara ★ Sunrise Field of Light experience ★ Uluru camel trek adventure ★ 25-minute helicopter tour of Uluru & Kata Tjuta ★ Sounds of Silence dinner ★ 18 meals

DEPARTS > 11 MAY; 23 JUN 2027

Per person twin share FROM $7,300*

10 DAYS — TREASURES OF TASMANIA GRAND TOUR



EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO $100PP* Jan, Feb dates; Book by 31 Dec 2026

Return airfares included^^

★ Flights from Brisbane to Hobart ★ Luxury 'Diamond Class' coach travel ★ 3 nights Hobart ★ Guided tour of Port Arthur and harbour cruise ★ 2 nights Strahan Village, Gordon River Cruise and Wilderness Railway ★ Overnight in Cradle Mountain & St Helens ★ Tasmanian Devil feeding ★ 2 nights Devonport ★ Chairlift ride at Cataract Gorge, Launceston ★ Scenic flight over Wineglass Bay ★ 26 meals

DEPARTS > 23 JAN; 6, 24 FEB 2027

Per person twin share FROM $7,820*

8 DAYS — NORFOLK ISLAND INDULGENCE



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★ Return flights from Brisbane to Norfolk Island ★ Fully escorted by an experienced Fun Over 50 Holidays tour host ★ 7 nights Norfolk Island ★ Island Fish Fry dinner ★ 'Night as a Convict' dinner ★ Emily Bay ★ Bounty Museum ★ Naturally Norfolk Tour ★ Progressive Dinner ★ Paddock to Plate Tour ★ Glass-bottom boat cruise ★ Governor's Lodge dinner ★ Fletcher's Mutiny Cyclorama ★ 21 meals

DEPARTS > 29 APR 2027

Per person twin share FROM $4,623*

8 DAYS — LAKE EYRE, COOBER PEDY & FLINDERS RANGES



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★ Return flights from Brisbane to Adelaide ★ Local quality coach travel ★ 2 nights Adelaide & Wilpena Pound ★ Overnight in Port Augusta, Coober Pedy & William Creek ★ Umoona Opal Mine tour ★ Scenic flight from Coober Pedy over Painted Hills to Anna Creek Station for tour & drinks then to William Creek ★ 1.5 hour scenic flight over Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre & surrounds ★ Wilpena Pound 30-min flight ★ 14 meals

DEPARTS > 7, 16 MAY; 4 JUN 2027

Per person twin share FROM $6,524*

13 DAYS — DARWIN, KAKADU, KIMBERLEY & BROOME



EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO $150PP* May dates; Book by 31 Dec 2026

Return airfares included^^

★ Flights to Darwin & from Broome ex Brisbane ★ Luxury 'Gold Class' coach travel ★ 2 nights Darwin, Kakadu & Broome ★ 30-min scenic flight & wetlands cruise ★ 1 night Katherine including Katherine Gorge dinner cruise ★ 3 nights Kununurra with Ord River cruise ★ Bungle Bungles flight ★ 1 night Halls Creek ★ 1 night Fitzroy Crossing ★ Willie Creek Pearl Farm ★ 35 meals

DEPARTS > 12, 29 MAY; 1 JUL 2027

Per person twin share FROM $10,975*

12 DAYS — OUTBACK QUEENSLAND, GULF & SAVANNAH SAFARI



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★ Luxury 'Diamond Class' coach travel ★ Overnight in Roma, Blackall, Cloncurry, Undara Lava Tubes & Cairns ★ 2 nights Longreach plus iconic sites ★ Winton's Australian Age of Dinosaurs ★ 2 nights Karumba, sunset dinner cruise ★ Gulflander & Savannahlander rail journeys ★ 2 nights Cobbold Gorge; cruise & helicopter flight ★ Flight from Cairns to Brisbane ★ 33 meals

DEPARTS > 19 MAY; 16 JUN; 14 JUL 2027

Per person twin share FROM $8,720*

11 DAYS — CAPE YORK & TORRES STRAIT ADVENTURE



Return airfares included^^

★ Flights from Brisbane to Cairns plus Qantas flight from Horn Island to Cairns ★ Overnight in Port Douglas, Daintree National Park, Cooktown, Musgrave Roadhouse, Weipa, Bramwell Station, Thursday Island & Cairns ★ Mossman Gorge ★ Cape Tribulation ★ Bloomfield Track ★ Lion's Den Hotel ★ Western Cape Eco Cruise ★ 2 nights Bamaga ★ Pajinka - The Tip of Cape York ★ 28 meals

DEPARTS > 17 MAY 2027

Per person twin share FROM $8,020*

9 DAYS — HERON ISLAND & CARNARVON GORGE



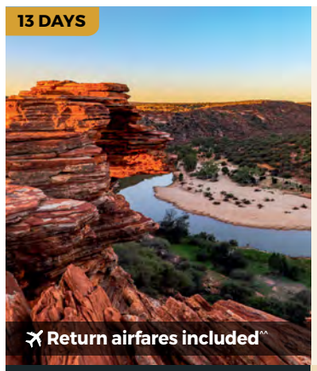
EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO $150PP* May date; Book by 31 Dec 2026

★ Luxury 'Diamond' or 'Gold Class' coach travel ★ 2 nights Agnes Water ★ Full day amphibious 1770 LARC! Paradise Tour ★ 2 nights Heron Island Resort with daily naturalist eco & bird watching tours & reef walks ★ 1 night Gladstone ★ Greycliffe Homestead at Biloela ★ 2 nights Carnarvon Gorge ★ Guided gorge walks with Australian Nature Guides including the spectacular Moss Garden ★ 1 night Roma ★ 16 meals

DEPARTS > GOLD: 1 JUN 2027; DIAMOND: 8 MAY; 26 AUG 2027

Per person twin share FROM $5,020* GOLD CLASS

13 DAYS — WEST COAST WANDERER



Return airfares included^^

★ Flights to Broome & from Perth ex Brisbane ★ Luxury 'Gold Class' or third-party coach travel ★ 2 nights Broome, Port Hedland, Exmouth & Monkey Mia ★ Willie Creek Pearl Farm ★ Camel ride on Cable Beach ★ Overnight in Karratha, Kalbarri, Geraldton & Perth ★ Guided Ningaloo Reef tour ★ Kalbarri National Park & Skywalk ★ The Pinnacles, Nambung National Park ★ 34 meals

DEPARTS > 3RD PARTY: 22 AUG 2027. GOLD: 13 SEP 2027

Per person twin share FROM $9,700*

9 DAYS — SAVANNAHLANDER & GULFLANDER OUTBACK TRACKS



EARLY BIRD DEAL! SAVE UP TO $150PP* May dates; Book by 31 Dec 2026

Return airfares included^^

★ Flights from Brisbane to Cairns ★ Luxury 'Diamond Class' coach travel ★ 2 nights Cairns, Karumba & Cobbold Gorge ★ Kuranda, Gulflander & Savannahlander rail journeys ★ Overnight in Georgetown & Undara ★ Sunset cruise & dinner at Karumba ★ Scenic helicopter flight ★ Cobbold Gorge cruise with Savannah guide ★ Undara Lava Tubes ★ 23 meals

DEPARTS > 15, 29 MAY; 12 JUN 2027

Per person twin share FROM $6,500*

19 DAYS — NEW ZEALAND NATURAL WONDERS



Return airfares included^^

★ Flights to Auckland & from Christchurch ex Brisbane ★ 2 nights Auckland, Bay of Islands, Rotorua, Wellington, Queenstown & Dunedin ★ Māori Village experience and Hāngi ★ Lake Taupo ★ Coastal Pacific rail journey ★ 3 nights Christchurch ★ TranzAlpine rail journey ★ 1 night Franz Josef ★ 1 night aboard the Milford Mariner ★ 1 night Te Anau ★ Larnach Castle ★ 2 nights Christchurch ★ 52 meals

DEPARTS > 7 APR 2027

Per person twin share FROM $13,675*

8 DAYS — ICONS OF OUTBACK QUEENSLAND



★ Overnight 'Spirit of the Outback' rail journey in Sleeper Cabins ★ Luxury 'Diamond' or 'Gold Class' coach travel ★ 3 nights Longreach with local iconic touring ★ Sunset cruise dinner & show ★ Winton's Australian Age of Dinosaurs ★ 2 nights at Toogunna Plains Farmstay ★ Eromanga Dinosaur Museum tour & dinner ★ Bilby encounter ★ 1 night Roma ★ 21 meals

DEPARTS > GOLD: 7 AUG 2027 DIAMOND: 3, 31 JUL 2027

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Treasure island, nature's bounty

If X really did mark the spot for treasure hunters, Norfolk Island's map would be a cross-stitch tapestry.

By **SUSAN ELLIOTT**



Photos: Norfolk Island Tourism.

↙ An aerial view of picturesque Anson Bay.
→ Abundant birdlife on Norfolk Island includes the green parrot and masked booby.
↓ The historic site of the former Government House building.
The boardwalk down to Bumboras Beach.





Wearing T-shirts and bucket hats, my fellow passengers on QF179 don't look anything like bounty hunters.

But we are. And we're armed.

Cameras and smart phones are charged, and everyone understands the brief – to seek and enjoy the treasures of this South Pacific isle.

After a two-hour flight – they come in from either Sydney or Brisbane – the final approach into Norfolk Island is flagged by thousands of its famous pines, their monstrous green fronds framing the runway and swaying like the loving arms of football fans.

Trying to steal the show are towering granite cliffs coddling tiny white beaches, coral reefs screeching blue and green, and the sandstone ruins of Kingston.

Once the South Pacific's most cruel penal settlement, the old town now sits pretty in manicured lawns that could have been trimmed with nail scissors.

We are gifted our first treasure in the arrival's hall where "watawieh" (pronounced wot-a-way) welcomes all.

It means "how are you?" in Norf'k – a curious mix of 18th-century English and Tahitian.

It was the language of Fletcher Christian's *Bounty* mutineers and their Tahitian wahine who settled on Pitcairn Island – their descendants later relocated to Norfolk.

Answer by saying "kushu", which means great, and you've just spoken one of the rarest languages in the world.

SUNKEN TREASURE

Norfolk's beaches are sirens.

Emily Bay is the Instagram-ready model, perfectly poised with Lone Pine its slender side kick.

A steep switchback descent reveals Anson Bay, one of the most remote stretches of sand in the world, Bumboras Beach lures with a cool forest boardwalk, then there's Slaughter Bay, which is the antithesis of its horrendous name.

Slaughter is the old English word for slow-moving water, which wasn't the case on 19 March 1790 when HMS *Sirius*, the flagship of the First Fleet, lost a violent, watery bout here.

Artefacts from the wreck – the ship's one-tonne anchor, carronades and cannonballs – now RIP in Norfolk Island Museum, just metres from the wreck site.

To explore this First Fleet treasure to the real-life soundtrack of crashing waves is a unique experience.

Beneath the waves are living treasures – including fish found nowhere else in the world, like the Norfolk Island blenny, freckled dwarfgoby and the gilded tuskfish.

Snorkelling Emily Bay I am hoping to spot them.

However, I am distracted by Norfolk's cheeky and highly territorial aatuti.

They dash out from coral bommies attempting to kiss me to death with their teeny-weeny mouths.

I pick a bunch of "sea grapes" to feed them and enjoy a few myself – the gas-filled beads pop in my mouth like bursts of salty caviar.

There are riches overhead, too.

Each year tens of thousands of seabirds – petrels, red-tailed tropic birds, shearwaters, masked boobies, gannets and sooty terns – fly in to breed.

But it's in Norfolk's ancient rainforest that I find a special feathered treasure – the Norfolk green parrot.

Its call – 'kek-kek-kek' – helps me home in on its location.

What a treat to see this species that once faced extinction.

But it's a quick show.

A pair of the rare birds flash their red crowns and are off.

Harder to spot (I don't see one during my time of the island), is the Norfolk Island morepork, a species of owl whose numbers dwindled to one single female in 1986, before two males were introduced from New Zealand to save the lineage.

ARTISTIC TREASURES

Saving the stories of Norfolk's rare and endangered flora and fauna is local artist Sorrel Wilby.

I find her at In the Wild, a new venture that has mini golf, a rainforest walk, cafe, bar and Wilby's art gallery Nature's Bounty.

Her beautiful pastel drawings illustrate the who's who and the who was, of Norfolk's flora and fauna – the vulnerable, critically endangered and extinct.

It's the tip of a massive project.

After winning a Churchill Fellowship, Wilby travelled overseas to examine preserved specimens of species long ago lost to the island.

Now she documents and draws them, ensuring the burgled bounty is being brought home in a growing collection she is gifting to the island.

To "meet" the grey-headed guava bird, the local subspecies of the long-tailed triller, and the Norfolk kākā is a grounding moment, one Wilby tells me, has brought many to tears.





CONVICT WAYS

I expect many tears were shed during Norfolk's penal colony days.

There were two convict settlements here. The first, as a mainly agricultural outpost to support Sydney, lasted from 1788 to 1814; the second, from 1825 to 1855 saw the worst of the worst sent here.

It was a brutal place for prisoners, described by Australian author Marcus Clarke as "hell in paradise" in his novel *For the Term of His Natural Life*.

In 1834, visiting vicar Father William Ullathorne noted prisoners sentenced to hang saw death as mercy.

"Every man who was reprieved broke down in tears while those condemned to death dropped to their knees, dry-eyed, and thanked God they were to be delivered from the place," he wrote.

Today, Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area is a UNESCO heritage-listed site.

I'm exploring it on bicycle with Kingston Cruisers, a business that sets up guests with a step-through bike, phone and headset for a GPS audio tour.

Each bite of information is triggered to play as I pedal around the site, and I love that I can set my own pace, which is a slow one.

The gory stories you'll hear by day, are more terrifying at night.

I join a lantern-lit walking ghost tour through the convict cemetery to a duplex on Quality Row that is said to be one of Australia's most haunted houses.

The hairs prickling on the back of my neck seem to confirm it.

The ghost stories are oral treasures, passed down through generations, preserving the folklore and ensuring the tales of nameless convicts, mistreated servants and local figures are not lost to time.

While it's dark, look up. Norfolk is a gold-level dark sky zone and the cosmos here sparkles.

There are tours on offer, but with no need for a telescope it's easy to lay down a rug at Captain Cook lookout or Anson Bay to see some of the brightest stars in the South Pacific.

LOCAL GEMS

Howie Martin guides me on rainforest hikes, Phoenix Kenny teaches me how to paint pine trees, PJ Wilson rolls me through Hundred Acre Reserve on a horse-drawn carriage, Haydn "Teddy" Evans sells me his homegrown veggies at the market, and at Cascade Pier, Scotty gives me the catch of the day.

The local favourite is trumpeter and the whole fish costs just $20.

Without doubt, though, the Norfolk folk are the most valuable booty you'll find.

Don't leave without a spending a night with the island's top chef, Kurt Menghetti.

At the Homestead Restaurant, I watch as he spoons coconut-turmeric broth over flametail snapper, caught just hours earlier.

Meanwhile, sizzling away beside Kurt are locally sourced meats and vegetables.

They're charring over a hand-built Argentinian parrilla (grill), fired by charcoal Kurt makes himself from olive tree wood on his property. That's gold. So too is his naturally fermented sourdough and a crème caramel that sells out nightly.

Of all the crosses on this treasure of an island, I think I've found my favourite.

PRACTICAL TIPS

1. **Book a hire car early.**
2. **Book tours before you leave home.**
3. **Make special dinner reservations.**
4. **Don't miss sunset over Anson Bay.**
5. **BYO snorkel gear if you prefer your own.**

GETTING THERE

Qantas flies directly to Norfolk Island from Brisbane and Sydney. **qantas.com**

MORE INFORMATION

norfolkisland.com.au

The writer was a guest of Norfolk Island Tourism.



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Photo: Tourism and Events Queensland

Worth the detour

Consider these five Queensland experiences you won't find on the highway when planning your next road trip.

By **LIZ BOND**

The very best of Queensland rarely sits by the highway.

Instead, it might be found down a gravel track, over a cattle grid, or up a steep hill where the only signage is sun-faded, hand-painted and tied to the gate with an "occy" strap.

It's more than simply getting off the beaten track.

Several of these destinations and experiences have a backstory involving generations of hard yakka, pure innovation, and more often than not a little serendipity.

TRUFFLE HUNTING AT THE FOLLY, TRUFFLES BALLANDEAN

When it comes to folly, some might think establishing a truffle farm in sub-tropical Queensland is the ultimate.

Not so for long-time Francophiles Mike and Judi Edgerton, son Ben and daughter-in-law Maple, of The Folly Truffles near Ballandean, about 30 minutes from Stanthorpe.

The Granite Belt's elevation and granite-rich soil make it not only perfect for wine growing; it's also prime Périgord truffle country thanks to its frosty winters and warm, dry summers.

You don't simply pick truffles; you hunt them. Winter is truffle season, and hunts run Friday to Sunday from June to August, led by the ever-energetic Barry, a dashing bull arab with a nose for the black gold buried underground.

Afterwards, head down the road to The Church, an immaculately restored 99-year-old church that's transformed into the Local Wine Project, for a grazing platter of truffle deliciousness.

The Truffle Trailer is open Friday to Sunday, 11am–3pm for delicious truffle and three-cheese toasties with exquisite golden truffle fries; no booking, no truffle knowledge required. And you might learn a thing or two about Granite Belt wine, while you're at it.

thefollytruffles.com.au

TAMBORINE RAINFOREST SKYWALK

This epic undertaking almost happened by accident.

After creating their award-winning Songbirds in the Forest Restaurant on Tamborine Mountain, the Moore family left the lower 12ha of their property untouched.

When you descend to the dense forest floor, you don't merely see; you feel, hear and breathe in this amazing ecosystem.

An overhead view of the Tamborine Rainforest Skykwalk.

Later, they discovered a glow-worm colony.

The family began informal day and night tours, which grew so popular they decided to build a permanent walkway beneath the canopy and above the dense forest floor.

It took five arduous years to build a 1.5km elevated steel walkway through the rainforest canopy, finishing with a cantilever bridge suspended 30m above Cedar Creek. Amazingly they didn't fell a single tree during construction.

The fully accessible suspended walkway takes you on an immersive journey through, above and below the ancient Gondwana rainforest.

Strangler vines encircle giant native trees, then creep and entwine in overhead bowers. When you descend to the dense forest floor, you don't merely see, you feel, hear and breathe in this amazing ecosystem of rockpools, fungi, butterflies and the occasional koala.

skywalktamborine.com

KALKI MOON DISTILLERY LUNAR LOUNGE, BUNDABERG

Pair a family-run gin and rum distillery with a bar that sports its own indoor driving range, and you have a game-changer.

When co-owners Rick and Kylie Prosser installed TrackMan golf simulator technology into the Lunar Lounge, they believe it made Kalki Moon one of the first distilleries in the world to offer the experience.

The opening of the Lunar Lounge means you can now tour the distillery, blend your own, taste some distinctive spirits and "play" a round at famous golf courses like St Andrews or Pebble Beach.

And in another first, the Lunar Lounge serves only Queensland-made artisan spirits, beer and wine, making it a favourite detour for tourists.

Since opening in 2017, Kalki Moon's success has meant the distillery has outgrown its original footprint.

Now two copper stills named Mari and Mary (after Master Distiller Rick's grandmothers) are part of the small-batch gin and rum process.

kalkimoon.com.au

KIN KIN SPRINGS BATHHOUSES

The Noosa Hinterland is one of Queensland's most distinctive landscapes, where rolling countryside, ancient forests and protected natural areas combine to create a region unlike anywhere else.

Charming country towns sit alongside lush national parks and in the tiny village of Kin Kin, about 45km north-west of Noosa, there's something altogether different – the Kin Kin Springs Bathhouses.

Life doesn't get much better than lying back in your own warm, springwater-fed bath overlooking the green valleys and hills of the Noosa Hinterland, where your only neighbours are cows and kangaroos.

The gentle flutter of butterflies is the only interruption to a blissful two-hour soak.

Because the two bathhouses are perfectly secluded, you first need to hop on the off-road buggy with owners Lisa or Charley to get to the ridgetop where your warm bath has already been drawn.

(Insider tip: Add the natural, fragrant oils for the full sensory experience.)

The bathhouses are perfect for a girls weekend with your besties or if a romantic interlude is on your mind, you can stretch out with your one-and-only side by side in the extra-deep, handcrafted tubs made by a local artisan from recycled materials.

kinkinspringbathhouses.com.au





MI RIDE DISCOVERY TOUR, MAGNETIC ISLAND
Have you even been to Townsville if you haven't visited Magnetic Island?

Home to northern Australia's largest koala colony and 23 beaches and bays, the island is magical.

Most of its 52 square kilometres is classified as national park and although only a 20-minute ferry ride from Townsville, it feels remote and is unlike much of Australia's coast.

Hitch a ride with MI Ride's zoologist and local ecologist Tim Hempstead to visit the less-visited west side, where eucalypt forests range up hillsides, mangroves shelter a diverse ecology, and you can grab a secluded beach all to yourself.

Tim shares his knowledge over three hours in a specially reconstructed 4WD bus that traverses creeks and secluded off-road tracks.

South African-born and a former elite Olympic rowing coach, Tim was a keen African wildlife photographer.

When he landed in North Queensland, he fell for Magnetic Island and now revels in spotting koalas, not lions.

A share of tour profits go to the Magnetic Island Nature Care Association.
miride.com.au

↖ A koala moves along a tree branch on Magnetic Island.
← The Kin Kin Springs Bathhouses offer rustic charm and relaxation.



FIVE ICONIC OVERSEAS ROAD TRIPS



From Iceland's otherworldly landscapes to Germany's fairy-tale castles, these iconic international drives offer unforgettable experiences for road trippers.

From winding mountain passes to dramatic coastlines, some drives have earned legendary status among travellers.

Here are five road trips worth considering for your next overseas adventure.

1
THE DOLOMITES, ITALY
Towering peaks, sweeping valleys and picturesque alpine villages make Italy's Dolomites one of Europe's most celebrated driving destinations. Base yourself in Cortina d'Ampezzo and explore spectacular mountain passes such as Passo Giau and Passo Pordoi, where winding roads deliver sweeping views of the UNESCO-listed alpine landscape.

2
HOKKAIDO, JAPAN
Japan's northernmost island offers a very different road-trip experience. Scenic roads connect volcanic landscapes, national parks, flower-filled countryside (pictured) and traditional hot springs. In summer, the lavender fields of Furano burst into colour, while autumn brings brilliant displays of red, gold and orange across the island's forests and mountain ranges.

3
RING ROAD, ICELAND
Stretching more than 1,300km around the island, Iceland's Ring Road showcases some of the country's most spectacular scenery. Waterfalls tumble from sheer cliffs, glaciers meet the sea and steaming geothermal landscapes sit alongside dramatic black-sand beaches, creating an unforgettable self-drive adventure.

4
GERMAN ALPINE ROAD, GERMANY
Winding more than 450km through the heart of Bavaria, Germany's oldest scenic touring route showcases fairy-tale castles, alpine villages, sparkling lakes and mountain vistas. Highlights include Neuschwanstein Castle, Lake Chiemsee and the beauty of the Berchtesgaden region, making it one of Europe's classic journeys.

5
ICEFIELDS PARKWAY, CANADA
Connecting Jasper National Park and Banff National Park, the 230km Icefields Parkway is regularly ranked among the world's great road trips. The route winds past turquoise lakes, towering mountain peaks and ancient glaciers, with the chance to spot wildlife such as elk and bighorn sheep.

INSPIRED TO TAKE AN OVERSEAS ROAD TRIP?
Driving overseas can be one of the best ways to experience a destination, but requirements vary from country to country. Before you leave Australia, check whether you'll need an International Driving Permit (IDP), particularly if you're planning to hire a vehicle.

An IDP is an official translation of your Queensland driver licence into nine languages and may be required by local authorities or requested by vehicle hire companies in some countries. It can also help simplify interactions with police, rental providers and insurers while travelling abroad.

The permit is valid for 12 months and must be carried alongside your Australian driver's licence when driving overseas.

RACQ is Queensland's authorised sales agent for IDPs on behalf of the Australian Automobile Association. Permits can be purchased online or issued on the spot at participating RACQ stores.
TRAVEL TIP: In countries where an IDP is not legally required, some rental companies may still ask to see one before handing over the keys.

To check requirements for your destination or apply online, visit racq.com/travel/international-driving-permit or scan the QR code.

Cheapest cars to own and operate



RACQ's annual Vehicle Operating Costs Report takes the emotion out of the new-car buying process, providing the hard cost-of-ownership data on 85 vehicles in six categories.

By **GED BULMER**

In journalist Malcolm Gladwell's year-2000 non-fiction book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference*, he describes examples of the moment an idea, trend, or social behaviour crosses a critical threshold and spreads rapidly.

Australia's electrified vehicle 'tipping point' may have arrived this year with consumers eagerly adopting new powertrain technologies in response to rising fuel costs and the increasing availability of affordably priced electrified alternatives.

In addition to record electrified vehicle sales, 2026 marked another milestone with RACQ's annual Vehicle Operating Costs (VOC) Report crowning a battery electric vehicle (BEV), the BYD Atto 1 (pictured above and right), as the most affordable vehicle to own and operate in Queensland.

RACQ Principal Economic and Affordability Specialist Dr Ian Jeffreys said the findings mark a turning point for motorists, with plug-in electric vehicles (EV and PHEV) accounting for 34.5% of Australia's new vehicle market in September.

"Electric vehicles have been closing the affordability gap with petrol cars for several years, but for the first time, some are now cheaper to own and operate than their petrol or diesel counterparts," Dr Jeffreys said.

As with past VOC reports, our research shows that the vehicle with the lowest purchase price isn't always the most affordable in the long term, with the report examining a wide range of costs including fuel, servicing and insurance to provide a clear picture of how much vehicles in different segments actually cost to own and operate.

"When you add up purchase price, loan repayments and fuel or charging costs, EVs and plug-in hybrids are becoming a much stronger proposition for motorists," Dr Jeffreys said.

"However, we know a cheap car isn't always the right car. Motorists should still do their homework on safety, security and suitability before making a decision."

Visit **racq.com.au/voc** for the full report.

Light & small passenger SUV

BYD ATTO 1 ESSENTIAL EV

$45k TOTAL 5-YEAR OWNERSHIP COST

AUSTRALIANS HAVE NEVER had more choice when it comes to affordable electric vehicles (EVs) and BYD has further upped the ante with its keenly priced Atto 1 electric hatch.

The BYD Atto 1 Essential was the lowest-cost vehicle in its category under both conventional finance and novated leasing and takes the overall crown as the most affordable vehicle to own and operate in Queensland. Its win marks a historic transition in the new-vehicle landscape, being the first time a battery-electric vehicle has been crowned our overall winner.

The Atto 1 Essential's low electricity costs and competitive purchase price saw it beat petrol, hybrid and other electric rivals over the five-year ownership period.

Under conventional financing, the Atto 1 was $236 per month less expensive than the category average, and $2,835 less expensive over a year.

The advantage is even greater for eligible novated leases, where BEVs benefit from FBT exemption.

The entry-level Atto 1 Essential features a single electric motor sending 65kW/175Nm to the front wheels and a 30kWh battery which delivers a modest 220km of range on the WLTP test cycle.

Since the analysis was completed, the Atto 1 Essential was temporarily discounted to $19,990 driveaway, representing a saving of more than $6,000 on the price used in our report.

For those who prefer combustion-power, the Chery Tiggo 4 was the most affordable petrol model, its five-year ownership costs being $5,000 higher than the winning Atto 1 Essential.

	AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS						TOTAL COSTS			
MODEL	ON ROAD PRICE	LOAN REPAYMENTS	REGISTRATION & INSURANCES	FUEL	SERVICING	TYRES	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	5-YEAR TOTAL	CALCULATED RESIDUAL
1. BYD ATTO 1 ESSENTIAL EV	$26,354	$498	$166	$54	$30	$2	$751	$9,007	**$45,037**	$12,700
2. CHERRY TIGGO 4 URBAN	$23,990	$463	$160	$178	$29	$4	$834	$10,008	**$50,038**	$8,900
3. MG ZS VIBE	$24,351	$471	$174	$161	$38	$3	$848	$10,170	**$50,852**	$8,900



Medium Passenger

BYD SEAL 6 ESSENTIAL PHEV

$63k TOTAL 5-YEAR OWNERSHIP COST

CONVENTIONAL SEDANS and station wagons have looked in danger of becoming extinct in recent years, swamped by SUVs.

But BYD is keeping faith with the formats, launching the Seal 6 in both body styles. The Seal 6 Essential sedan is the entry point into the two-variant range, undercutting the Touring wagon by $5,000 and claiming the title of lowest-cost medium passenger vehicle.

Under conventional financing, the Seal 6 was $464 per month less expensive than the category average, and $5,567 less expensive over a year. Both variants feature the same 1.5-litre Atkinson-cycle four-cylinder petrol engine as part of BYD's widely used DM-i (Dual Motor Intelligent) powertrain, but the Essential sedan gets a smaller 10.08 kWh lithium iron phosphate (LFP) battery delivering a pure electric range of 55km (WLTP).

When fully charged the battery contributes to low 1.1L/100km fuel-consumption, rising to 3.6L/100km when depleted.

Combined petrol-electric outputs for the front-wheel drive sedan are 130kW/210Nm and unlike traditional hybrids where the petrol engine drives the car and the electric motor assists, BYD's DM-i system uses the electric motor as the primary source of propulsion.

The Seal 6's relatively low purchase price and low energy costs see it undercut the Toyota Camry hybrid sedan, with operating costs that are lower by $175 monthly, $2103 annually, and $10,513 over five years.

AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS | TOTAL COSTS

MODEL	ON ROAD PRICE	LOAN REPAYMENTS	REGISTRATION & INSURANCES	FUEL	SERVICING	TYRES	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	5-YEAR TOTAL	CALCULATED RESIDUAL
1. BYD SEAL 6 ESSENTIAL PHEV	$37,574	$736	$200	$75	$32	$3	$1,047	$12,562	**$62,811**	$16,300
2. TOYOTA CAMRY ASCENT HYBRID	$43,693	$858	$230	$103	$28	$3	$1,222	$14,665	**$73,324**	$20,200
3. SKODA OCTAVIA SELECT HYBRID	$43,990	$864	$194	$130	$49	$4	$1,242	$14,900	**$74,502**	$21,200

Medium SUV

BYD SEALION 5 ESSENTIAL PHEV

$62k TOTAL 5-YEAR OWNERSHIP COST

THE MEDIUM SUV segment is one of Australia's most fiercely contested new vehicle categories, with approximately 35 makes and more than 60 models competing for consumer attention.

BYD is well represented with four medium SUVs including the Atto 3 EV, Sealion 5 PHEV, Sealion 6 PHEV and Sealion 7 EV.

The Sealion 5 Essential PHEV emerged as the most cost-effective medium SUV overall under conventional finance.

Under a novated lease the Sealion 5 loses the crown to its smaller stablemate the fully electric BYD Atto 3, illustrating how the FBT exemption can significantly change the relative ownership cost of an EV. Since our report was finalised the Atto 3 range has been updated with the Essential replaced by the better-equipped and $2,000 more-expensive Evo Dynamic.

Compared with the category average, the Sealion 5 was $236 per month less expensive to own and operate, and $2,828 less expensive over a year. The Sealion 5 is available in two front-wheel-drive PHEV variants: the entry-level Essential and the higher-grade Premium. Both feature a 1.5-litre petrol four-cylinder engine paired with a front electric motor, delivering combined outputs of 156kW/300Nm.

The Essential's $4,000 lower price sees it equipped with a smaller 12.9 kWh Blade LFP battery delivering a lower electric drive range of 71km. Fuel consumption is 1.2L/100km (NEDC) with charged battery, or 4.5L/100km when depleted.

AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS | TOTAL COSTS

MODEL	ON ROAD PRICE	LOAN REPAYMENTS	REGISTRATION & INSURANCES	FUEL	SERVICING	TYRES	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	5-YEAR TOTAL	CALCULATED RESIDUAL
1. BYD SEALION 5 ESSENTIA PHEV	$36,554	$715	$200	$74	$32	$4	$1,025	$12,303	**$61,513**	$16,500
2. CHERY TIGGO 7 URBAN	$39,990	$784	$185	$91	$30	$4	$1,094	$13,128	**$65,638**	$20,000
3. BYD ATTO 3 STANDARD RANGE ESSENTIAL EV	$42,674	$816	$190	$55	$34	$4	$1,098	$13,181	**$65,906**	$17,700

*All figures rounded up or down to the nearest dollar

Large SUV/4x4

BYD SEALION 8 DYNAMIC PHEV

$89k TOTAL 5-YEAR OWNERSHIP COST

THE SEALION 8 is yet another new addition to BYD's burgeoning Australian lineup.

Launched in January 2026 as the brand's first seven-seater, it takes the fight up to rival large PHEVs including the Mitsubishi Outlander, Mazda CX-80 and Kia Sorento.

Available in entry-level Dynamic Front-Wheel Drive, mid-spec Dynamic All-Wheel Drive, and Premium AWD, the roomy seven-seater's recommended retail pricing ranges from $56,990 to $70,990.

All three variants feature BYD's 1.5-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol DM-i powertrain, which in the case of the lower cost Dynamic Front-Wheel Drive variant incudes a smaller 19.0 kWh battery and a front-mounted electric motor.

Combined outputs are 205kW/315Nm, electric-only range is 103km (NEDC) and fuel consumption with a charged battery is 1.1L/100km, rising to approximately 5.3L/100km when the battery is discharged.

The Sealion 8's combination of low purchase price and low running costs helped it claim the title of our lowest-cost model under both conventional finance and novated leasing, outperforming rival diesel and hybrid-powered large SUVs.

It's worth noting that this segment includes a mix of both 2WD and AWD SUVs and more heavy-duty 4x4 wagons.

This, to some extent, helps explain why the Sealion 8 was $519 per month less expensive to own and operate than the category average, and $6,227 less expensive over a year when using conventional finance.

AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS | TOTAL COSTS

MODEL	ON ROAD PRICE	LOAN REPAYMENTS	REGISTRATION & INSURANCES	FUEL	SERVICING	TYRES	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	5-YEAR TOTAL	CALCULATED RESIDUAL
1. BYD SEALION 8 DYNAMIC PHEV	$60,014	$1,152	$235	$55	$32	$6	$1,480	$17,758	**$88,792**	$29,100
2. ISUZU MU-X LS-M 4X4	$60,335	$1,192	$186	$206	$46	$5	$1,635	$19,617	**$98,083**	$29,600
3. FORD EVEREST ACTIVE 4X4	$60,000	$1,185	$193	$218	$35	$6	$1,638	$19,656	**$98,282**	$30,500

Light Commercial 4x4

LDV T60 MAX PLUS

$93k TOTAL 5-YEAR OWNERSHIP COST

IT WAS ONLY the Light Commercial 4x4 segment and closely-related 4x2 Ute segment that prevented BYD from achieving a clean sweep of VOC 2026.

It was a close-run thing, though, with the BYD Shark 6 Premium dual-cab placing second behind the winning LDV under both conventional finance and novated leasing arrangements.

But the cost-of-ownership plaudits in this segment go to the diesel-powered LDV T60 Max which starts with a circa $9,000 purchase price advantage that helps it edge out the more fuel-efficient Shark 6 by a mere $846 over five years.

Compared with the category average, the LDV T60 Max Plus is $271 per month less expensive to own and operate, and $3,254 less expensive over a year.

The T60 Max variant sits mid-grade in the about-to-be-updated three-variant LDV dual-cab 4x4 lineup, powered by a 2.0-litre four-cylinder bi-turbo diesel that makes a category-competitive 160kW/500Nm, driving through a ZF eight-speed automatic gearbox.

Combined cycle fuel economy of 8.9L/100km is higher than equivalent diesel-powered segment heavyweights the Toyota HiLux and Ford Ranger but the LDV's significantly lower purchase price makes that fairly insignificant in the overall operating-costs equation.

A dual-range transfer case and centre differential provide a choice of drive modes including 4x2, full-time 4x4, Auto, plus high and low-range 4x4.

Braked towing capacity is 3,500kg with a payload of 830kg. The LDV T60 Max doesn't have a current ANCAP rating.

In the separate-but-related Light Commercial 4x2 segment, the Ford Ranger XL 2.0-litre turbo-diesel took the honours ahead of the Mitsubishi Triton GLX and Kia Tasman S.

AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS | TOTAL COSTS

MODEL	ON ROAD PRICE	LOAN REPAYMENTS	REGISTRATION & INSURANCES	FUEL	SERVICING	TYRES	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	5-YEAR TOTAL	CALCULATED RESIDUAL
LDV T60 MAX PLUS	$52,095	$1,026	$239	$242	$45	$5	$1,558	$18,691	**$93,457**	$18,000
BYD SHARK 6 PREMIUM PHEV	$61,067	$1,206	$212	$100	$47	$6	$1,572	$18,861	**$94,303**	$29,500
GWM CANNON XSR	$51,990	$1,024	$254	$258	$51	$6	$1,593	$19,117	**$95,583**	$21,800

DATA CRUNCH EXPLAINED

DISTANCE TRAVELLED
Calculations are based on buying a new vehicle and operating it for five years while travelling 15,000km annually, which is in line with Australian Bureau of Statistics surveys.

PURCHASE PRICE & RESIDUAL VALUES
Calculations are based on a manufacturer's listed retail price or national on-going driveaway price and were current at the time of compilation. The estimated on-road price includes registration and other statutory fees and charges.

Residual value shows the difference between purchase price and what the vehicle is worth at the end of the five-year calculation period, or how much the vehicle has depreciated.

REGISTRATION & INSURANCE
Registration costs, other statutory fees and Compulsory Third Party (CTP) insurance costs were current as of 1 July 2026. Calculations include CTP cover (Class 1 or 6, as appropriate).

RACQ Comprehensive Car Insurance rates are based on a privately-used vehicle driven by a 30-year-old with a $1,000 basic excess, rating 1 for life, no listed drivers under 25, and garaging in an average risk postcode. Rates also assume the vehicle is financially encumbered and insured for market value. Premiums represent the average of male and female driver rates.

FUEL
Fuel costs of 192.2 cents per litre (cpl) for ULP, 205.3 cpl for PULP 95, and 245.5 cpl for diesel are based on the weighted average (by number of sites) of Queensland metro and regional centres for the June quarter of 2026. Fuel consumption data was based on the Australian Design Rule 81/01 combined cycle test. For electric vehicles, an averaged domestic electricity tariff of 28.02 cents/kWh has been used along with official power consumption provided by the car maker. In the case of plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs), both electricity and petrol costs have been used.

TYRES & BATTERY
A replacement set of four tyres and a 12-volt battery are included. Costs include tyre replacement plus fitting and balancing. Tyre selection was based on the most suitable replacement for the original, or an equivalent specification from another brand. A replacement 12-volt battery and fitting are included for most vehicles, including battery electric vehicles.

SERVICE & REPAIRS
Maintenance costs include dealer servicing according to the manufacturer's schedule. Where capped-price servicing is offered this has been factored in. So too for makes and models with one-off payment service-inclusive programs. Where a capped-price servicing arrangements expires earlier than our five-year calculation period, servicing reverts back to normal schedule and rates.

CONVENTIONAL FINANCE
The report sets out the costs over five years of a conventional car loan assuming 100% of the total cost (including on-road costs) has been financed. It is assumed the loan is paid monthly and fully repaid at the end of the term. A market average comparison interest rate of 7.51% is applied. A green car loan with a comparison interest rate of 6.29% has been applied to eligible PHEVs and EVs.

NOVATED LEASE
For comparison purposes, the report also sets out the costs over five years of obtaining vehicles through a Novated Lease arrangement. Battery electric vehicles valued at up to $91,661 and purchased through a novated lease are currently exempt from Fringe Benefits Tax, representing a considerable saving. Novated lease costings can be found in the full RACQ Vehicle Operating Costs Report at **racq.com.au/voc**



*All figures rounded up or down to the nearest dollar. Pictured: The BYD Seal 6 sedan.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CAR DURING QUEENSLAND'S SUMMER WEATHER

QUEENSLAND SUMMERS bring sunshine, road trips and outdoor adventures, but they can also deliver intense storms, heavy rainfall, flash flooding and damaging hail.

Taking a few preventative steps can help protect your vehicle, improve safety and reduce the risk of expensive repairs.

PARK SMART TO PROTECT YOUR VEHICLE
One of the easiest ways to reduce the risk of weather-related damage is by choosing where you park.

During storm season, a garage or carport can help shield your vehicle from hail, strong winds and falling debris.

If you don't have access to covered parking at home, consider using undercover parking facilities when severe weather is forecast.

Avoid parking beneath trees, particularly during storms and strong winds, as falling branches can cause significant damage to vehicle body panels, windscreens and roofs.

Check local council flood mapping and avoid parking in flood-prone areas.

CHECK YOUR VEHICLE'S ESSENTIAL SAFETY FEATURES
Inspect components that are critical during wet-weather driving, including:

- Windscreen wipers
- Tyres and tread depth
- Headlights and brake lights.

Replacing worn wiper blades and ensuring your tyres have adequate tread can significantly improve visibility and grip during heavy rain.

BE PREPARED FOR HAIL AND HEAVY RAIN
If hail is forecast, consider using a purpose-built hail cover to help protect your vehicle if you can't park under cover.

In an emergency, thick blankets or padded coverings may provide some protection for vulnerable areas such as the roof and bonnet.

Windscreens are particularly susceptible to damage during hailstorms, so any extra protection can be worthwhile.

DRIVE SAFELY DURING SUMMER STORMS
If you find yourself driving during a severe storm or hail, slow down, turn your lights on, double your following distance to the car in front to at least four seconds (allow more space if you are towing) and find a safe spot to stop well away from high-speed traffic, not on the side of a highway or motorway.

It's also important to remember: if it's flooded, forget it. Never drive through floodwater.

Road conditions beneath the water may have been damaged or washed away, and even shallow water can cause a vehicle to lose traction. Floodwater can also cause severe damage to engines, electrical systems and safety components.

DON'T ATTEMPT TO START A WATER-DAMAGED VEHICLE
If your vehicle has been damaged during a severe weather event, it's important to ensure it is safe to start before turning the key.

If there has been any water in the interior of the car, the engine bay or exhaust, do not attempt to start it.

TAKE PHOTOS FOR AN INSURANCE CLAIM
Once it's safe to do so, document any flood damage before moving, cleaning or drying your vehicle.

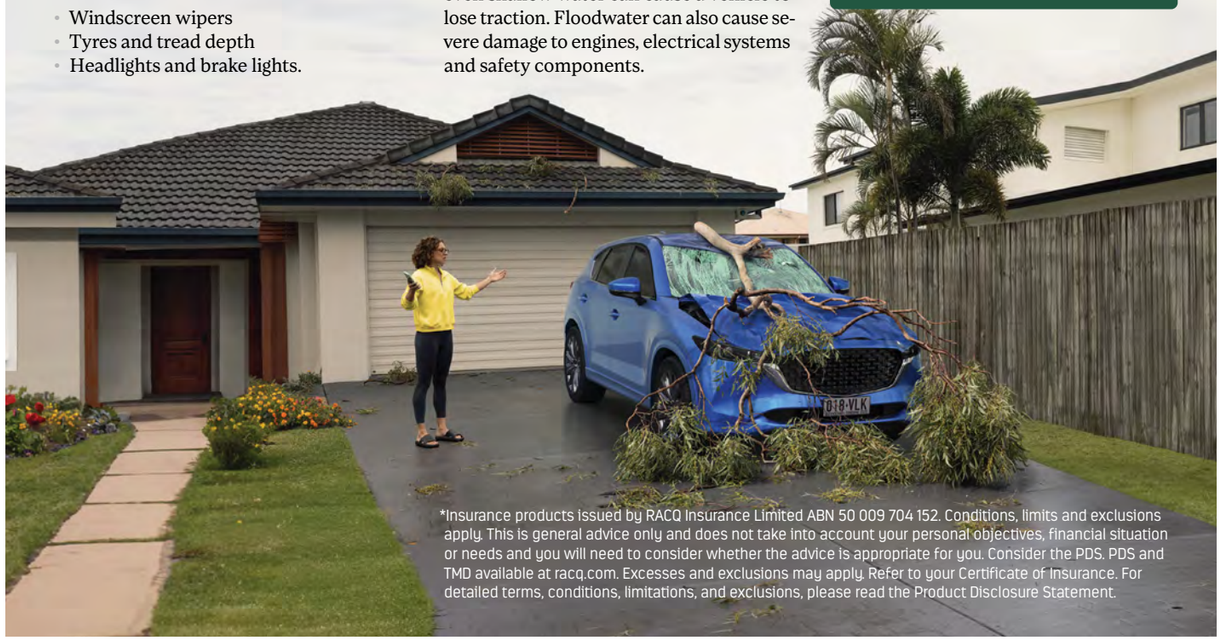
Take photos and videos of the car from all angles, including waterline marks, interior damage, debris and any affected mechanical areas, as this evidence can be critical when lodging an insurance claim.

It's also helpful to photograph the surrounding environment, such as flooded streets or nearby waterways, to support how and where the damage occurred.

Detailed records can help insurers accurately assess the claim and reduce the likelihood of disputes during the process.

Contact your insurer as soon as possible to start the claim process.

RACQ Comprehensive Car Insurance automatically covers your car for storm, flood, fire and hail damage*. Visit racq.com/carinsurance to get a quote.



*Insurance products issued by RACQ Insurance Limited ABN 50 009 704 152. Conditions, limits and exclusions apply. This is general advice only and does not take into account your personal objectives, financial situation or needs and you will need to consider whether the advice is appropriate for you. Consider the PDS. PDS and TMD available at racq.com. Excesses and exclusions may apply. Refer to your Certificate of Insurance. For detailed terms, conditions, limitations, and exclusions, please read the Product Disclosure Statement.

Lessons from a caravan trip to Cape York

A Brisbane couple who sold everything to travel Australia full-time learned plenty of lessons while towing their caravan to Cape York and 'the Tip' of Australia.

By **LANI DAY**



There's a moment on the road to Cape York when you start to wonder what on earth you've done.

For us, it came right before we reached 'the Tip', in Bamaga, when a rookie mistake saw our caravan dislodge from the car and hit the road. It was a sound I'll never forget and one I never want to hear again.

By this point though, turning around wasn't an option. We were going to make it; all of us, our van included.

On 20 March 2026, my husband Warren and I hit the road to travel Australia full-time.

Our dream became reality after two years of planning, saving and selling everything we owned. It's a date that will be etched in our minds forever.

We had set the date long before the practical planning started and before we even knew if we could achieve it.

Cape York was one of those bucket-list destinations, a must-do for my husband, but for me it was firmly in the 'maybe' basket. To be honest, I was scared of it. Of what the road conditions might do to our car and van, and the remoteness.

When we bought our caravan, we were still debating whether we would even go to the Cape.

After the decision was made, our initial plan was to leave the van at Laura, or one of the stations along the way, and camp for the rest of the journey north.

Eventually, we concluded that camping wasn't for us. We had the off-road van, so why not put it through its paces?

When choosing our caravan we had a rough idea of what we wanted. As newbie towers, we wanted something small, but there were a few things we weren't willing to compromise on: air-conditioning, a toilet and a shower.

Taking the van all the way meant we had everything we needed – a comfortable bed, water, a toilet and shower – making the journey far more comfortable than it might otherwise have been. The off-road caravan gave us the confidence to tackle roads we might otherwise have avoided. The only thing holding us back was ourselves and our experience level.

DRIVING TO THE CONDITIONS

As it turned out, the road conditions were really good. We went early in the season, so the roads had just been graded.

On the way north, there wasn't too much in the way of corrugations, but there were some dips that, if you're not driving to the conditions, could see an early end to your trip. Take note of the dip signs and slow right down.

After we left Hann River Roadhouse we aired down our tyres, only to find a few kilometres later it went back to bitumen.

The dirt is in sections and it's worth looking at WikiCamps for the point of interest "where the dirt starts".

We aired down and back up many times in the beginning. Again, this was due to inexperience.

We kept our speed to a maximum of 80km/h once we hit the dirt. There are so many differing opinions on this, so I would say to first timers: drive to the conditions and your comfort level.

For us, the biggest challenge of off-road caravanning wasn't necessarily the road itself, it was our inexperience.

There is so much advice out there about tyre pressures, speeds and what you should or shouldn't do, but ultimately, we had to learn our own setup and become comfortable making decisions based on the conditions in front of us.

One day we arrived at camp to find our cupboard door hinges had rattled off. The doors had literally come off and all our things were piled on the floor of the van.

But one problem we thankfully didn't have was dust.

My number one piece of equipment I would recommend is a dust reduction system.

Our van stayed dust-free – on the inside, at least – for the entire trip and it was worth every cent. Ours operates automatically, so we didn't have to remember to turn it on and off.

We met other travellers who told us horror stories of forgetting to turn on their dust reduction systems and then spending hours cleaning their vans.

BE PREPARED

We carried two jerry cans of fuel, giving us an additional 40 litres, as well as two jerry cans carrying 40 litres of fresh water on top of the 80-litre water tank in our caravan.

Bamaga is the last place to get groceries, water and fuel before heading to Punsand Bay, so it's worth stocking up while you're there.

Punsand Bay doesn't have potable water, so you need to make sure you have enough with you for your stay.

It was while looking for the supermarket in Bamaga that we went over a speed bump and the caravan came off the hitch.

We had forgotten to press the hitch lock. Due to our inexperience, our safety chains were also a little too long, which meant they didn't catch the van.

It was a rookie mistake and one we certainly won't make again.

THE REWARD

For all the practical lessons Cape York taught us, one thing I wasn't prepared for was just how beautiful the journey would be. Red dirt, blue skies and dense green vegetation make the drive itself part of the experience.

Punsand Bay was the perfect place to stay. We could hear the waves from our campsite and watch the most incredible sunsets.

We spent our days exploring and our afternoons debriefing with other travellers. The pool and Corrugation Bar are the social hub.

There was a real sense of community among the travellers heading north.

We would cross paths with the same people at different points along the journey, each of us having our own adventure but ultimately heading towards the same place.

As for whether or not an off-road van is needed, or if a semi off-road could make the trip, that is a personal choice.

When we pulled into Punsand there was a mix of off-road and semi off-road vans. We all made it, some in worse shape than others. For us, having an off-road van gave us peace of mind.

The Tip itself was extraordinary.

It's not a long walk from the car park, but the feeling that washes over you when you see the sign, after all the mishaps, dust and kilometres, is indescribable.

The closest feeling I can attribute it to is relief that we made it and pride that we did it.

There isn't anything I'd do differently, except maybe remembering the hitch lock!

Would I do it again? Absolutely yes.

This was the trip I never thought I'd make but I sure am glad we did.

Follow Lani's journey with The Van Wife Diaries on Instagram and Facebook.

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BEYOND THE BITUMEN: EXPERT ADVICE FOR OFF-ROAD TOWING

Planning an off-road caravan adventure? Learn how to prepare your RV, drive safely on rough roads and avoid common touring mistakes.

By **BEN MENZIES**

GETTING OFF the beaten track has always been part of my life.

I've spent more than 25 years working across the caravanning industry in sales, service, insurance and industry development with Caravanning Queensland. But my connection to caravanning started much earlier.

My father spent more than 40 years in the industry, and family holidays almost always involved a caravan or camper. My first trip to K'gari was at just four weeks old, and some of my earliest memories are camping on North Stradbroke Island.

After decades travelling dirt roads, sand tracks and corrugations, here are my top tips for anyone planning to take their RV beyond the bitumen.

1

MAKE SURE YOUR RV IS DESIGNED FOR THE TRIP

Not all "off-road" caravans and campers are built for the same conditions.

Before you leave, understand what your manufacturer considers acceptable use and check the warranty conditions. Match your destination and driving conditions to what your RV was designed to handle.

2

GET IT INSPECTED BEFORE YOU LEAVE

A pre-trip inspection is one of the best investments you can make.

Tell your service provider where you're going and the conditions you expect to encounter so they can pay particular attention to components likely to face extra loads and vibration.

3

DRIVE TO THE CONDITIONS

Just because a road has a posted speed limit doesn't mean it's appropriate when towing.

Corrugations, sand, potholes, loose gravel and changing road surfaces should all influence your speed. Slowing down gives you more braking distance and reduces stress on both your tow vehicle and RV.

4

STOP REGULARLY AND INSPECT YOUR SETUP

Frequent checks should be part of any off-road journey.

Walk around your vehicle and RV, checking tyres, wheels, suspension, hitch, safety chains, electrical connections and anything else that may have loosened or been damaged.

Take a look inside too. Identifying a problem early is much better than discovering it hundreds of kilometres later.

5

CARRY THE RIGHT TOOLS

Corrugations can test fasteners and fittings throughout your RV.

Carry a quality torque wrench, know the manufacturer's torque settings for key components, and pack a basic toolkit, tyre equipment and recovery gear. Also make sure your jack is suitable for your RV's weight and the terrain you'll be travelling on.

6

TAKE DUST SERIOUSLY

Fine dust can find its way into almost any RV.

If you're spending time on dirt roads, consider a dust-reduction or positive-pressure system. Before leaving, check seals on doors, windows and storage compartments, and make sure required vents remain unobstructed.

7

IF IT CAN MOVE, ASSUME IT WILL

Off-road travel will shake and rattle almost everything you've packed.

Secure loose items carefully, especially liquids, food and glass containers. Over the years I've learned that even tightly sealed jars can work loose on corrugated roads, so I pack them in sealed containers or bags to contain any spills.

PREPARATION MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Off-road caravanning is one of the best ways to experience Australia, but successful trips rarely happen by accident.

Know the capabilities of your RV, drive to the conditions, inspect your setup regularly and carry the right equipment.

The more remote the destination, the more important it is to prepare.

Ben Menzies is Business Development Manager with Caravanning Queensland



Chevy Silverado built for big adventures

Review

The best-selling ute in Chevrolet's local lineup combines V8 muscle, serious towing capability and genuine off-road ability.

By **GED BULMER**

During World War II, US-military personnel stationed in Australia were sometimes disparagingly described as being "overpaid, oversexed and over here".

It's a catchphrase that can be readily repurposed to describe imported US pickups like the Chevy Silverado 1500 and its ilk, which are to some eyes "over-sized, overpriced and over here".

While they may not be everyone's cup of tea, locally reengineered versions of full-size US pickups have found a receptive market in recent years, as Australian consumers look for something substantial enough to haul their ever-larger caravans, boats and other recreational accessories.

The segment, which also includes the Ford F-150, RAM 1500, and Toyota Tundra set a high-water mark of 10,611 sales in 2024, before stumbling last year to a still significant 8,763 vehicles.

In 2026, big pickups continued to face sales headwinds, presumably due in part to the steep ramp-up in fuel prices due to the Iran war and the fact their large-capacity petrol V8 and twin-turbo six-cylinder engines are renowned big drinkers.

Like its rivals, the US-manufactured Silverado is imported in left-hand drive and converted to right-hand drive, a process that in the Chev's case is handled by Melbourne remanufacturing specialist Walkinshaw Automotive, who also handle RAM and Tundra conversions.

Towing is of course why many people buy these big 'Yank' utes which, with their long wheelbases, substantial ladder-frame chassis and large-capacity engines are particularly well suited to the task.

However, if your requirements include routinely towing big, heavy stuff, the Silverado ZR2 may not be the best choice thanks to it having a 300kg lower braked tow rating than the Silverado LTZ Premium, which can legally haul up to 4,500kg.

This is due to the ZR2 – which retails for $147,490 versus $135,900 for the LTZ Premium – being designed as the more off-road capable of the two, with a specific suspension setup that lowers braked towing to a still impressive 4,200kg (with 70mm tow ball).

That's a handy buffer over popular dual-cab 4x4 utes like the Ford Ranger and Toyota HiLux which are rated to tow up to 3,500kg. Laden or unladen, the Silverado cuts an imposing figure on the road, weighing around 2.5 tonnes and measuring almost 6m long by more than 2m wide.

The ZR2 is fairly easily identified from its stablemate via unique styling attributes and a more off-road oriented fitout that includes heavy-duty off-road suspension with factory two-inch suspension lift, front and rear locking differentials, specific suspension package with Multimatic DSSV (Dynamic Suspension Spool Valve) dampers, extra underbody protection and 18-inch alloy wheels clad with chunky 33-inch Goodyear Wrangler Mud-Terrain tyres.

Under the gargantuan bonnet, with its raised power dome sits, a naturally aspirated 6.2-litre pushrod V8 that punches out a muscular 313kW/624Nm. It's the last remaining V8 in the cohort, with the Chev's rivals all having switched to twin-turbo sixes.

The L87 small block puts its power to the tarmac through a smooth-shifting 10-speed automatic, sending drive to either the rear wheels or all-four depending on the selected drive mode.

The engine delivers crisp throttle response, linear power delivery and a delicious V8 bark courtesy of a dual-mode sports exhaust.

It also shifts the 2,583kg beast with impressive ease, making the Silverado a consummate highway cruiser.

The engine's syrupy torque combined with tall gearing in the upper ratios of the sweet-shifting automatic delivers effortless performance.

Driven sedately the Silverado *might* achieve its official combined cycle fuel consumption figure of 12.7L/100km, but whack 4,300kg on the tow bar or get liberal with the loud pedal and you'll get to know the servo owner on a first name basis.

Unsurprisingly, handling dynamics are not a particular strong point.

It's not that the Silverado has any major flaws in this regard but you need to allow for its heft in bends and adapt sympathetically to its body roll and slow steering.

The Multimatic dampers aid the overall handling package by firming up when required, such as in bends, and softening to provide more compliance over rougher roads.

The cabin fitout is more luxury SUV than pickup-like, with acres of space and generous accommodation for driver and passengers.

Standard ZR2 fare includes heated and ventilated leather front seats, leather-clad steering wheel, head-up display, Bose stereo, wireless phone charging and twin digital screens comprising a 12.3-inch driver display, and a 13.4-inch touchscreen.

It's a credit to the quality of Walkinshaw's reengineering efforts that visible signs of the left-to-right-hand-drive conversion are virtually undetectable.

There is ample storage on offer including dual gloveboxes, an esky-sized centre console, large door pockets and various cubbies.

The standard-fitment 360-degree surround-view monitor and rear-view camera are particularly useful when hitching up trailers and there's 14-different camera views available when driving off-road.

Some of these proved particularly handy when cresting sand dunes and traversing narrow tracks during our off-road stint along Tasmania's dramatic north-eastern coastline. Here, the Silverado was able to demonstrate its all-terrain chops to great effect, the dual-range transfer case providing push-button high and low-range 4x4 selection, with the backup of front and rear diff locks should they be required.

Other off-road specific tech includes a dedicated Crawl mode and a ZR2 mode which recalibrates throttle progression, transmission shifts, and traction control for loose or difficult terrain.

The ZR2 also gets extra underbody protection including aluminium skid plates and a high-clearance front bumper to aid offroad performance.

Suffice to say, that with the off-road rubber lowered to a sand-appropriate 15psi the big Chev made short work of its beach assignment.

Like the rest of its cohort, the Silverado doesn't have an ANCAP safety rating, but ANCAP did test the ADAS capabilities of these big pickups last year, handing the Silverado a bronze rating, the lowest of the five models tested including the LandCruiser 79 Series.

Among the issues identified was the Silverado's camera-only AEB system which can't detect cyclists and offers only limited detection of motorcyclists.

The big Chev does, however, come equipped with six airbags and a bunch of driver assistance tech including autonomous emergency braking (AEB) with pedestrian detection, adaptive cruise control, lane-keep assist with lane departure warning, rear cross-traffic alert, blind-spot monitoring, and more.

PRICE
$147,490 (MRLP)

POWERTRAIN
Front-mounted 6.2-litre pushrod V8 (313kW/624Nm), 10-speed automatic, full-time or part-time 4WD, two-speed transfer case

FUEL CONSUMPTION
12.7L/100km (293g/m O_2, estimated)

ANCAP SAFETY RATING
Not rated

WARRANTY
Five years, unlimited kilometres

FOR
Muscular V8 performance; plush ride comfort; useful towing tech; generous tub capacity; high payload and GVM; strong towing and load hauling abilities.

AGAINST
Expensive; size makes parking difficult; high fuel consumption when laden; some ergonomic flaws including switch layout and head-up display legibility.



New model launches

From tiny Japanese 'kei' cars to Chinese luxury EVs and V8-powered American supercars, the past quarter served up an unusually eclectic batch of offerings.



HONDA SUPER-ONE TWO-TONE

IF THERE'S A PRIZE for 'cutest' EV of the year, then Honda's diminutive Super-One will likely romp it in. The compact Honda hatch has already generated a cult following in Australia and elsewhere, channelling the distinctive look and feel of a Japanese 'kei' car. The Australian-spec Super-One is slightly longer and wider than the strict definition of Japan's ultra-compact vehicle class, but by Aussie standards it's tiny and well suited for the cut and thrust of city driving. That is, provided your cutting and thrusting doesn't extend beyond its modest 320km urban range, or even more meagre 202km (WLTP) combined-cycle figure. For many buyers the Super One's limited range, tiny proportions and relatively high price will exclude it, but for those willing to go there the little pocket rocket rewards with head-turning looks and punchy performance. A steering-wheel mounted 'Boost' button lifts power output from the standard 47kW to 70kW/162Nm, while activating a virtual seven-speed transmission mode and enlivening the go-kart like driving experience. Pricing starts at $36,900 (driveaway), rising to $37,400 (driveaway) for the Super-One Two-Tone.

PRICE: $37,400 (driveaway)
BATTERY: 29.6 kWh lithium-ion (NMC)
DRIVETRAIN: Front-wheel drive, single electric motor (70kW/162 Nm in Boost mode)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 202km (WLTP)/12.1kWh/100km (WLTP)
SAFETY RATING: Not rated
WARRANTY: Five years/unlimited kilometres.



IM6 PERFORMANCE

NEW CAR BUYERS still getting their heads around the dizzying array of new Chinese brands can add IM to the list. MG's premium electric brand arrived last year with two models, the IM5 sedan and IM6 SUV. The latter comes in a three-variant range comprising Premium, Platinum and Performance, with prices starting at $57,990 (driveaway) and topping out at $74,990 (driveaway). The Platinum and Performance feature a 100 kWh battery with the Performance adding dual-motor all-wheel drive to deliver outputs of 572kW/802Nm and supercar-like 0-100km/h acceleration of 3.2 seconds. It's not the only thing fast about the IM6 Performance which boasts 800V electrical architecture to support ultra-fast DC charging up to 396kW. Adapative dampers and air suspension are standard while bi-directional rear-wheel turning is designed to improve handling agility and reduce the turning circle. The minimalist cabin design features an impressive 26.3-inch infotainment display. Elsewhere, a panoramic sunroof, 20 high-definition audio speakers, and quilted synthetic-leather seats with heating, cooling, memory, and massage functions round out the offer.

PRICE: $74,990 (driveaway)
BATTERY: 100 kWh NCM (nickel cobalt manganese)
DRIVETRAIN: Dual electric motors, all-wheel drive (572kW/800Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 505km (WLTP)/23.4 kWh/100km (WLTP)
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2025)
WARRANTY: Five years/unlimited km (vehicle); eight years/ 160,000km (battery)



XPENG G6 AWD PERFORMANCE

XPENG IS ANOTHER Chinese luxury contender making its presence felt Down Under. The brand has been in the news this year following an ugly legal dispute with original importer TrueEV which settled in favour of the now factory-backed operation. The all-electric lineup includes the G6 SUV and X9 people mover with the Tesla Model-Y rivalling G6 the brand's top seller. It benefited from a facelift in July that brought exterior, interior and technical updates plus a $3,000 price reduction on the entry-level G6 RWD Standard Range ($51,800) that pegged it a handy $7,000 below the comparable Tesla. For the money you get a 68.5 kWh battery, single-motor outputs of 185kW/440Nm and a maximum range of 480km. Stepping up to the mid-spec G6 RWD Long Range costs $56,800 (MRLP) but brings a larger 80.8 kWh battery, higher outputs of 218kW/440Nm and 525km of claimed range. Sitting at the top of the tree is the $63,800 (MRLP) G6 Performance which gets the larger battery plus a dual motor all-wheel drive powertrain that punches out an impressive 358kW/660Nm and travels up to 510km on a charge.

PRICE: $63,800 (MRLP)
BATTERY: 80.8k Wh LFP (lithium iron phosphate)
DRIVETRAIN: Dual electric motors, all-wheel drive (385kW/660Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 510km (WLTP)/18.4 kWh/100km (WLTP)
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2024)
WARRANTY: Seven years/unlimited km (vehicle); Eight years/160,000km (battery)



ALFA ROMEO TONALE VELOCE IBRIDA

YOU CAN USUALLY COUNT on Italian marque Alfa Romeo to get the styling of its cars right, and that's certainly the case with the Tonale SUV. First launched in late 2023 in mild-hybrid and later plug-in hybrid guise the Italian machine's striking looks haven't succeeded in firing up the sales charts. Alfa would prefer the Tonale be benchmarked against the likes of the Audi Q3, BMW X1 and Mercedes-Benz GLA and it has the fit-out to go toe-to-toe with these brands. Its mild-hybrid powertrain is somewhat uninspiring but there's no complaints about the dynamics, which conjure the sort of sharp steering, strong grip and disciplined body control the Scudetto badge implies. The interior is styled as beautifully as the exterior, with embossed logos on bolstered sports seats, aluminium-faced pedals and a shapely stitched-leather steering wheel complete with race-inspired start button and aluminium paddle shifters. The Tonale's slow sales have prompted a freshen up and model realignment that brings a range of modest styling enhancements and some useful feature upgrades, but it remains a heart-over-head proposition.

PRICE: $64,990 (MRLP)
BATTERY: 0.77 kWh (lithium-ion)
DRIVETRAIN: 1.5-litre four-cylinder turbocharged petrol, 48-volt mild hybrid, (128kW/240Nm combined); front-wheel drive; seven-speed dual clutch transmission
FUEL CONSUMPTION: 5.4L/100km (123g/km CO_2)
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2022)
WARRANTY: Seven years/unlimited km



MERCEDES-BENZ CLA 200

GERMAN PRESTIGE BRAND Mercedes-Benz is not alone among European car makers in walking back its aggressive EV-only timeline to a more flexible, multi-powertrain approach. The brand's third-generation CLA is a practical example of this strategy, including as it does a 1.5-litre turbocharged petrol mild-hybrid in three states of tune across CLA 180, 200 and 220 variants, and two pure electrics the CLA 200 and CLA 350 4 Matic. Both EVs are based on fast-charging 800V architecture with the CLA 200 boasting a single-motor rear-wheel drive layout producing 165kW/335Nm, powered by a 58 kWh battery delivering a range of up to 470km (WLTP). Stepping up to the better-specified CLA 350 4MATIC adds $20k to the price but brings dual motor all-wheel drive traction, more robust 260kW/515Nm outputs, and a larger 85 kWh battery delivering up to 663km (WLTP). We sampled both vehicles and would be happy with either, thanks to their quality build but also their polished ride, steering and handling that underscores why people continue to pay a premium for the three-pointed star.

PRICE: $72,200 (MRLP)
BATTERY: 58 kWh (lithium iron phosphate)
DRIVETRAIN: Single-motor rear-wheel drive (165 kW/ 335 Nm)
RANGE/ENERGY CONSUMPTION: 470km (WLTP)/14.4 kWh/100km (WLTP)
SAFETY RATING: Five stars (2025)
WARRANTY: Five years/unlimited kilometres (vehicle); eight year/160,000km (battery)



CORVETTE Z06

THE EIGHTH-GENERATION or C8 Corvette is a remarkable piece of kit for any number of reasons. One of the most significant is that it's the first model in the iconic US sports car brand's 70-plus year history to locate its engine behind the driver, something that had been a goal of Corvette engineers and designers for decades. It's also the first Corvette to be built in right-hand drive, which explains why Aussies have been able to purchase a factory-made 'Vette since 2021. GMSV recently introduced updates to the three-variant lineup which included a sizeable $36,000 price reduction on the range-topping Corvette Z06, the most track-focused variant in a lineup that also includes the Stingray and E-Ray. The Z06's beating heart is Chevrolet's 5.5-litre LT6 V8, the most powerful naturally aspirated V8 ever fitted to a production car. The hand-built flat-plane crank engine delivers bristling outputs of 475kW/595Nm and ferocious 0-100km/h acceleration in 3.0 seconds flat. That isn't enough to make it the quickest 'Vette in the lineup, however, with the E-Ray combining V8 power with electric assistance to cover the sprint in a blistering 2.9 seconds.

PRICE: $299,990 (plus on-road costs)
POWERTRAIN: 5.5-litre naturally aspirated 'LT6' petrol V8 (475kW/595Nm), eight-speed twin-clutch gearbox, rear-wheel drive
FUEL CONSUMPTION: 16.0L/100km (371g/km CO_2)
SAFETY RATING: Not rated
WARRANTY: Three years or 100,000km



GEELY EX2 INSPIRE MY26

By **GED BULMER**

Review

In the space of a few short years electric vehicles have gone from being a pricey alternative to internal combustion-powered rivals to achieving price parity, and now increasingly undercutting the old technology.

We have China to thank for that, with the tsunami of new brands and models driving down prices, expanding the range of electrified options in practically every segment, and bringing electrified mobility within reach of everyday Australians.

Geely is one of these new brands, having set up shop here in its current incarnation last March and recently adding a third model to its fledgling lineup, the EX2 compact electric hatch.

It's the latest small and relatively affordable EV to land in Australian showrooms, following in the tracks of the BYD Atto 1 and Atto 2, MG4 EV Urban, and the GAC Aion UT, all of which have expanded the available options for EV-curious Australian with an eye on the budget bottom-line.

Affordably priced and commendably spacious the EX2 – or Xingyuan Star Wish as it's known in its home market – was China's top-selling passenger car in 2025 and arrives here in a two-variant lineup comprising the Complete and Inspire, priced at $26,490 (MRLP) and $30,990 (MRLP) respectively. The Complete boasts outputs of 60kW/150Nm and packs a 35.3 kWh battery enabling a driving range of 252km (WLTP), while the better-specified Inspire gets more powerful 85kW/150Nm motor and a larger 47.1 kWh battery, boosting its driving range to a more useful 345km (WLTP).

Both models send their drive to the rear wheels which is unusual in this segment and at this price where front-wheel drive tends to be the norm. The configuration benefits steering quality and handling dynamics while also contributing to a commendably compact 9.9m turning circle.

Despite suspension claimed to have been tuned by Geely-owned Lotus, the EX2 doesn't feel especially sporty.

Ride and handling err more toward comfort than corner carving but the car nonetheless exhibits good body control and feels reasonably well balanced.

Off-the-mark acceleration is not especially exhilarating by EV standards with claimed 0-100km/h acceleration time for the 85kW Inspire of 11.5 seconds, which is around two seconds slower than a Corolla hybrid. It is, however, a pleasant and easy small car to drive around town.

Dimensionally, the EX2 is slightly shorter than a Hyundai i30 hatchback but rides on a longish wheelbase which endows it with an impressively roomy interior.

Wide door apertures provide easy entry and exit, with good headroom for taller occupants front and rear.

The driving position is comfortable, with enough adjustment for different body types, good all-round visibility, and a pleasingly quiet cabin.

Standard features on both variants include power front seats, dusk-sensing LED head- and tail-lights, and a 14.6-inch central touchscreen with in-built satellite navigation, Apple CarPlay, and Android Auto capability and an 8.8-inch digital instrument cluster.

To this the Inspire adds large LED-illuminated vanity mirrors, heated front seats and steering wheel, rain-sensing wipers, wireless smartphone charging, dynamic ambient lighting, 360-degree around-view monitor, plus a power tailgate and a six-speaker audio system versus four speakers in the Complete.

The interior is finished in Horizon Grey leather-like upholstery, with a no-cost Skyline White option available on the Inspire.

The boot is accessed via an electric tailgate on both variants and offers a reasonable 375 litres, or slightly less than what's available in the Hyundai i30 hatch (395 litres). However, with an additional 70 litres on offer in the front-trunk, the EX2 offers more cargo capacity than most rivals.

The EX2's combination of sharp pricing, clever Geely packaging, attractive design and advanced technology distinguishes it as a strong value-for-money proposition.

It feels like it will be an easy car to live with, combining good visibility, reasonably responsive performance, a roomy and practical interior, and a comfortable ride.

PRICE
$30,990 (MRLP)

POWERTRAIN
Single rear-mounted electric motor, 85kW/150Nm, rear-wheel drive

BATTERY
47.1 kWh LFP

RANGE
345km (WLTP)

ENERGY CONSUMPTION
15.5 kWh/100km (WLTP)

ANCAP SAFETY RATING
Five stars (2026)

WARRANTY
Seven years/unlimited kilometres (vehicle); eight years/unlimited kilometres (battery).

FOR
Sharply priced; generously equipped; spacious small car interior; compact and manoeuvrable; well-judged ride and handling; well-tuned ADAS.

AGAINST
No full-size spare (repair kit); leisurely acceleration for an EV; distracting touchscreen-embedded controls.



MAZDA CX-6E GT

By **GED BULMER**

PRICE
$53,990 (MRLP)

POWERTRAIN
Rear-mounted electric motor, rear-wheel drive, 190kW/290Nm

BATTERY
78k Wh lithium iron phosphate (LFP)

MAXIMUM DC CHARGE
194kW

RANGE
484km (WLTP)

ENERGY CONSUMPTION
18.9 kWh/100km (WLTP)

ANCAP SAFETY RATING
Not rated

WARRANTY
Five years/unlimited km (vehicle); eight years/160,000 km (battery)

FOR
Attractive design; generously equipped; well-priced; DC charging up to 194kW; good performance and dynamics.

AGAINST
Critical controls buried in on-screen menus; oversized infotainment screen; no ANCAP safety rating; no full-size spare (repair kit).

Review

Mazda's battery-electric ambitions have taken a huge step forward with the arrival of the all-new CX-6e, a sleekly styled medium SUV that joins the recently launched Mazda 6e sedan as the brand's second mainstream EV in Australia.

The CX-6e enters one of Australia's most fiercely-contested segments, squaring off against rivals including the Tesla Model Y, BYD Sealion 7, Kia EV5 and Hyundai Ioniq 5.

On paper at least, it appears well equipped for the challenge.

There are two variants to choose from, the entry-level CX-6e GT which costs $53,990 plus on-roads, and the range-topping Azami at $56,990 plus on-roads.

The key to this sharp pricing is that, like the 6e sedan with which it shares its platform and engineering fundamentals, the CX-6e is built in China under Mazda's longstanding joint venture with Chongqing Changan Automobile Co. But while the build-plate may say 'Made in China' Mazda is keen to emphasise the design was completed in Japan, drawing on the expertise, of the same design team and "Kodo" design principles seen on other Mazda models.

The result is an attractive and distinctive SUV that appears larger than its medium SUV classification suggests.

Longer and lower than a CX-5, the CX-6e boasts sleek proportions, flush door handles, flush-fit glass and smooth, muscular surfacing.

There's evidence of intense efforts to maximise battery range in the various wind-cheating aerodynamic devices used, including a vent on the leading edge of the bonnet and aerodynamic ducts in the rear D-pillars.

The steeply raked D-pillar and rear glass inevitably compromise luggage space, but there's a respectable 363 litres when loaded to the parcel tray, expanding to 956 litres with the rear seats folded.

For heavy packers, an additional 80 litres of storage is available in the front boot.

The cabin delivers a calm, minimalist atmosphere highlighted by a massive 26.45-inch display that stretches across the dashboard to ahead of the front-seat passenger.

Space is generous in both rows, with enough shoulder room to comfortably accommodate two larger adults up front without rubbing elbows. A deep centre console with butterfly-opening storage compartments enhances practicality.

Under the skin sits a 78 kWh lithium iron phosphate battery paired with a single rear-mounted electric motor producing 190kW/240Nm. Drive goes exclusively to the rear wheels, with no all-wheel drive variant available.

On the road, the CX-6e is impressively smooth, quiet and well-balanced with ample punch for overtaking and merging but without the eye-popping thrust of dual-motor rivals. Body control is good, steering weight is natural and grip levels are reassuring.

Ride quality is likewise impressive, with the 19-inch wheel equipped GT having the edge over the Azami on its lower-profile 21s. The smaller diameter wheel and tyre package also hands the GT a maximum range advantage of 484km versus 468km for the Azami.

What you get for the extra ask with the Azami are futuristic-looking digital exterior mirrors, a digital interior mirror, and 21-inch alloys clad with Michelin Pilot Sport tyres.

Some buyers will appreciate these extras, but we prefer the GT's lower price, extra range and superior ride comfort.

Mazda's electric vehicle ambitions have finally found their stride with the arrival of the CX-6e, a medium SUV that looks, feels and drives like a genuine alternative to the segment's established leaders.

Quiet, smooth and refined, it delivers much of what buyers expect from a quality EV, with the backing of a well-established and trusted brand.

To the Black Stump and beyond

Brisbane member Michael Gordon shares highlights from the holiday he and wife Janette enjoyed after winning our Outback Queensland competition, run in partnership with Tourism and Events Queensland.

From searching for white bull statues in Aramac to cruising the Thomson River at sunset, Janette and I spent 22 days discovering the landscapes, history and characters that make Outback Queensland so memorable.

Winning the Outback Queensland competition gave us the perfect excuse to finally embark on a trip we'd long wanted to take.

Rather than rushing from place to place, we planned our journey so we could spend a couple of nights in each destination and really experience what each town had to offer.

Our adventure began in Charleville, where a visit to the Cosmos Centre and a guided tour of the town's World War II sites provided an insight into both the region's past and its place beneath some of Australia's clearest night skies.

Dinner at the aptly named Warrego Yacht Club, despite being hundreds of kilometres from the nearest coastline, was a memorable introduction to Outback Queensland's unique sense of humour.

As we travelled north, each town revealed its own distinct personality.

In Tambo, recycled scrap metal had been transformed into creative Australiana sculptures, while the town's famous chook races continue to raise funds for local charities and entertain visitors.

History remained a constant companion throughout the journey.

In Blackall, we stopped to see the legendary Black Stump before continuing to Aramac, where a collection of white bull statues celebrates the tale of cattle duffer Harry Redford and one of Outback Queensland's most enduring pieces of folklore.

Then it was on to Longreach, one of the highlights of the trip.

Although we'd previously visited major attractions such as the Qantas Founders Museum and the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, this time we experienced the region from a different perspective.

An Outback Pioneers stagecoach ride offered a taste of life on the frontier, while a sunset cruise on the Thomson River combined spectacular scenery, a campfire dinner and classic outback entertainment.

From Longreach, we made the journey to neighbouring Winton. While the two towns are almost 200km apart, that's often considered "just down the road" by Outback Queensland standards.

Winton's unique blend of history, culture and prehistoric discovery made it another standout stop.

We explored the Waltzing Matilda Centre, visited the Australian Age of Dinosaurs and stopped by the monument commemorating the first Qantas flight. Before leaving town, we couldn't resist trying the famous musical fence and enjoying a performance by the entertaining Crackup Sisters.

Boulia offered a relaxing change of pace with The Min Min Encounter Centre a standout attraction.

After a brief stop in Mount Isa, we headed north through the Gulf Country to historic Burketown on the Albert River.

Known for its excellent barramundi fishing, the town serves as a gateway to the spectacular Gulf of Carpentaria.

A scenic flight revealed the scale and beauty of the region, while our stay at Savannah Lodge felt like a tropical oasis in the heart of the Outback.

One of the highlights of this leg of the trip was visiting Floraville Station and the picturesque Leichhardt Falls. The landscape was breathtaking and provided a glimpse into the remoteness and beauty that make this part of Queensland so special.

Returning to Mount Isa during rodeo season, we experienced the town at its liveliest.

The Hard Times Mine tour was a fascinating insight into the mining industry and the role it has played in shaping the city.

We also visited the Burke & Wills monument, located near one of the explorers' historic campsites, adding another layer of history to our journey.

From Mount Isa, we boarded a Greyhound bus for the 11-hour trip to Townsville.

Staying at The Ville and enjoying walks along The Strand provided a refreshing coastal contrast to the red dirt landscapes we'd been exploring for weeks.

To complete our Queensland adventure, we travelled on the Spirit of Queensland sleeper train to Brisbane.

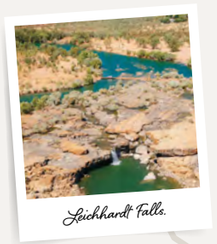
After travelling by road, bus and rail through some of Queensland's most iconic landscapes, we returned home with a renewed appreciation for the size, diversity and character of our state.

The attractions were memorable, but so too were the simple moments: spotting emus, brolgas and camels beside the road, sharing conversations with locals and watching the landscape change from red dirt plains to tropical Gulf country and finally the Queensland coast.

Outback Queensland is often associated with big distances, but our journey reminded us that its greatest strength is the variety of experiences waiting along the way.

Every town had a story to tell, and every stop offered a reason to linger a little longer.

See page 13 for details on how to enter our Ultimate Sunshine Coast Holiday competition.


Leichhardt Falls.


Mount Isa.


Winton to Boulia.

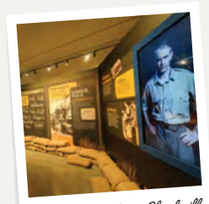

Age of Dinosaurs, Winton.


The Crackup Sisters, Winton.



White bull at Aramac.


Stagecoach ride at Longreach.


WWII Secret Base, Charleville.


Sculpture at Tambo.

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Off-road convoy creates connection

Photos: Oh Tilly Brand Photography.



A five-day off-road adventure has raised vital funds for mental health services, with participants proving that connection, friendship and time outdoors can make a lasting difference.



Four-wheel-driving charity event Off The Road Again was launched this year with a focus on raising funds while promoting community spirit.

The inaugural off-road adventure, operated by Expedition 10, brought together families, friends, businesses and supporters to explore regional Queensland while raising money for a local cause.

The five-day journey attracted 42 vehicles and 100 participants.

The event raised $102,400 for Momentum Mental Health, a not-for-profit organisation that provides free wellbeing coaching and mental health support programs across Toowoomba, the South Burnett, Southern Downs and Western Downs regions.

Off The Road Again also delivered direct benefits to local communities, with about $50,000 contributed to those visited along the route.

The event's unique mix of touring on scenic back roads, themed dress-ups, campfire camaraderie and community fundraising has laid a strong foundation for similar adventures in the years ahead.

RACQ was an event co-naming sponsor and Patrol Officer Adam Bekkers accompanied participants.

"I was given the job of running at the very back of the group as the RACQ support vehicle, so if anyone got into trouble along the way, I could catch up and lend a hand," Adam said.

The dusty conditions meant Adam was kept busy and his shiny RACQ patrol vehicle did not stay shiny for long.

"I was kept busy cleaning air filters," Adam said.

"I also helped diagnose water-contaminated fuel and got the vehicle running again, fixed a trailer indicator, sorted out a 4WD front auto-locking hub failure, and repaired a couple of tyres."

Adam was overwhelmed by the scenery and experiences along the route, as well as the camaraderie among the group.

"I've made new friendships, shared plenty of laughs, experienced places I probably never would have seen and created memories that will stay with me for a very long time," he said.

"Most importantly, I've seen firsthand what can happen when people, businesses and an entire community come together for something that genuinely matters."

Momentum Mental Health Chair and Off The Road Again participant Chris Black said the event was a reminder of how important connection is to our mental wellbeing.

"I'm incredibly proud to be part of an initiative that highlights the importance of connection, spending time with family and friends, and enjoying the benefits of being outdoors," Chris said.

"Looking after our mental health doesn't always have to be complicated; sometimes it's as simple as jumping in the car, hitting the road, having a laugh and enjoying the journey."

↑ Patrol Officer Adam Bekkers prepares to help another Off The Road Again participant.

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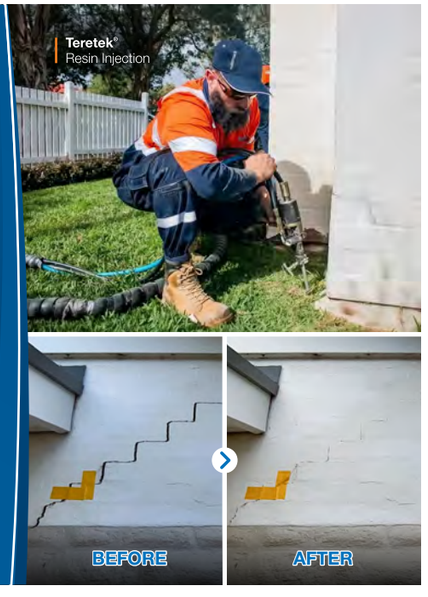

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INSIDE THE ICU OF THE FUTURE

FROM CIRCADIAN LIGHTING to nature-inspired technology, the 'ICU of the Future' is reimagining intensive care to improve recovery, wellbeing and long-term outcomes.

Thanks to a Queensland research group, the Intensive Care Unit of the Future is redefining critical care by focusing not only on survival, but also on patients' long-term recovery and quality of life.

Developed by the Critical Care Research Group (CCRG), the world-first ICU of the Future is pioneering new approaches to support patients well beyond discharge.

The redesigned bed spaces feature a quieter, calmer and more recovery-focused environment that supports better sleep, healing and mental wellbeing.

Features such as circadian lighting, reconfigured alarms and equipment, and nature-inspired visual and auditory elements are designed to help patients maintain a sense of time, improve sleep and reduce the risk of delirium, factors known to influence recovery and long-term outcomes.

CCRG Director Professor John Fraser said traditional ICUs were designed primarily around clinical needs, but research had shown the experience could leave lasting physical, cognitive and psychological impacts on patients.

"While survival has traditionally been the benchmark of success, growing evidence shows many patients leave ICU with devastating complications," Professor Fraser said.

"Up to 80% of ICU patients experience ongoing physical, cognitive or psychological challenges following discharge, with many cases linked to environmental factors within ICU settings."

Founded by Professor Fraser and Associate Professor Oystein Tronstad, the ICU of the Future initiative was launched at The Prince Charles Hospital in 2022 following five years of research by CCRG in partnership with patients, families, clinicians and industry partners.

"Working closely with former patients and family members, every element has been carefully considered to support healing, reduce stress, and create a more human-centred environment without compromising clinical excellence," A/Professor Tronstad said.

The model is to be rolled out nationally and internationally, beginning with St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital in Brisbane, the first private hospital in the world to implement the ICU of the Future concept.

"Intensive care saves lives, but increasingly we are realising that the environment in which that care is delivered also matters," said Professor Fraser, who is also Director of ICU at St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital.

"For patients who are critically ill, even small improvements to rest, comfort, and the experience of being in hospital can make a big difference to their long-term recovery."

To learn more about the ICU of the Future, visit ccrg.org.au

Your Say



ARDUOUS JOURNEY HAD ITS PITFALLS

MUM AND DAD were long-time members of RACV from when they bought their brand new 1956 FJ Holden. Before that, the old Pontiac was our family car. In 1952 they drove from Melbourne across the infamous Nullarbor Plain/Eyre Highway (1,100km of rough track carved out in 1941 from Port Augusta in South Australia to Norseman in Western Australia) to visit relatives in Waterloo. However, on the return journey, probably as a result of the seriously corrugated and ungraded condition of the road, they broke a pitman arm, disabling the Pontiac at the 402-mile post between Madura and Eucla. With help from a rare passing vehicle, Dad removed the pitman arm, and Mum took it with her as she hitched a ride to the closest repair workshop (I've heard her talk of Cocklebiddy). Dad (pictured) sat beside the car for four days waiting for mum's return. He had no phone and no idea of her whereabouts. Finally, Mum hitched a ride with a friendly truckie back to Dad, the replacement pitman arm was installed, and they continued a trouble-free journey back to Melbourne. I am a very happy RACQ member who has been helped wonderfully in my times of need. I, too, love the RACQ animal and bird ads.
CHRIS BELL *Caloundra*

UNPAID ROAD TOLLS CAUSE CONFUSION

RECENTLY MY HUSBAND started receiving texts, emails and phone calls from an organisation called Linkt, demanding payment of an amount of money for unpaid tolls. At first we ignored these messages, thinking it was a scam (we get lots of those). The messages became more insistent, then threatened an escalation of the issue. They identified a car registration in our name, but the problem was that car had been traded nearly two years earlier. Eventually we made contact by email with Linkt and asked when the tolls were recorded, letting them know that we had not travelled through any toll roads for over 10 years. When they learnt that we no longer owned that vehicle, Linkt advised they would no longer be trying to retrieve unpaid tolls from us. We don't know who attracted those tolls in our old car, but we are happy that through respectful and factual communications between us and Linkt everything has been sorted. The moral of the story is if your vehicle is sold, the toll recording account for that vehicle needs to be closed to avoid all this confusion.
DAVID THOMAS *Deepwater*

SLOWER DRIVERS BUILD FRUSTRATION

DURING EVERY TRIP up and down the Bruce Highway, we are continually frustrated by slowly driven vehicles and their ignorance toward fellow road users. In this instance, people driving well under the speed limit (100km/h) with sometimes a kilometre or two of vehicles backed up behind them. Suddenly, when a rare and short overtaking lane appears, they can suddenly manage 110km/h. This is dangerous and frustrating as only a small number of the queued vehicles can get past. When the overtaking lanes end, they revert to their 89, 92 or 87km/h routine again. Do RACQ or any readers know what the bizarre and annoying psychology is behind this common act? Sense would dictate to maintain speed or even slow further to allow as many as possible of those held behind to prepare and pass, not speed up to stop them passing. Better still, pull over in a safe place and let traffic clear.
KIM CLEVELAND *Mackay*

WARRANTY WARNING FOR CAR BUYERS

LAST YEAR I bought a 2007 Toyota LandCruiser from a car yard and was persuaded to get an extended warranty. I was told it provided peace of mind and if there were troubles with the vehicle, the warranty would cover me. In the next year I learned the hard way that the warranty was not what I thought. On our way to Nanango the radiator exploded and coolant went into the motor. Luckily an RACQ patrol came and helped out. We were towed home and the vehicle was taken to a mechanic soon after. Let's just say that the warranty was not what I thought. The most anyone could claim was $2,000 and the repair cost was $45,000. My advice to anyone considering an extended warranty is to read the terms and conditions very carefully and ask plenty of questions before signing.
GRAHAM RAWLINGS *Upper Caboolture*



SHOPPING CENTRE PARKING ISSUES

DAVID SNELL RAISED some important issues regarding parking and safety at shopping centres (Spring edition). Parking stress at shopping centres is increasing exponentially as Queensland's population grows. At my local shopping centre, larger vehicles are commonly parked in the bays marked as 'small cars only', which not only impedes the visibility of smaller vehicles using the bays, but also creates reversing difficulties for cars coming out of spaces parked opposite. In shopping centres where traffic is heavy, some drivers (and pedestrians) appear to be oblivious of others and do not heed the conditions such as driving slower or with awareness that drivers are looking in several directions to safely exit a parking space. As for those few who leave their shopping trolley in the car space therefore blocking the next user's access forcing them to move it before anyone can park, where have manners gone? A bit more care, respect for other users and mindfulness would minimise anxiety and potential accidents in shopping centres.
ANNE BANENS *Buderim*



HIGH-VIS SOLUTION FOR E-SCOOTERS

APART FROM THE often irresponsible and unsafe behaviour of the riders, one of the disturbing problems with the current plague of e-bikes/scooters is their lack of visibility especially in low-light situations. For some inexplicable reason it seems that most are matte black in colour and black also appears to be the mandatory clothing colour worn by the riders, along with black helmets adopted by the few who wear them. Many accidents could be prevented by the riders being more visible to other road users by the cheap, simple and easy requirement of a hi-vis vest. We visit Norway frequently where they are mandatory and the contrast and effect is dramatic. I recently wrote to the Minister with the suggestion and received a wordy but meaningless bureaucratic response, and yet it would be such a simple zero government cost contribution to road safety where any non-compliance would be obvious. The recent heavy-handed amendments, while probably necessary, are too little, too late. The horse has bolted.
DAVID SELDON *Noosaville*

LACK OF RESPECT IS UPSETTING

I REFER TO David Snell's letter (Spring edition) and agree with his comments. It is not only the increase in larger vehicles, but also the number of drivers who have no regard for the vehicles parked either side of them at shopping centres. I was a victim of this behaviour when a driver of a much higher vehicle than mine, reversed out and almost took my car with him/her. The result was one long driver's side scratch. Then, recently, the rear passenger wheel of the vehicle next to mine, was parked in my bay over the painted line, making it difficult to get into my driver's seat. What's also upsetting is the total lack of consideration for other people's possessions.
JULIE BERRY *Murgon*

SOME DRIVERS DO THE RIGHT THING

HEADING NORTH ALONG the M1, just south of Gympie, we encountered a massive afternoon storm with rain bucketing down, visibility on the road, nil. Yet cars without lights went flying past and trucks, still on 110km/h, also sped past. We saw two accidents with numerous blue and red lights of police, fire and ambulance vehicles flashing. Nonetheless, it was great to see at least 50 cars pull over to a safe side of the highway, hazard lights flashing, lights on, and patiently waiting out the storm cell.
MOIRA THOMPSON *Biggenden*



LEVEL CROSSINGS SUGGESTION

LIVING NEAR THE township of Pomona, I enjoy being stopped at the train line level crossing. I count the freight containers, wave at passengers who have sometimes travelled all the way from Cairns and simply sit and enjoy the rattling noise. One aspect of the safety system does confuse me, however. A friend recently said she was fined $350 for moving off too early to cross the rail lines after the boom gates had risen. The lights were still flashing. I have had impatient drivers sit behind me urging me to cross also. But I wait for the lights to stop. My point is: why is it that the lights do not stop flashing first then the boom gate rise signalling it's safe to cross rather than the other way round?
JUDE DAVIES *Pinbarren*

OUR SAY
Queensland road rules state that you must not enter a level crossing if: warning lights are operating, or warning bells are ringing; or a gate, boom or barrier at the crossing is closed, or is opening or closing. The Department of Transport and Main Roads also warns that you should never assume it is safe to cross when the lights are flashing as there may be another train approaching from the other direction.

HAVE YOUR SAY

When sending letters to Your Say for consideration, please include your name and address. Letters will not receive an individual reply and should be no more than 150 words.

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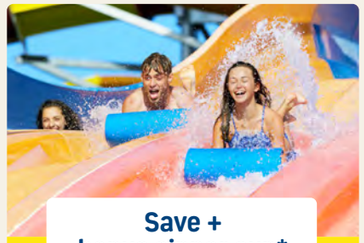

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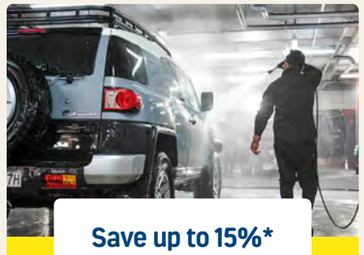

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VETERAN PATROL OFFICER REACHES 35-YEAR SUMMIT

From roadsides to mountain peaks, long-serving RACQ patrol officer Brian Blackwell has spent decades helping others and pursuing adventures of his own.



By **RAY ANDERSEN**

When Brian Blackwell marked 35 years as an RACQ patrol officer in September, he wasn't thinking about slowing down.

Instead, the 68-year-old was preparing for another trekking adventure in the Himalayas, continuing a passion that has taken him to some of the world's most famous mountains.

Brian is RACQ's second longest-serving patrol officer, behind Neil Everson, who will celebrate 37 years of service in January.

When *The Road Ahead* spoke with Brian, he was getting ready to embark on his latest month-long trekking adventure on the Annapurna Circuit (pictured).

A regular visitor to Nepal, he has completed more than 20 treks and admits he lost count of the exact number "years ago".

"When I started going over there in the late '80s, there was no such thing as mobile phones," Brian said.

"If you wanted to call Australia, you had to go down to Kathmandu, visit the post office and book a time to make a phone call.

"Now you can pick up a mobile phone at Everest Base Camp and call wherever you like. There are even a couple of high passes where you'll find solar-powered charging stations in case your phone goes flat.

"Every time I go back, the place has changed. Everything moves on."

Brian's trekking adventures extend well beyond the Himalayas. He has also trekked extensively throughout New Zealand and, in 2013, achieved a long-held bucket-list goal when he summited Africa's highest peak, Mount Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania.

After listening to Brian speak so passionately about trekking in Nepal, it's hard to imagine he'll ever get it out of his system.

"Every time I've gone over there recently, I've said this will be my last trip," he said.

"Before COVID, that was going to be my last trip, and this will be my third visit since then."

Whether it's a roadside breakdown in Queensland or a mountain pass high in the Himalayas, Brian has never been one to shy away from a challenge.

And if history is any guide, this "last trip" to Nepal probably won't be.

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THE ROAD AHEAD is giving readers the chance to win a $250 EFTPOS gift card*. To enter, tell us what you think about this edition of the magazine at racq.com/trasurvey. The survey opens at 8am on Tuesday 1 December (AEST) and closes at 5pm on Tuesday 19 January (AEST).

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STAY ALERT BEHIND THE WHEEL

Summer is one of the busiest times on Queensland roads, with families heading away for holidays, road trips and long weekends.

While reaching your destination is exciting, getting there safely should be the priority.

Fatigue can affect any driver, reducing concentration, slowing reaction times and increasing the risk of a crash.

Before you hit the road, take a few minutes to plan ahead and familiarise yourself with these simple tips to help keep you and your passengers safe throughout your journey.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE FATIGUE
Driving tired doesn't just mean falling asleep at the wheel. Fatigue can cause dangerous lapses in concentration and slower reaction times, even if you feel awake.

START WITH A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP
Aim to be well-rested before setting off and avoid starting a long journey after a full day of work.

PLAN YOUR BREAKS BEFORE YOU LEAVE
Plan rest stops along your route and schedule a minimum 15-minute break every two hours. Take advantage of roadside rest areas and scenic stops.

STAY HYDRATED
Queensland summers can be unforgiving. Carry plenty of water and healthy snacks to help maintain concentration and comfort on the road.



KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS
Pull over and rest if you notice signs of fatigue such as:

- Yawning
- Your eyes closing for a moment or going out of focus
- Feeling drowsy, tired or exhausted
- Forgetting the previous few minutes of driving
- Daydreaming
- Experiencing slower reaction times
- Changing speed without reason
- Drifting in the lane or over lane lines.

SHARE THE DRIVING
If possible, alternate drivers during long journeys to reduce fatigue and stay fresh behind the wheel.

DON'T PUSH THROUGH TIREDNESS
If you're struggling to stay focused, stop as soon as it's safe to do so. No destination is worth risking your safety.

LIMIT YOUR DAILY DRIVING
Try to not drive more than 10 hours in a day and consider an overnight stop on longer trips.

DID YOU KNOW? Being awake for more than 17 hours can impair your driving ability to a similar level as having a blood alcohol concentration above 0.05. Fatigue can be just as dangerous as drink driving.

Visit www.qld.gov.au/transport/safety/road-safety/driving-safely for more information on safe driving, including driving tired.



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