

## The Hills Are ALIVE

AWAY FROM THE GLITZ OF THE GOLD COAST BEACHES, ADVENTURE-LOVING FAMILIES CAN HEAD TO THE HINTERLAND FOR A LITTLE RAZZLE DAZZLE OF THE RAINFOREST KIND.  
WORDS: CARLA GROSSETTI

The paramount ingredient for the perfect holiday is sunshine. Not so if you are in the rainforest. The law of the jungle states: expect rain in a rainforest. And that's precisely when to enjoy this luxuriant greenery at its best.

### Rainforest retreat

Although we are only an hour or so away from the sun-kissed *Gold Coast*, it feels like we have journeyed back to the Jurassic era. Just moments after settling in to our accommodation in the heart of the World-Heritage-listed *Lamington National Park*, I hear the blood-curdling screech of what I am certain must be some kind of feral creature. Yep, it's my eight-year-old son, Finley, bellowing "THIS IS WILD!" And no, he's not talking about this piece of Amazonian-like paradise: instead, his exuberance is directed at the spa located on the balcony of our luxurious mountain villa at *O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat*. With a happy sigh, I realise he and his seven-year-old brother Marley might need a few days to get amongst the environment as, right now, they can't see the forest for the trees.

After a wonderful night's sleep, we attack the breakfast buffet like hunter-gatherers. Everything about this place - which has been in the same family for near to a century - has been designed to intensify appreciation of the natural habitat. Forget video games. Here, at the breakfast table, my boys are entertained by cameo swoops from the striking regent bowerbird outside our window.

### Wild ones

The feathery fun continues later that morning when we join tour guide Mark for the birds of prey show. "Who knows what Australia's largest carnivorous marsupial is?" he asks in a lugubrious tone. "A dingo!" shouts one brave soul. "The dingo is NOT native to Australia. It arrived about 5000 years ago. And it is not a marsupial. Next!"

"The Tasmanian devil," suggests a bold Brisbane teenager. Mark shakes his head slowly, admonishing the mostly Australian



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From top:  
View from Binna Burra  
Rockclimbing in Bunna Burra  
Cabin at Bunna Burra

audience about how little we know about our own native wildlife. "I bet you know Africa's largest carnivorous animals!" he says. Point taken.

Clearly affronted by our collective ignorance, Mark darts off into the bushes and returns with the flesh-eating marsupial in question: it's the spotted-tail quoll and it's no bigger than a domestic cat. "I'm gob-smacked!" says Marley, who is currently obsessed with catchphrases.

After watching the quoll devour what looks like half a guinea pig, we are joined by the wedge-tailed eagle, which is one of many aerial predators that crash-land into the middle of the amphitheatre. Moments later, the marble-like eyes of a tawny frogmouth glower at me, as if I'm to blame for the rain and stultifying humidity. Mark is like a walking edition of the *Field Guide to Australian Birds* and the show is fabulous.

## Above it all

We decide to get our own bird's eye view of the rainforest the next day when we wade through the mist along the 180-metre-long treetop suspension walk. "This is freeeaky," says Fin, bouncing along the bridge, which slices through the soaring canopy. We aim for new heights again the next day when we whiz along a wire 25-metres above the ground on a flying fox stretching through the trees.

After all this action, the boys happily retreat to the *Eco Rangers* program, while I spend two hours losing myself at the lush Lost World Spa.

Nearby *Binna Burra Mountain Lodge* - nestled on a neighbouring spine of the Springbrook Plateau - is also famous for its bushwalks and birdspotters. Like O'Reilly's, Binna Burra is proud of its eco cred: both resorts are dedicated to preserving the local wildlife and educating visitors about the environs.

Although we are cocooned in one of the older cabins at Binna Burra, there is also the luxe Sky Lodges, perched like eyries over the clifftop. Binna Burra is about switching off. There is no TV or mobile phone coverage in our dinky log cabin and the only sound we hear at night is the light opera of insect song.

Although 4am is much earlier than I would normally deign to rise while on holiday, we have a dawn appointment with *Hot Air*. Cutting through the calm while floating through the air is the occasional roar of the gas burners igniting. Oh yes, and the relentless chorus of "I'm hungry". "Although it looks like we are in a picnic basket," I say, through clenched teeth, "there are no provisions on board".

## Marsupial madness

Luckily, there is plenty to distract my boys with until we return to O'Reilly's Vineyard



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From top:  
Beautiful road into Bunna Burra  
Hot Air Balloons  
Tawny Frog Mouth Owl

for a bounteous breakfast. I point out kangaroos and cows, a floppy-eared hare and a tractor tootling through the pretty patchwork fields. It's seriously surreal.

Back at Binna Burra, Fin and Marley have shrugged off their city slickin' ways with an archery class, a bush tucker tour and several laps of the obstacle course. They also beg us to go bushwalking in the sun-dappled forest after joining the Kilometre Club, an initiative designed to motivate children to want to walk. And the nearby circuits are stunning: a rich palette of 1000 shades of green broken only by arrangements of iridescent fungi.

As we say farewell to our fellow bushwalkers, ready to roll down the coast, I hear my son Marley whisper, "I'm gob-smacked." What is it?" I ask. "That koala is waving goodbye!" In actual fact, says a resident wildlife expert, "it's swatting a bee." Even so, it's still pretty special. And, as I stand there watching my sons wave back at the koala, I feel kissed by the warmth of the moment and the beauty of our surrounds. I, too, am gob-smacked.

**Around the worlds**

There's no ignoring the glitz of the Gold Coast

when you have kids. In fact, once your children hit 130cm in height - which enables them access into even the most screw-tightening rides - you are contractually obliged, as a parent, to take them to a theme park or two.

And so we dedicate a day or two to copping an Olympic-pool sized soaking at *White Water World* and, well, having a lot of family fun. If it's adrenalin you are after, you can wend your way from *Whitewater World* to *Movie World*, *Dreamworld* and *Sea World*. After ticking all the boxes - screaming our lungs out, see our life flash before us, swallowing a bucket of water, doing a spot of sunbathing - we make a beeline for our lush pad at *Peppers Broadbeach*. With access to a private cinema, teriyaki bar, fab infinity pool, iPad and Wii for the kids, our stocks of bonhomie are restored.

We drop down a gear for our final day when *Get On Your Bike* delivers four green bicycles at our hotel for us to sample some of the 600-kilometre Gold Coast cycleway. It is the perfect way to end a holiday that pulls us between the attractions of the coast and the hinterland, and we manage to find the equilibrium.

**FAST FACTS**

- WHERE TO STAY**  
Paradise Resort [www.paradiseresort.com.au](http://www.paradiseresort.com.au)
- O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat [www.oreillys.com.au](http://www.oreillys.com.au)
- Binna Burra Mountain Lodge [www.binnaburralodge.com.au](http://www.binnaburralodge.com.au)
- Pepper's Broadbeach [www.peppers.com.au](http://www.peppers.com.au)
- Mantra Crown Towers [www.mantracrowntowers.com.au](http://www.mantracrowntowers.com.au)
- Sea World Resort & Water Park [www.myfun.com.au](http://www.myfun.com.au)
- WHAT TO DO**  
Hot Air [www.hotair.com.au](http://www.hotair.com.au)
- Get On Your Bike [www.getonyourbike.com.au](http://www.getonyourbike.com.au)
- MORE INFORMATION**  
Gold Coast Tourism [www.visitgoldcoast.com](http://www.visitgoldcoast.com)

Valid for stays 23 April to 22 June or until sold out. Subject to availability. \*For every night you stay you'll receive entry to either Sea World, Warner Bros. Movie World OR Wet'n'Wild Water World. Payment required in full by credit card at time of booking. No refunds. Date may be changed subject to availability and within the sell period timeframe. Based on Resort Room accommodation. Surcharges apply for other room types. Please note Sea World opens at 1.30pm on Anzac Day. Movie World and Wet'n'Wild are closed Anzac Day. Visit [myfun.com.au](http://myfun.com.au) for full terms and conditions.