

Boasting some 300 days of sunshine each year, the Gold Coast is famous for its swimwear, surf and stunning beaches, but there's more than meets the eye in this sunny city.

Story: Annie Waddington-Feather

# golden days

A short drive from the city's epicentre takes you to the Gold Coast's hinterland, where cosy retreats, gourmet delights and nature reserves are tucked away in the pristine rainforest. From wildlife and cultural, to being pampered or looking for thrills, the Gold Coast is chock-a-block with activities and experiences to satisfy and delight all ages – and all tastes.

## WHALE OF A TALE

Between June and the end of October, several thousand humpback whales leave their summer feeding grounds in the Antarctic, passing by the Gold Coast as they head to warmer waters for breeding.

Viewed from the shore, or better still from a boat, these amazing creatures can grow up to 18 metres long and are renowned for their extraordinary acrobatic

displays. It is an awesome sight to see a whale leap out of the sea or playfully slap the water with its giant fins and tail flukes.

You may also be lucky and spot 'Migaloo the white whale', who was last seen passing the Gold Coast in July 2009. He was originally thought to be an albino whale, but now he's referred to as a 'hypo-pigmented' humpback.



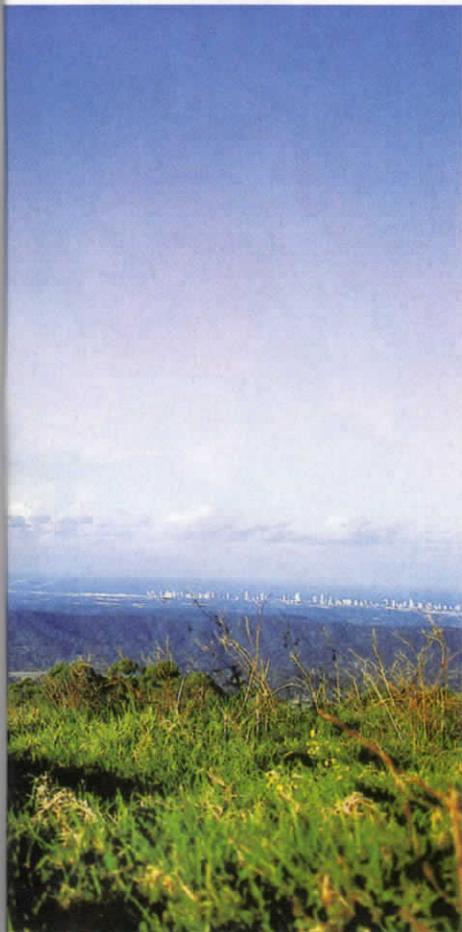
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#### GOURMET ON GOLD

Indulge your gastric senses with some of the gourmet delights waiting for you on the Gold Coast. Fine weather and fertile soil have created a distinctive cuisine in the area to complement the thriving wine industry.

A trip to one of the many regional food and farmers' markets will introduce you to some of the Gold Coast's variety of fresh

produce, which includes tropical fruits and vegetables, teas, coffees, avocados, herbs, honey, ginger and an array of seafood.

The hinterland also has a feast of edible delights. After discovering how to make cheese at the Witches Chase Cheese Company, North Tamborine, try some macadamia coffee at the Nut Shed, Wongawallan.

Wine lovers can spend a day visiting some of the many wineries in the hinterland, many of which have other sidelines to keep the driver entertained. ▶

**ABOVE (from left):** Take in a bird's eye view of the Gold Coast from Tamborine Mountain; Enjoy a glass of wine at the Verandah Restaurant at Albert River Wines.

Images © Tourism Queensland.



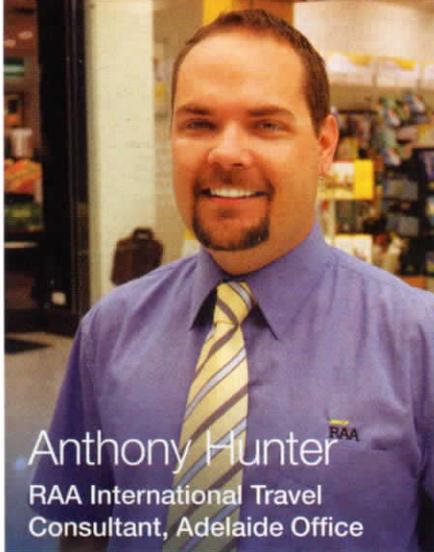
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#### Why visit the Gold Coast?

It has something for everyone and its warm weather makes it a year-round destination.

#### What's new?

The theme parks are always adding different attractions and with new hotels, restaurants and shops popping up all the time, each visit is a different experience.

#### What can't you miss?

The live dolphin show at SeaWorld or, even better, swimming with the dolphins.

#### What's your insider tip?

Don't travel during major events such as the Indy 300 (October) or Schoolies week (November). It's harder to book accommodation and you have bigger crowds to contend with.

#### Where should you stay?

To be close to bars, beaches and restaurants stay in Surfers Paradise. For a quieter stay, yet close enough to walk to Surfers Paradise, Broadbeach offers great seafront accommodation. Or for a five-star experience the famous Palazzo Versace is a must – you may even spot a star.

#### Where should you eat?

From burger bars to steakhouses, Italian to Chinese, there are too many options. Or reminisce at Sizzler, located on the main highway.



▶ Mt Nathan Winery also sells honey products and offers its visitors bee observations, while Canungra Valley Vineyards entertains tasters with jazz. Albert River Wines boasts ownership of 'Terroir', the French expression given

to the perfect combination of soil and weather conditions essential to good wine grapes. Here you can soak up the atmosphere of historic Auchenflower House, while admiring the vista of Tamborine Mountain.

## Try something different

**ON THE WATER** Choose from tall ship sailing, deep sea fishing, cruising a canal or simply paddling your kayak.

**WANT SOME ADRENALIN?** Try out Zorbing: be rolled down a 120-metre hill in a plastic ball. Thrill seekers can also be a pilot in a jet fighter simulator or learn how to be a stunt man.

**GOLD COAST FROM ABOVE** Experience a ride in a tiger moth plane, helicopter or, more sedately, a hot-air balloon. Alternatively, take in panoramic views from the 230-metre QDeck Observation Deck.

**PETROL HEADS** Hire a Harley, race a V8 buggy or be a rally driver for the day.

**SOMETHING FOR THE EVENING** Wonder at the glow worms, experience a traditional Aboriginal corroboree or enjoy a gondola romantic cruise and dinner.



## departure lounge STY

### getting there

All major Australian airlines operate daily, direct flights from Adelaide to Gold Coast Airport.

### where to stay

With options aplenty you have a choice from five-star suites to self-contained apartments. A stay at Mantra Circle on Cavill will have you central to the action of Surfers' shopping and restaurant strip.

### getting around

Your options include picking up a rental car from the airport, navigating the Gold Coast's bus network or purchasing a Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle Freedom or Gold pass. The latter includes a combination of coach transfers and unlimited local bus travel and if pre-purchased from the RAA, members will save 10 per cent.

### travel tip

Hire a car and explore the Gold Coast beyond Surfers Paradise. Head north to the Hinterlands or south to Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, Mermaid Beach, Coolangatta and Tweed Heads. Members receive special hire car rates, check out [www.raa.com.au](http://www.raa.com.au) to pre-book.

### more at [www.raa.com.au](http://www.raa.com.au)

It's now even easier to make the most of your member discounts on a range of Gold Coast attractions. Head online and you can purchase anything in the RAA Travel *Holiday Savings* brochure, including theme park tickets and whale-watching tours: Whale Encounter Pass and Whales in Paradise.

#### RAA Travel:

T: 8202 4346

E: [touring@raa.com.au](mailto:touring@raa.com.au)

W: [www.raa.com.au/travel](http://www.raa.com.au/travel)

If beer is your preferred drink, you can get an insight into the brewing process with a visit to the Carlton Brewhouse. For chocolate lovers, there is a veritable plethora of chocolatiers offering exquisite delicacies, including the Chocolate Kingdom at Tamborine Mountain and Sanctuary Cove Chocolates.

However, if you're just after some good, old-fashioned tucker, the Australian Outback Spectacular, just a 20-minute drive north of Surfers, not only offers you a three-course Australian BBQ dinner, but you can enjoy a show celebrating the legendary Australian Light Horse.

### KIDDING AROUND

A trip with children to the Gold Coast would not be complete without visiting at least one of the many theme parks and attractions. One of the latest additions, Dracula's Haunted House, will scare you with giant crocodiles and horror

memorabilia. Alternatively, get wet and go wild at one of the water theme parks.

Wildlife is always a hit with younger children and the Gold Coast has no shortage of wildlife experiences. Visitors can get up close to some of our native animals: feed friendly wild pelicans or watch wild raptor shows at the Catch-A-Crab and Oyster farm. Meanwhile you can cuddle a koala, pat a kangaroo or discover what animals get up to after dark at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, or, at Australia Zoo, feed elephants and watch crocodiles launch from the water's edge.

### AU NATUREL

The Gold Coast boasts some 100,000 hectares of World Heritage nature reserves, where you can wander through tranquil rainforests, wonder at magnificent mountains, admire plunging waterfalls and observe animals in their natural habitat. Simply pack a picnic and explore nature's backyard.

Tamborine Mountain and O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat both have walkways above the rainforest canopy and walkers will enjoy hiking the many trails in Lamington National Park that lead to caves and cool fern-filled gullies, with an occasional glimpse between the trees at the magnificent rolling vista beyond. A visit to the natural bridge in Numinbah Valley is an option for those after a gentle stroll on boardwalks.

**ABOVE: Meet Marvin the Martian and other characters at Warner Bros. Movie World.**

Image © Tourism Queensland.