

Great Sunshine Way Hidden Gems

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Explore Queensland's Great Sunshine Way Hidden Gems

The Great Sunshine Way is the perfect touring experience showcasing the highlights of southern Queensland. Radiating from Brisbane, the state's cruisy capital, access is easy to hotspots including the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and Fraser Coast. You will find a fascinating mix of cities, country towns, coast and hinterland - some well-known, and other hidden gems. And you don't have to self-drive as there are lots of day tours exploring the area.

BRISBANE & MORETON BAY

Discover Brisbane with Five in One

Visitors to Brisbane can now purchase a new 'Five in One' discount card to experience five of the city's top tourism attractions and save more than 30 per cent. The card provides full entry to the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary, Story Bridge Adventure Climb, Kookaburra River Queen Cruises, Riverlife Adventure Centre and Fouxex (XXXX) Brewery Tour. Each of the experiences must be completed within five days from the card's activation. The card, which is a joint initiative of Tourism Queensland and Brisbane Marketing, is available from the Visitor Information Centre in Brisbane's Queen Street Mall, via the website at www.brisbanefiveinone.com and is sold throughout Brisbane-based hotels.

Go Wild on a Moreton Island Eco Tour

The natural beauty of Moreton Island is a highlight on this tour which also focuses on the island's history and its marine life including bottlenose dolphins, dugongs, green sea turtles and from June to November, humpback whales. Explore the underwater beauty on a snorkelling tour of the Tangalooma wrecks and Flinders Reef, an isolated reef with the highest number of coral and fish species of all the sub-tropical reef systems along Australia's east coast. Try boom-netting behind the boat (its like taking a spa at 10 knots), feed the fish around the wrecks and enjoy the beach and island. Tours depart from Redcliffe with hotel transfers from the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and Brisbane. www.dolphinwild.com

Escape to Sirromet Winery

Award-winning Sirromet Winery has introduced a new Wednesday wine tour from the Gold Coast allowing visitors to leave the hire car behind and enjoy an afternoon amongst the vines. Sirromet is Queensland's largest and most highly-awarded winery, with more than 400 wine awards to its name. The tour includes transfers to and from the Gold Coast, a wine tasting at the Cellar Door and spare time to enjoy the winery. Optional extras include a cheese or antipasto platter at the Cellar Door, gourmet lunch at Restaurant Lurleen's or a guided tour of the winery. Sirromet is located an easy 30 minute drive south of Brisbane at Mount Cotton and has views across rolling hills to Moreton Bay. www.sirromet.com

New City to Straddie Tour

An exciting new package tour of Brisbane's coastal Redlands region combines the diverse offerings of North Stradbroke Island with a visit to Australia's first environmental centre for indigenous plants. The City to Straddie Tour includes a half day Straddie Kingfisher Tour including Brown Lake, pippy digging on Main Beach, the Gorge Walk, beach fishing and a barbecue lunch on Flinders Beach. The tour then returns to the mainland for a Bush Tucker Tour through the themed native botanical gardens at Redlands IndigiScapes Centre and afternoon tea in the open air Tea Gardens Café. The tour runs from 7.15am to 5.30pm and includes pick-up and drop-off from hotels in the Brisbane CBD, morning and afternoon tea, a barbecue lunch and ferry transfers. www.straddiekingfishertours.com.au

Cork 'n Fork Winery Tours

One of the most relaxing ways to explore southern Queensland's picturesque wineries is onboard a Cork'n Fork Winery Tour. Owners Judi and Peter will collect guests from their accommodation on the Gold Coast or Brisbane and visit five of the region's wineries, plus the award-winning Tamborine Mountain Distillery. Enjoy a delicious lunch at one of the wineries. A tour of the Scenic Rim wineries is available with pick up from Brisbane only. Cork'n Fork Winery Tours also offers tours including accommodation. The tours have won multiple tourism awards and are renowned for their intimate and personalised wine tour experiences. Visit www.corknfork.com.au

Extreme Adventure on Moreton Island

Experience the delights of the world's third largest sand island, Moreton Island, on an Xtreme Adventure Guided Tour hosted by Moreton Island Ferries. Make the short and scenic journey to the island from Brisbane on the luxurious MiCat ferry, remembering to look out for dolphins on the way. Your day at the island includes a guided snorkel tour of the Tangalooma wrecks (15 vessels sunk on the landward side of the island to form a breakwall for small boats and a fabulous diving and snorkeling spot), a 4WD tour of the island and the chance to go desert dune sand boarding. If the photos and memories aren't enough, you'll also take home a souvenir booklet about Moreton Island. www.moretonventure.com

Personalised Meet Greet and Familiarisation

More independent tours with a personal tour can be organized for one person through to a group of eight. Call the shots, stay as long as you like or stop by at an interesting site which catches your attention on your drive. You will be collected from Brisbane Airport and follow the scenic Brisbane River to Mt. Coot-tha Lookout and Gardens for a spectacular view of Brisbane City and Moreton Bay. Learn some of the convict history, see Queensland Parliament House and other buildings from the colonial past. Your guide will also familiarise you with the location of the best restaurants and recreational areas the city has to offer so you can explore at leisure in your own time. www.daytours.com.au

GOLD COAST

Tasty delights await at Cheese Company

Cheese lovers will relish a visit to the Witches Chase Cheese Company on Tamborine Mountain. The company was created in 2004 and has moved into the stylish new premises it now shares with MT Tamborine Brewery and the Liquid Amber Bistro & Grill. The specialty range of award winning premium cheeses include fresh, soft, blue and hard varieties, using traditional methods without preservatives and with vegetarian rennet. www.witcheschasecheese.com.au

Aim high on the Rainforest Skywalk

The Tamborine Rainforest Skywalk and Eco Centre is a new Gold Coast hinterland eco-adventure on Tamborine Mountain. It includes a 300 metre long canopy walk soaring 30m above ground level in parts, with spectacular views across the valley and rainforest canopies below. The elevated walkway runs through the middle and upper canopies of the rainforest descending gradually to the lower canopy and following points of interest including rock pools and waterfalls, a butterfly lookout, local history enclosure and sheltered rest areas along the way. The walk culminates at the Skywalk Cantilever, where guests are suspended five stories above the ground. The final stages of the walk return along the rainforest floor to the Eco Centre which includes a gallery with a comprehensive array of rainforest fauna and flora information and displays, café and other visitor facilities. The Skywalk is approximately 50 minutes drive from Brisbane or the Gold Coast or you can visit on one of these day tours. www.rainforestskywalk.com.au ; www.daytours.com.au ; www.bushwacker-ecotours.com.au

Beach and Rainforest Blend

Combine the beach and the beautiful rainforest on a Gold Coast and Springbrook – Beach & Rainforest day tour. Departing Brisbane, spend two and a half hours exploring the Gold Coast's most famous beach, Surfers Paradise, before heading inland to the World Heritage Rainforest and Springbrook National Park. Take a four kilometre hike through volcanic caves and under waterfalls while your guide explains about the rainforest plants growing in this area. Be rewarded for your efforts with a picnic lunch at the base of Twin Falls and a swim in the cool mountain pool. On the way home you'll also be treated to spectacular views across valleys back to the coast. www.greentriangle.com.au

Look through the window to the Wilderness

Journey to the volcanic plateau of Tamborine Mountain, via the original pioneers' track, for morning tea and shopping in the art and craft shops on Gallery Walk in the village. The 4WD tour continues up mountain side tracks to lush subtropical rainforests with cascading waterfalls. After a delicious barbecue lunch at "Spring Gully" learn to crack a whip and throw a boomerang. Then visit the mountainous regions of Lamington National Park, Australia's largest preserved natural stand of subtropical rainforest, to O'Reilly's Plateau, 3000 feet above sea level, for native bird feeding and a walk on the Treetop Boardwalk through the rainforest canopy. Return to the Gold Coast through the Kerry Valley on a bush track offering magnificent views of mountains and valleys. www.sc4wd.com.au

Hike the Gold Coast Hinterland Great Walk!

This five-day extended tour follows the Gold Coast Hinterland Great Walk exploring the mountains, World Heritage-listed rainforest, waterfalls and valleys of south east Queensland' ancient Gondwana Rainforests. The 54km walk passes through Lamington National Park to Springbrook National Park. The fully-accommodated tour allows time to make extra walks along the trail and includes stays at the famous hinterland guest houses, O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat and Binna Burra Mountain Lodge. www.parktours.com.au

SUNSHINE COAST

Tasty Tours with Storeyline

Storeyline Tours offers a variety of mini-coach tours of the Sunshine Coast. Food lovers will enjoy the Montville Magic tour which combines the beauty spots of this hinterland region with deliciously tempting stops at the Australian Nougat Company and Montville Cheese. Other popular tours visiting Sunshine Coast Attractions include Australia's Zoo, the Buderim Ginger Factory and Underwater World; the Eumundi Markets tour, the largest open air market on the Sunshine Coast featuring approximately 500 stall holders, and the Sunshine Wine Trail visiting three local wineries. www.storeylinetours.com.au

Discover Fraser Island

A quick cable ferry crossing over the Noosa River takes you deep into the Cooloola National Park and well on the way to the Teewah and Rainbow Beach coloured sands. Another short ferry ride and you have arrived on Fraser Island, the world's largest sand island, and driving along spectacular Seventy Five Mile Beach. The day tour includes a guided rainforest walk, authentic Aussie BBQ Lunch, a swim in the freshwater of Lake McKenzie and afternoon tea on a remote beach. Experience the excitement of the world's best beach drive in a purpose built "Warrior" coaches specially designed and engineered for Fraser Island touring. More leisurely two day tours "with a difference" are also available and include an overnight stay at acclaimed Kingfisher Bay Resort. www.fraserislanddiscovery.com.au

Explore Noosa by Kayak

Check out Noosa from the water with a range of adventures and tours at Kayak Noosa, and it doesn't matter if you are an experienced paddler or a novice. The tours include a relaxing two hour sunset session, half day ocean and river adventure and the Dolphin Adventure which goes in search of dolphins and includes kayak surfing, snorkelling in the waters off Noosa National Park and kayak sailing across beautiful Laguna Bay. www.kayaknoosa.com

ACCOMMODATION SECRETS

Wanting to self drive? Here's some accommodation options along the way to get you started.

Escape to the country

Mt Barney Lodge offers the perfect ecotourism country retreat. So called because it is located at the base of Mt Barney within the Scenic Rim, the retreat offers self contained accommodation and optional meals. Relax in one of the Queenslander homesteads, cabins, and deluxe camper trailers. Camping is also available. The lodge is family-friendly and offers adventure activities for kids and adults including rock climbing, abseiling, night adventure, bushwalking, a sunset eco tour and mountain guiding. www.mtbarneylodge.com.au

Head to the Hinterland

Peppers Ruffles Lodge is a luxury five-star retreat in the Gold Coast hinterland midway between the beach and the mountains. Get away from it all in a selection of private accommodation options including Spa Villas and Treehouse Pool Villas and enjoy fine dining with all meals prepared by the in-house chef. Ruffles Day Spa offers a range of therapies and indulgent treatments for guests. <http://www.peppers.com.au/ruffles-lodge/>

Luxury in the Rainforest

Songbirds Rainforest Retreat features six spacious villas scattered amongst the rainforest surrounded by the sounds of Australia's songbirds – the kookaburras, whipbirds and lorikeets. Dine at the multi-award-winning Songbirds in the Forest Restaurant and explore the walking tracks meandering through kilometres of rainforest. The Tamborine village shops, cafes and galleries are a five-minute drive away or an easy 30 minute stroll. In-room massages are also available. www.songbirds.com.au

Escape to The Escarpment

Another luxurious hinterland escape is The Escarpment, also situated in rainforest on Tamborine Mountain and offering bed and breakfast accommodation in split-level villas featuring four poster beds, double spa baths and wood fires. Tamborine Village's restaurants are only minutes away and in-house dining is available on request, delivered steaming hot to your door in the evening. Guests can also escape without leaving and book to watch a movie of their choice in the private, on-site Gold Class Theatre. A Spa Pavilion houses massage rooms, Vichy shower and Grecian Spa bath. www.escarpment.com.au