

Behind the Scenes in Queensland

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There's plenty happening behind the scenes at Queensland's favourite theme parks, animal sanctuaries and other popular entertainment venues. The good news is many of these places are happy to open this side of their business to visitors giving them the opportunity to spend special time with animals, explore under the seats and on the wings of the jumbo, behind the stage in a theatre, learning animal training tips – here are some of the options.

Butterfly Sanctuary launches "behind-the-scenes" lab tour

The Australian Butterfly Sanctuary in Kuranda celebrated its 22nd birthday with the launch of a "Behind-The-Scenes" tour of the breeding laboratory.

A new walkway has been constructed between the butterfly flight aviary and the "engine room" of the sanctuary, the laboratory which houses up to 4000 caterpillars. The new experience is included with entry to the sanctuary and allows visitors to see the breeding laboratory and the caterpillars in their varying stages of development through special viewing windows. The aviary is the largest live butterfly exhibit in Australia and home to more than 1500 tropical butterflies including the electric blue Ulysses butterfly, and the majestic green and yellow Cairns Birdwing, the largest butterfly in Australia. www.australianbutterflies.com

Learn how to train a Sea World dolphin

The Animal Adventures program at Sea World on the Gold Coast offers a selection of exclusive opportunities for visitors such as the Dolphin Trainer for the Day programme.

This four-and-a-half hour group session begins with a tour of Dolphin Bay with a Marine Mammal Trainer who also introduces some of the animals to be 'trained' during the day. Also included in the programme is a session outlining Sea World's role in rescuing and caring for stranded marine animals and a tutorial on how to train animals, especially dolphins. Guests will join a group in the water at Dolphin Bay and also enjoy a behind-the-scenes tour of Polar Beach Shores. A souvenir photograph provides the perfect memento of the occasion. Participants must be at least 14 years old. Other animal adventures available at Sea World include getting up close and personal with sharks at marine life at Shark Bay, deep and shallow water dolphin encounters for adults and children, plus land and water based interactions with seals. All programmes are structured for group participation. <http://seaworld.myfun.com.au/attractions/animal-adventures.htm>

Saving wildlife at Australia Zoo's Animal Hospital

A vision of the late Steve Irwin, the Australian Wildlife Hospital at Australia Zoo on the Sunshine Coast is the largest wildlife hospital in the world.

Tours of the hospital run four times a day and take approximately 75 minutes. They are led by a knowledgeable and friendly guide who is happy to answer any questions about the state-of-the-art facility. The hospital includes an intensive care room and laboratory as well as separate holding facilities for males and females, and diseased and non-diseased koalas. An orphan enclosure also allows hand-raised koalas to develop climbing skills and become less dependent on humans carers before being released back into the wild. http://www.wildlifewarriors.org.au/wildlife_hospital/

Queensland Performing Arts Centre – tour behind the scenes

Discover what happens behind the scenes on the stages of Brisbane's premier entertainment venue, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre.

Group tours explore the public spaces, theatres and backstage area of QPAC and its theatres and performances spaces, providing an opportunity to step behind the footlights and explore the public, and private, facets of this world-class venue. Experienced tour guides will inform and entertain with little known facts about the complex and the many artists who have performed within its walls. The tours take approximately 90 minutes. http://www.qpac.com.au/at_qpac/guided_tours/

Pat a Dreamworld tiger

One of the most magical and awe-inspiring experiences at popular Gold Coast theme park Dreamworld is taking a morning stroll within arm's length of a fully grown tiger.

The experience includes the opportunity to walk with the tigers and Dreamworld's tiger handlers where you can pat the tigers and learn more about the cats with several stops for photo opportunities. In the specially-designed habitat of Tiger Island, the tigers and their handlers co-exist peacefully without the constraints of cages creating an exciting and unique experience for guests. Dreamworld's tigers are trained (never 'tamed') by establishing from birth a strong bond, based on trust, respect and affection, between the handlers and tigers. The tigers live in a stress-free environment receiving a highly specialised diet, veterinary care and the necessary stimulation from interaction with their handlers. www.dreamworld.com.au

Reef HQ turtle hospital

Sick and injured marine turtles are being lovingly cared for and rehabilitated at the Reef HQ Aquarium Turtle Hospital in Townsville.

As well as providing turtles with a chance to recover in a safe environment, the hospital also provides visitors with an interesting insight into the care of this precious marine animal. The hospital plays a vital role in treating acute and chronic ailments to the turtles can be released back into the ocean. It provides short, medium and if necessary long term care. Visitors can take guided tours of the hospital and learn from educational talks. www.reefhq.com.au

Discover the heart of UnderWater World

If you've ever dreamed of being an aquarist for the day then look no further than UnderWater World on the Sunshine Coast.

See for yourself and discover the heart of the Oceanarium. Watch how the experts feed, care and protect the marine animals on display. Have the opportunity to go above the Oceanarium tunnel and see the sharks from above, check out the babies in the nursery – they could be stingrays, turtles or one of the many other residents. You'll also learn important lessons on how to save marine turtles from extinction. www.underwaterworld.com.au

Longreach – Jumbo Tours and Wing Walk

Head to Longreach in the Outback and the only place in the world where you can tour two fully-equipped passenger jet aircraft – the Qantas Founders Museum.

A former Qantas 747-200 is permanently located at the museum and is open for guided tours including a unique wing walk experience. Some of the roof, wall and floor panels are removed within the tour and provides guests with an informative insight into the secrets of this magnificent aircraft. Take the experience even further and take a Wing Walk Tour where you can climb out on the aircraft's wing, climb down in the computer cargo bays, and sit in the pilot seat. Guided tours are also available for a fully restored Boeing 707, the very first passenger jet registered in Australia and Qantas' first jet aircraft. www.qfom.com.au

Lone Pine Keeper for the day

If you've ever wanted to experience a day in the life of an animal keeper, look no further than Brisbane's Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary.

Lone Pine's One Day Keeper Experience Program is available to visitors who are interested in acquiring hands-on training and knowledge of the animals from keepers at the iconic animal sanctuary. Participants choose to work with one of four different kinds of animals – birds, macropods and mammals, koalas or farmyard animals. As well as the training, participants also receive a Lone Pine polo-shirt, training certificate, gift pack (koala photo in a folder, postcards, stickers, calendar, A3 big picture, guide book) and lunch. Applicants must be aged 18 years and over and be able to understand basic conversational English. Lone Pine is the world's first and largest koala sanctuary where you can cuddle a koala, hand feed kangaroos and get up close to Aussie wildlife in a beautiful bushland setting. www.koala.net

Longreach – School of the Air

See how we educate the children who live in the isolated Outback region of Queensland's on a tour of the School of Distance Education in Longreach.

Otherwise known as the "School of the Air", this remarkable system acts as the heartbeat of education for around 200 students living in the central west of Queensland. Visitors to the school can listen in on one of the on-air lessons during their visit and are also shown how the school operates on a day to day basis. Tours depart twice daily on weekdays except on public holidays and during the Christmas school holidays. www.longreacsde.eq.edu.au

Brewing Queensland's favourite amber ale

The Fourx (XXXX) symbols above the Castlemaine Perkins Brewery in Milton have enjoyed pride of place in Brisbane since 1878 and a tour of the brewery provides the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Australian icon.

The tour provides an interesting insight into how the beer got its name, how it is made and a chance to see what it tastes like when poured fresh at the brewery. The 75 minute tour starts at the XXXX Ale House Visitor Centre and is followed by a walk through the heart of the heritage listed site, where guests see firsthand the raw ingredients and brewing processes that produce the popular drop, and a visit to the Southern Hemisphere's biggest single packing line. You will also learn how to pour a perfect beer. Classic brewery tours run hourly between 11am and 4pm Monday to Friday. Saturday tours and Wednesday evening tour include a barbecue meal. <http://www.xxxxalehouse.com.au/index.php/brewery-tour>

Experience a Hard Times Mine tour

The Outback city of Mount Isa began life as a mining town when lead deposits were discovered back in 1923 so where better place to take a mine tour?

The city is now one of the 10 largest producers of silver, copper, lead and zinc in the world. The Hard Times Mine Tour at the popular Outback at Isa attraction is a special chance to have a taste of the mining world. Your guide is a miner and you will be kitted out in overalls and cap lamps before descending into the mine in a cage. Explore the history of mining and listen to stories of the good times and the hard times of working deep under the earth. See how the tunnels are formed and shaped by the boom drills and mucking units, try the airleg drill, and feel the earth rumble with the firing of the blast face. <http://www.outbackatisa.com.au/Attractions/Hard-Times-Mine.aspx>

Keeping rail history alive

Train lovers visiting the Queensland Museum's Workshops Rail Museum at Ipswich near Brisbane can also experience firsthand the hard-work that goes on behind the scenes of this working museum.

The museum offers two "Behind the Scenes" tours at regular intervals during the day. The Tour of the Working Workshops shows real Queensland Rail (QR) workers maintaining and restoring the engines and carriages that make up the QR heritage train fleet. On the Blacksmith's Tour safety glasses are essential as the group watches as sparks fly as molten steel is beaten into shape and the heat from the furnaces projects across the room. If you want to know more about how real steam engines work then join a Steam Shop Tour. The Behind the Scenes Tours are part of the entry fee to the museum.

<http://www.theworkshops.qm.qld.gov.au/exhibitions/permanent/behind.asp>